**Don't Let Your Guard Down**

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**Summary**

Eren and his adopted sister were raised in an extremely Christian household and as a result, are very ignorant to the world around them. And there’s one big problem with that. Eren is gay and has been hiding it from everyone since he realized it, out of fear of his homophobic father and other people finding out. One day he feels tested religiously when he meets some eccentric people as a result of him drawing attention to himself by exhibiting his athletic abilities. Little does he know, he drew their attention because they are all apart of their school's color guard team and are desperate for a new member. He's hesitant to join, however, it may not be his choice to accept the offer after all.
I have been waiting for this au to be a thing for forever & I've waited long enough. I'm not sure if many people will be interested in it because it's themed mostly around color guard but I don't care. This fic is my new baby and I'm so excited to write it! Just a heads up, if you notice that Eren's views are kind of ... shitty, they're supposed to be. Don't worry, he'll be nice by the end of this fic, hopefully. This chapter isn't so exciting but the chapters following this one (which I already have written) are going to get the ball rolling. I really hope you all enjoy this!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

He couldn't be late. Not this time. It would've made the fourth time this week & Eren knew his teacher was not going to have it.

Eren rushed down the street, sprinting as fast as his feet would carry him with the autumn chill biting at his skin. He begged to god that the doors would still be open by the time he reached them.

Of course, he wasn't so lucky. As he rammed into the doors, he pulled and pulled at the handles but to no avail. He really needed to remember to set his alarm clock. He checked his watch and saw that he had a mere three minutes until class started. With such little time and a class room on the second floor, taking three minutes alone to get there from inside the building, he had to think of something and quick.

Looking over to the wall of the school, Eren noticed that the bricks had yet to be repaired. Cracks and deep crevices were all through them. 'Just deep enough to grab onto.' He thought. It wasn't his safest option but what other choice did he have? Besides, it wasn't like it was the first time he had done it.

He dug his hands into every makeshift ledge he spotted, climbing to the top. Eren was somewhat of a parkour expert but even so, his elevated heart rate made it harder to concentrate.

Once he reached the window to his classroom, he clung to the ledge of the window. He peaked inside and thanked the heavens that his math teacher had not yet arrived. With one sweaty hand, he pounded relentlessly on the window, gathering the attention of the entire class. "Hey!" He shouted. "Open the window!"

Several students were laughing, while most of them watched with anxiety and others were cheering him on. One of the anxious ones, who he couldn't name, sprinted to the window and opened it. With the help of two other students, they helped Eren crawl through and the class erupted with applause. He was short of breath and stood wiping off his jacket, walking over to his desk to plop down. He was far too exhausted to tune in on the praises he received from his classmates.

"Way to go, Jaeger!"

"Right on time!"

"Why didn't you use the door? You must love the challenge!"

Just as he heard that, the bell that signaled first period rung and their teacher, Mr. Shadis, walked in the door. "Sorry I'm late, had a teachers meeting."

A random student commented, "Wow, even Eren was on time today."

Mr. Shadis looked up and regarded Eren. "Hmph, so he is." This was followed by silent giggles and teasing murmurs.

Eren slumped in his chair as his teacher took attendance. He cast his gaze to the seat next to him, which belonged to his savior, the petite girl who opened the window. She was fair skinned, had blond hair and wore a pink, floral dress with sequins on the collar, a diamond necklace (which was most likely fake) little, white heels and she had makeup that matched her outfit. She carried herself very delicately and had a small voice from what Eren recalled. He couldn't place her name.
When they had a couple of minutes to themselves at the end of class, Eren tapped on her desk to get her attention. She looked up at him with a polite smile. "Hey, what's your name?" He asked.

"I'm Christa." She replied sweetly.

"Thanks for opening the window. You really saved me there."

"Oh, it was no biggy." she waved him off. Before she could ask what he was doing dangling from the window in the first place, the dark haired, freckled girl wearing baggy jeans and a motocross t-shirt who was sitting in front of her, turned around to address Eren.

"How funny would it have been if no one helped you? If you were just dangling there all by yourself. I would've pissed myself laughing." She snickered. It was an odd thing for her to say, considering she was the one who did most of the lifting.

"Uh..." Eren didn't need to ask for her name. She was the girl who sat next to him in his history class who answered every question without giving anybody else a chance. She was a real history nut. Her name was Ymir. She was funny at times, but Eren found her too blunt to have a distinct opinion on her.

"That's not nice!" Christa reprimanded her. She then turned to Eren. "I wouldn't think it was funny, that'd be awful."

"Thanks... I guess?"

"Don't you feel obligated to help him, Christa. He got himself in that mess, he could've got himself out." Ymir, oh-so-helpfully added.

"Can you stop?" Christa begged. "He probably feels bad enough as it is."

Ymir rolled her eyes, giving in. "Alright, I'll back off."

"Thank you." Christa beamed.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever makes you happy, honey."

Christa chuckled to herself and winked at Ymir. Eren watched, confused. The gears in his head started turning before he asked, "Are you... are you two... dating?"

They both nodded casually and Eren shrunk into himself. He felt very awkward in these kinds of situations.

"Why, you gonna try and steal her from me?" Ymir cocked an eyebrow.

"Oh, uh no. I wouldn't do that." His face heated up. He had to hold his tongue to say he wouldn't date any girl.

They picked up on how uncomfortable he seemed and occupied themselves in their own conversation. Eren looked on with jealousy and spite. It wasn't fair that they were happy with someone they wanted to be with. It wasn't fair that they could be open about who they were. And it most definitely wasn't fair that they didn't live in fear of someone finding out about who they were.

Eren wanted to say some sort of mocking comment about their sexuality but he couldn't bring himself to do it. He wouldn't like it if someone did that to him but he was used to hearing such things about people like him and the girls sitting next to him. So it became second nature to join in.
He was about to open his mouth and say something to them that he knew he would regret, when
the bell rang. The girls stood up. Christa waved goodbye and Ymir put her arm around her
girlfriend's shoulder. Eren thought he heard Christa utter his name and say something along the
lines of "we should mention Eren to him and-" but he wasn't sure. Whatever she said, Ymir
appeared to have shot down her idea.

~

Eren sat down in his next class, one that he hated in particular. Earth Science. He didn't hate Earth
Science as a whole but it was so confusing to him that he got frustrated and gave up half up the
time. He took his normal seat in the front of the class.

Their teacher stood from her desk and walked in front of the board. "Let's get started on-"

"EXCUSE ME!" A booming voice came from the center of the class, drawing all the attention.
Eren jumped a bit but didn't look at them. The teacher looked mildly surprised but answered
nonetheless.

"Yes?"

The voice answered. "Sorry to interrupt, but I was wondering if I could switch seats to sit in the
front? One of the lenses on my glasses broke and I'm having trouble seeing the board. And I uh...
don't have my contacts with me." Eren recognized the voice as the same one who answered all the
questions in this class.

"By all means, go ahead." The teacher answered. "You can sit next to Eren."

"Excellent!" Eren heard rustling and squeaky footsteps coming from behind. The person that sat
next to him did not at all look how he had imagined. So, this eccentric, bubbly mess was the
genius. The first thing he noticed was their hair. It was brown with colored streaks here and there,
all pulled up into a ponytail and... was that a leaf he saw in the back? Their outfit was as loud as
their voice. They wore a brown, laced, Victorian corset around their waist, a long sleeve Depeche
Mode tee shirt, bright red short shorts with black and white striped leggings underneath, a long,
knitted scarf with umpteen different yarns of different textures and colors that was wrapped three
times around and still reached the floor, black combat boots, and lastly, studded fingerless gloves.
They had dozens of rings, brackets and necklaces, all of different materials, metals, and sizes.
Some were just for show and some showed off what he assumed was their favorite bands, films,
shows, books and other things like that. Their book bag had a million pins that said random things.
A lot of them had puns involving chemical formulas, which Eren would've thought were funny if
he understood them. He looked up to their face, which was covered in makeup that was very
intricate, bizarre and yet somehow professional looking. There, he saw the glasses that indeed had
one lens that was majorly cracked. They sat with good posture and they wore an eager grin. Eren
wanted to laugh.

The class started reviewing questions about their astronomy unit. They had a test the following
week, so their teacher simply asked practice questions, allowing anyone to shout out the answer.

"Okay, let's work on the sun and stars." The teacher clicked through photos on the projector that
were vaguely related to each question. The current photo was a diagram showing the angle of the
light of the sun hitting the earth. "Who can tell me the date of the winter solstice?"
"December twenty-first!" The person beside Eren answered.

"Very good, Hanji." So that was their name. "How about the summer solstice?"

"June twenty-first." Hanji said.

"Good. Okay, does anyone know the date of the autumnal equinox?"

Eren peered at Hanji. They were currently glancing around the room with a smug smirk. It looked as if they were waiting for someone to speak up. "September twenty-third." They answered smoothly.

"Right again. And what about the spring equinox? And not Hanji this time."

There were crickets in the audience. The teacher gave a sigh and waved to Hanji, who happily replied, "March twentieth."

Someone in the back of the room muttered to their friend, "What a nerd." Hanji had obviously picked up on it because they visibly slouched and their smile disappeared. Eren felt bad for them, but not bad enough to say anything.

The teacher then showed the class constellations and asked them to identify them. Hanji, of course, answered all correctly, though less enthusiastically. Aries, Taurus, Leo, Capricorn and Virgo.

About half way through the period, the teacher stopped reviewing and announced that since their class was so far ahead, they could start on their lab assignment. "This time I'll let you choose partners."

Much to Eren's surprise, he felt a hand forcefully grab his right arm. He looked to the owner and stared wide-eyed as he locked gazes with a pair of broken glasses. "I choose Eren!" They proclaimed.

Eren looked at them quizzically. He couldn't comprehend why anyone would choose him as a partner, and so enthusiastically. He was horrible at this class. "Wait, why-"

"I saw you scale the wall this morning."

Ah, yes. That explained it. Everyone wants to hang out with the parkour kid.

The two moved to the back, and got started on their lab. Since they had finished the astronomy unit, they could begin on their next subject, which was geology. Oh joy.

This was just a test to see what they knew about minerals before hand. They were given a chart and several tools to help identify the minerals placed in front of them. The teacher explained that they wouldn't be graded but if anyone succeeded in naming all the minerals perfectly, they wouldn't have to do the homework.

"This is going to be tough." Eren huffed out an agitated sigh.

"First one is calcite." Hanji said almost immediately after sitting down.

Eren snapped his head up to stare at them. "Wait a sec, how did-"

"Sulfur." They tapped the next mineral lightly with their pen to indicate which one they were talking about. "Next one is Quartz."
Eren scribbled down the answers, trying his best to keep up. Hanji never touched a mineral, never glanced at a chart and barely looked at the minerals themselves and they listed off each one with ease, as if they were being asked to name different domestic animals.

When they finished, Eren's hand ached and Hanji took the liberty of handing in both of their worksheets. Hanji returned and asked the question they had been itching to ask all period. "What was it like to climb the wall? Was it easy? Were you tired? I need details!"

Eren sat back and replied smoothly. He felt good when people applauded his abilities. "I was exhausted but only because I was panicking about being late. But I do that kind of stuff all the time." Hanji dropped their jaw and regarded him with amazement. "But hey, I have a couple questions for you." Hanji looked as if they had their own questions but nodded in acknowledgment. "How are you so good at this class? It's like you don't even try."

Hanji gushed at the complement. "I'm glad you asked, I almost never get to talk about this! I do so well because one, I enjoy science and learning. And two, almost everything we learn in this class is related to my religion." They pulled up their sleeve to reveal a beautiful tattoo on their forearm, consisting of different elements of nature. "If you look, there's a little bit of everything that we're taught in here." They pointed things out on their arm as they spoke. "This is the aurora borealis, here's the constellation for Ophiuchus, that's a Quartz point, this is an amethyst cluster, heh, that's obviously a fox, that's-"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa." Eren cut them off. Other than 'how did you convince someone to give you a tattoo underaged?' he had a question that was driving him crazy. "How does that tie into your religion... what even is your religion?" This didn't look like anything from his religion, or any other religion he knew about.

"How considerate of you to ask!" He could tell that they didn't get the opportunity to talk about this often. "I'm Wiccan, it's a nature based religion."

"Wiccan... Wiccan..." Eren whispered to himself. He had heard the word before. Ah yes, his father had discussed it with him. So, to contribute his knowledge on the subject he said...

"Isn't that when you worship the devil?" As soon as it left his mouth, he regretted it. The light behind Hanji's eyes vanished. But still viewing this as an opportunity to educate, they still smiled and continued. "No no no, we don't even believe in the devil... or any concept of absolute evil for that matter."

"Hm? Then do you believe in god?" Odd, he could've sworn his dad said something about the devil and Wiccans.

"Sort of, we have a god and a goddess."

"Is one good and the other bad?"

"Well, they're like people. They are good and bad. Nobody's perfect so we don't believe our god or goddess are either."

"Wait, let me get this straight. You don't have a devil but you have two gods and neither of them is all good but neither is all bad either? How does that make any sense?"

Hanji did what they could to be civil. "Not to be rude but it seems like you're Christian and that religion doesn't make sense to me anymore than this makes sense to you."
Eren pondered this over for a moment before he gave up. Even he didn't quite understand Christianity, and he sometimes would go as far as to say he didn't agree with it. He relented with a chuckle. "Good point."

Hanji felt like they had returned to good terms and smiled brightly.

"Okay, I have one more question. And it doesn't have to do with your religion."

Hanji nodded. "Shoot."

"This might come off really bad so I'm sorry in advance, but..." He leaned in. "Are you a boy or a girl?"

Hanji seemed to understand his confusion. "I'm agender."

"..." Eren stared blankly. "Yeah, but which gender?"

"Agender." They stated.

"Sooo, is that male or female?" He drawled out cautiously.

"I'm not a boy or a girl. I'm agender, my pronouns are they/them if you were wondering." They provided helpfully.

Eren nodded but was still confused. "Right..." He was about to tell them that that couldn't be, but he was once again saved by the bell.

"It was nice talking with you! See you- oh! Sit next to me tomorrow, I have a question for you!"

"Ok..." Eren was too baffled to comprehend what was just asked of him.

~

Eren's next class was music theory. It wasn't a subject he was particularly interested in but he didn't hate it. It was actually really fun at times. As he walked in, he noticed two students were sitting near the piano. It was odd because neither of them were seniors. They weren't supposed to be there, he thought. He recognized them, though.

The sophomore girl's name was Isabel. She had messy red hair, pulled into pigtails, she had on a green, oversized sweatshirt with a golden retriever on it, a pair of black skinny jeans and blue converses. He and other people in his grade often referred to her as the PETA wannabe.

The junior boy, standing next to her was Farlan. He was much more well dressed, with his white dress shirt, black slacks, black vest and shiny dress shoes. However his blond hair matched the girl's in the sense that it was messy.

He took his seat, eyeing them in curiosity. Their teacher, Mr. Bozado, walked through the door, clapping his hands. "Okay, everyone settle down." The class rolled their eyes, as everybody was completely silent. "Let's all welcome Farlan and Isabel Ackerman. I've pulled them from their study halls so they could play a song which you will all analyze for me. This piece is hard to play, especially for an old man like me because it has been known to give people tendinitis." About half of the jaws in the class dropped while the others were finally giving their full attention. "This piece
is Schubert's 'Der Erlkönig.' These two students have perfected this piece, to my amazement, so I thought it'd be a nice treat for you all to have a listen." He gestured to the siblings. "Whenever you're ready."

They switched positions, Farlan taking the piano with Isabel standing to sing. Immediately after Farlan began playing, it was easy to understand why such a piece was dangerous to play. The tempo was rapid and hard to keep up with, the keys that were played were vastly separated and it was a wonder how Farlan ever learned how to do it in the first place.

Once Isabel started to sing, the class listened in awe. She was damn near professional. She sang so abruptly when it was needed and so fluidly when it was called for. Everyone watched with envy. She was known as the kid who was obnoxious and clingy but who would've thought she possessed such talent?

It was a shame that they had to stop. Everyone clapped and shouted their praises as the two took a bow. Mr. Bozado made sure to demand that Farlan never play it again to "save his hands from their inevitable fate."

The class was asked to analyze the piece, which didn't take very long, and then they were allowed to relax while Mr. Bozado graded their work. Eren could see that Isabel and Farlan were privately discussing something and they kept giggling and glancing back at him. He felt a little uncomfortable. Were they making fun of him? Did he have something on his face?

Shortly thereafter, they walked over to him, elbowing and nudging each other as they did so. Isabel looked to Farlan and he nodded. "You're Eren, right?" He asked.

Eren simply nodded.

"Did you climb the wall?!" The girl spoke up excitedly. He nodded again. "That's so cool! How did you do that?"

Eren let out an amused breath as Farlan tried to calm his sister. "We were wondering if you do that kind of stuff often. Are you athletic?"

"Yeah, a bit. Heh, that's not the first time I had to climb a wall to get into the school. I do other stunts too, you know, just for fun."

Isabel and Farlan shared a knowing look. "So," Farlan started, "We thought that maybe, if you were interested-"

"Do you wanna join color guard?!" Isabel asked, clinging onto Eren's desk with an impatient stare.

Eren sat back a bit, startled at her outburst. "Uh, I don't know. Is that the thing with the flags and stuff?" He didn't really know much about it, other than the fact that it looked flashy and a little girly to him.

Isabel took in a huge breath. "It's not just flags! It's rifles and sabers and dancing and timing and lifting and-"

"I think you've made your point, Izzy." Farlan cut in. He turned to Eren once more. "So, what do you think? You don't have to give us an answer right now."

Eren scrunched up his nose at the thought. Dancing while twirling a flag and a glitzy costume? It didn't sound like it was for him. Or at least, it didn't sound like something that people would have an easy time accepting that it was for him. "I don't think it's my kind of thing..."
"We ask because you showed a lot of skill this morning and to put it bluntly, we're looking for at least one more member."

Eren pondered it over. He wasn't concerned with what would actually be expected of him, rather than what his friends, family and peers would think if he joined. It would be embarrassing. He could hear all the names he'd be called. "Can I have some time to think about it?" He wasn't going to think about it.

"Sure!"

"Of course."

And like that, they left him alone to 'think things over.'

~

It was time to go to gym class, Eren's favorite class of the day. Although, he didn't think he was able to put forth his normal amount of effort, given all the energy he used in the morning.

Today, there wasn't a specific sport they needed to play, so everyone was sent to the weight room to do whatever they wanted. Using his arms was out of the question, so Eren went to use one of the treadmills. He kept at it for half of the class period before he got tired and went to sit down. He took the time to observe all of the other people in the room. There were some people slacking off and sitting on the equipment. There was one kid who thought that it would be a fantastic idea to go on one of the ellipticals... backwards. There was one group that specifically caught his eye, though. On the ground, doing push-ups with ease was one of the three new kids. Eren couldn't remember his name, but he recognized him from passing him in the hall. He was rather muscular and had short blond hair. His current expression was one of pride. It was easy to tell why, because the person who was counting his push-ups had just surpassed sixty. The one counting was someone that Eren was very familiar with. His name was Marco and he had went to school with Eren since they were both very young. The higher he counted, the wider he grinned. The other two new students were standing next to Marco, watching the man on the ground. One of them was a short, blond girl, observing with a blank expression, as if she had seen him do this a million times over. The one standing next to her was a dark skinned, tall guy with black, choppy hair. He had a look of apprehension as he watched the blond student continue past seventy.

Eren thought they looked like an odd bunch but he had to admit that he was impressed with the efforts of the one on the ground. He walked over to watch him continue and was welcomed by the counter's side. "Eighty-six, come on, Reiner! Fourteen more!" Marco said.

With great ease, Reiner, as Eren had just learned the name of, finished at one hundred and ten push-ups, surpassing his goal. He got to his feet and exhaled deeply, swinging his arms. "Hey, look who it is! Spiderman!" He exclaimed when he spotted Eren.

Eren grinned at the nickname. "It's seems like everyone saw that."

Reiner nodded. "Yeah, we saw you from the other side of the school when we were walking to first period." He turned to the other three people. "Wasn't it cool?"

Marco gave him a formal agreement whereas the tallest one spluttered out something that sounded like he thought so too and the girl simply hummed a 'yes.'
"So what brings you over here?" Reiner asked.

"Oh, I just wanted to see how many you could do." Eren shrugged. "I don't think I know you three, what are your names?"

"I'm Reiner, this is Bertolt," he jabbed his finger at the taller boy. "And that's Annie." He pointed to the small girl. Eren said his hellos and introduced himself. A slightly awkward silence fell before Reiner broke it.

"Wanna see who can do more?" Reiner challenged Eren.

"Huh? Oh, no. I just wanted to come over and watch-"

"Come on! It'll be fun." Reiner slapped Eren on the shoulder, unintentionally rough. "Look, I'm a little warn out from what I just did and I'm sure you're warn out from this morning, so I'd say we're evenly matched."

Eren didn't necessarily agree with that, but he did kind of want to see if it was possible to beat him. "Why not?" He figured.

Reiner tapped his chin, deep in thought. "Let's make this a little more interesting."

"What were you thinking?" Eren raised an eyebrow.

"Let's add weights." He suggested. Eren was all for it until Reiner gathered the 'weights.'

He pushed Annie in front of Eren, who looked not at all pleased. He then brought over Bertolt to where he was standing. "Ready?"

"Wait, you mean they're going to sit on our backs?"

"Yup," Eren concluded that Reiner was insane. "Bertolt is the tallest one of the two and heavier than me and I'm bigger than you, so he sits on my back. Annie is closer to your size and let's face it, most likely heavier than y-"

"Watch it, rocks-for-brains." The girl's first spoken words caused Eren to laugh. Neither of the 'weights' looked overly happy about the situation but neither protested either.

Marco spoke up. "Alright, so who ever does the most push-ups before they collapse wins." His attention was brought to the door. "Hey, Nanaba! Just in time. We need another ref."

"Hey what are you guys doing?" Said person strided over to the group. Nanaba had a bright, beautiful smile and short, curly blond hair. Eren felt awkward. This was the second time today he was faced with someone who's gender he wasn't sure of. But he learned from his mistakes, if he couldn't understand the answer, then he didn't want to ask.

"Reiner and Eren are going to have a competition to see who can do more push-ups. I'll count for Eren."

"Oo, sounds interesting, I'm in!" Nanaba agreed.

Eren and Reiner took their positions, as did Annie and Bertolt. Eren was a little uncomfortable letting a stranger sit on his back, but it was just for fun, so he could handle it.

When Bertolt sat down, Reiner let out a sharp breath. "Geez, Bert. Lay off the fries, you're killin me!"
"S-sorry, Reiner!"

Reiner snickered beneath him. "I'm just kidding, Big Bert."

Marco and Nanaba took their less exciting positions. "Ready," they said in unison, "set, go!"

They had a slow start getting used to the extra pounds on their backs. Reiner had an easier time recovering, but it didn't look like he would last very long. Eren struggled to keep up the pace, but he could endure more. Annie happened to be quite a bit lighter than him but that didn't help the fact that he had never done this before.

It wasn't long before they both collapsed. Eren only stayed in the running for a few more seconds than Reiner, which shocked him. Then again, the guy just did one hundred and ten push-ups.

In the end, it was Reiner who won. He had a score of twelve while Eren had nine.

The four of them stood up and Eren congratulated Reiner while Reiner told Eren how impressed he was. They each sat down off to the side to cool down.

While they took their break, Eren could overhear a conversation being had between Annie and Nanaba. He knew eavesdropping was wrong but he couldn't help it.

Annie remained stoic but had an empathetic tone in her voice. "So what are you going to do?"

"I'm not sure." Nanaba replied. "Actually, I have an idea. Do you have a binder I could borrow? Don't you use one for boxing?"

"A binder?" Annie repeated skeptically. "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

Eren, being the good samaritan that he was, thought he could help. He stood up and address the two.

"I have a binder you could borrow."

"You have a binder?" Annie asked incredulously.

"Yeah, I have one in my bag I could let you use. I can get it right now." What a gentleman.

"Well, who am I to judge? Let's see it." Nanaba said hopefully.

Eren felt like that was an odd sort of comment to make but he retrieved his book bag anyway. He pulled out a blue three-ring binder and offered it to Nanaba.

Annie and Nanaba tried in vain to stifle their laughter. Eren looked at the binder to see if he had gotten anything on it that may have been embarrassing. When he saw nothing, he asked, "What?"

"Thanks, but I meant a chest binder. I need one for a family event coming up because my dad is still convinced that I'm a boy." Nanaba elaborated for him.

When all Eren gave her was a confused look, Annie turned and advised Nanaba to change her mind. "I know you want to avoid conflict with your dad but wearing a binder is one thing and wearing one after your surgery is another. Do you think your body can handle that? I'm no doctor but I think that'll be uncomfortable."

"I'm lost." Eren interjected, dumbly.
Nanaba couldn't help but laugh at that. "I'm trans, but my dad refuses to accept that and wants me to go to family events as someone I'm not. Understand?" She said with a polite smile.

"O-oh," he stammered. "Right, yeah I get it." He most definitely did not. He couldn't grasp the concept of someone just changing their sex. What a weird day it had been for him. It's like everyone wanted to challenge his beliefs. If that was their goal, they succeeded.

Annie was the only one who noticed how nervous Eren got. She thought it was rather rude that he was making it a big deal by overacting, so she ushered Nanaba in the other direction.

~

Lunch time came around, which was the first time of the day that Eren could meet up with his friends. He spotted them easily, as they were hard to miss.

His friend Armin, who had an unmistakable, long, blond hair, and who always looked like a bright young adult, with his sweater-vest and tie, was sitting at a table with his nose in a book. Not much of a surprise. Eren's sister, Mikasa, who he looked at as a best friend like Armin, sat beside him, waiting patiently. She was also easy to find in a crowd. She had long, silky black hair, a slightly oversized black sweater and skirt that hid her figure, and her signature red scarf that she didn't leave the house without.

Eren sat across from them, gaining their attention and dropping his backpack. "You would not believe the crazy morning I've had." He said exasperatedly.

Armin peered up from his book. "Well, let's go get lunch and you can tell us all about it."

They all did as he suggested, retrieving trays and returning to their table. The three put off eating their 'nutritious' food in favor of listening to Eren.

"So, it started when I over slept. I had to run to school and-"

"You climbed the building and got in through the window." Mikasa finished.

Eren stared, puzzled. "Wait, you saw it?"

Mikasa and Armin shared a glance. "Everybody saw it." Armin stated.

"Oh... right. Well, anyways," Eren told him about the strange people he encountered. He talked about the girls who were dating that surprised him, the person who was apparently neither a boy or a girl with a strange religion, the siblings that exhibited amazing talent for their age, the three new kids that he decided he liked and the (as he called it) sex-shifter. He explained how he thought the world was going mad as Mikasa listened intently and Armin nodded along but remained silent, as he couldn't believe that his friends could be so ignorant.

Eren finished his tale, absolutely perplexed at his day. "Such cool people that go to our school, don't you think?" Mikasa asked.

"Cool?" That wasn't the word Eren was looking for. "More like weird if you ask me." Though, he couldn't deny that he was fascinated by these people.
Armin hesitantly interjected. "You both knew that there are people like that beforehand, right?"

Eren shrugged vaguely. "You want to know what the weirdest part was?" His friends became more interested. "Isabel and Farlan, the musical kids, asked me if I wanted to join color guard." He punctuated his statement with a distorted, disgusted expression.

"Are you going to join?" Armin said.

"Gross, no way in hell." Eren over exaggerated to prove a point, more to himself than to his friends.

"Why not?" Mikasa wondered. "I think you'd be good at it. I'm not on the team or anything, but it looks pretty fun."

"Because, it's for girls." Eren answered. "Everyone knows that if a guy is in color guard, he's gay."

Armin had to disagree. He couldn't have his friend thinking such foolish thoughts. "Well, actually it's not even-" he couldn't finish his thought, he was interrupted by a loud complaint coming from the lunch line.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN I CAN'T HAVE A SECOND LUNCH?!"

The cafeteria became silent. Everyone stared in the direction of the argument.

"I'm sorry but we can't allow it." One of the lunch ladies tried to calm down a traumatized girl.

"But I have more money, I can pay for it! Everyone else already got their lunch and you have extra food!"

"We're sorry but it's against school policy. Surely you-"

"Please, I'm starving! Are you going to let me starve?!"

Eren elbowed Armin to get his attention. "What's her deal?"

Armin looked at him sadly. "That's Sasha. She's been struggling with eating for a long time. I feel bad, I kind of want to give her something."

Eren didn't understand why his friend felt so empathetic for her. She was just whining to get more food, right? How annoying.

Eventually the girl was dragged away, still begging, by who Eren assumed to be one of her friends. The friend was a girl with short strawberry blond hair and had pants with dirt all over them, and she kept patting Sasha on the back reassuringly. Sasha looked to be on the verge of tears when her friend ushered her to sit down at their table.

At the table, sat two other people aside from Sasha. The redhead head patted her back as one boy next to Sasha shushed her soothingly. Eren saw him before, but where?

Ah, yes. The bald kid riding the elliptical backwards. Connie was his name. "Hey Petra," he called, "go get my book bag, please. I have some fruit snacks I can give her."

She nodded and walked away to locate said bag. "Thank you." Sasha mumbled, afraid that if she said more, tears would spill over. Eren thought it was such a pathetic sight. Crying for food. How pitiful.

In Petra's absence, a dark figure strode over to their table. Sasha and Connie looked up at him. Eren
didn't know how they could do that without cowering in fear. The guy looked scary as hell. Eren wasn't oblivious enough to not know what goth was but he never saw someone who dressed that way up close.

He had a black jean jacket with spikes on the shoulders, black ripped skinny jeans, black fingerless gloves made out of fake leather, pointed, vintage looking shoes and what Eren would call a dog collar. He had an eyebrow piercing, a septum piercing and a lip ring. Heavy eyeliner surrounded stormy, grey orbs. His nails were covered in black nail polish. Under his black hair was an undercut. His skin was as white as a ghost and he may have been short but his build made up for it. Overall, he carried a deathly aura.

Eren lacked any sympathy for the girl before, but now he was fearing for her life. The guy looked utterly pissed off and god, if looks could kill. He crossed his arms and faced the two. When he spoke, it was a low baritone and his words were calm and smooth. "What's the problem?"

Connie was the one to reply, to save Sasha from crying. "She didn't get enough to eat again. They won't let her have more food."

Sasha began wiping at her eyes. The man turned away and exited the cafeteria. Eren hadn't realized that he'd been holding his breath all this time. Relief washed over him, the girl was spared.

His anxiety returned this soon as the scary man did. He came back with his book bag slung around his shoulder. He dropped it on the table with a bang. He pulled out a brown paper bag and tossed it to her. "Eat."

Sasha shook her head and bit her lip. She tried to give back his lunch. "I can't. I-it's yours."

The man stared intensely at her. "Eat." He repeated.

Sasha nodded reluctantly. "Thank you." She whispered. She pulled out an energy bar and started nibbling at it.

Eren thought he would've left after that but instead he sat down across from them, remaining silent.

Soon, Petra returned with Connie's book bag. She saw that Sasha now had a lunch and set down the bag beside Connie and sat next to Sasha. She rubbed Sasha's shoulder. "Are you feeling any better?"

Sasha nodded, but then she started shaking her head. "I'm sorry," she cried. "I'm sorry I keep taking your food and making you guys worry and drawing attention and crying and-"

"Enough." The man sitting across from them spoke. "Don't apologize. You can't help it and we don't mind."

"Enough." The man sitting across from them spoke. "Don't apologize. You can't help it and we don't mind."

Sasha sniffled. "Thanks, Levi."

The name sent shivers down Eren's spine. It suited him. Levi.

Sasha ate away at the food, her expression lightening up all the while. She finished everything, but left an untouched apple and bag of chips in the bag. "Thanks," she said again. "I'm full now." Levi took back his bag and leaned back to get more comfortable.

"I'm glad she got something to eat." Armin whispered to Eren and Mikasa. He had been listening in just as everyone else was.
Armin didn't see it because he was faced away but Levi had heard it and turned his head to look at the source. When Levi saw that Armin was the one who spoke he started to stare off into space, bored. Eventually his gaze hit Eren. He was brought out of his pointless staring and locked eyes with him.

Eren gulped but couldn't look away if he tried. He had a better view of the man's face. His eyebrows were furrowed, seemingly in agitation, his lips were in a thin line, he had a strong chin with high cheekbones and his under eye circles gave the impression that he was not to be angered.

At last, Eren could bring himself to look away but it wasn't without repercussions. He could see out of his peripheral vision that the stranger stood up to walk around the table.

Eren could feel the ominous presence looming behind him. He could see Mikasa and Armin tense up with wide eyes at the figure. "Oi." Levi commanded attention.

Eren turned around mechanically, apprehensive about his reaction. If Levi was intriguing to look at far away, he was positively striking to observe up close. Eren broke out in a cold sweat. "..." He couldn't think of an intelligent response as he stared, waiting for him to talk again.

"My little brother and sister told me about you." He stated.

Brother and sister?

"They said they already asked if you wanted to join our color guard team."

'Oh god, oh god, oh god.' Eren thought. 'I didn't answer quickly enough so they sent their demonic older brother after me. Wait, he said "our team." Shit, he's probably their leader.' He held his breath once again. "Th-they did."

Levi nodded curtly. "Do you have an answer yet?"

"Uhh..." Eren's mouth went dry. "I don't... know. Can I have some time to think about it?"

Levi set a hand on Eren's shoulder. Eren flinched, it felt like a burning sensation. Levi narrowed his eyes at him as if he was thinking over his answer very clearly. "I suppose." He began to walk away, eyes still locked with Eren's as he let his hand slide off Eren's shoulder.

When he sat back down at his own table and Mikasa let out silent laugh she had been holding in and said in a hushed tone, "That was so creepy!"

"Yeah, it really was." Armin agreed. "I guess they just want you to join really bad." Eren shivered. "Yeah? Well too bad. I'm not gonna be pressured into a sissy sport by a fag."

Armin and Mikasa stilled, losing all amusement. Eren hadn't been as quiet as he thought he had. He had drawn the attention of everybody at Levi's table as well as well as some other surrounding people. Petra, Connie and Sasha gasped and if Levi looked mad before, he was murderous now. Eren felt sick to his stomach. He didn't mean it, not that that excused it, but in reality he hated that word and even felt disgusted as it came out of his mouth. He only used it to make a point.

"Eren, don't say that." Armin glared at him sternly, like a furious parent. At this moment, Eren wished that he was honest to others about himself so he could reclaim the word. But since no one knew about who he was and he wanted to keep it that way, he couldn't excuse it whatsoever.

He went too far to take it back, so he decided to defend his actions. "What? He is one and you
"Eren." Mikasa said with a tone of finality.

Eren noticed that Levi was looking at him pensively, then his expression lightened, as if he had figured something out. "You know, kid," they all turned to face Levi. "You should really watch who you're talking about." Levi looked at him pointedly. Eren couldn't help but feel like that had an underlining message. Levi could see right through him and his facade. He took him down with a single sentence and no one else even noticed.

Mikasa and Armin apologized profusely to save their friend from his fate. Levi waved them off, saying it was no big deal but he should still watch his mouth. All Eren could do was stare dumbfounded.

Lunch ended shortly after and the trio walked to their next class together. Armin was rambling about something he saw in the news but Eren couldn't bring himself to listen. He was too busy reviewing what had just happened in his head. The three had to depart and they said their goodbyes, when Armin paused to regard Eren. "Why is your face so red?"

"Huh?" Eren's hands flew to his face, feeling how hot it was.

Armin chuckled but waved goodbye and went in the direction of his classroom, as did Mikasa.

Eren was off on his own and before long, he felt a familiar hand grab his shoulder, but much harsher. "Don't think that I don't know the real reason why you said that." The low voice from behind him warned.

Eren whipped around to see Levi walking away. He fucked up and he knew it.

~

At the end of the day, Eren was called down to the guidance office. He prayed that it wasn't about climbing the building. Did they have cameras on the outside of the school? He wasn't sure.

He hesitantly walked through the door to the office. He was greeted with the smile of an old family friend. "Hey, Eren. How are you?"

"I'm good, Hannes. You?" Eren didn't feel obligated to call him by his professional name since he'd known him since he was a kid.

"I'm well. Come on in and sit down." Eren did as he was told and sat on a large chair. "I need to talk to you about graduating."

Eren relaxed, no longer concerned that he was in trouble.

"Now, you shouldn't be worried about passing your classes. Your grades are excellent so far, but I suggest that you work a little harder in science. You're not anywheres near failing but I know you can do better." Eren nodded. "But you can't graduate this year. At least, not yet."

"What do you mean? You said my grades are fine, what's the problem?"

Hannes pulled out a couple files to review them as he answered. "You haven't participated in a
single extracurricular activity since kindergarten."

Eren raised a brow. "So?"

"Sooo," Hannes drawled out, "our school requires each student to take part in at least one extracurricular activity before they graduate."

"That's so stupid! No one ever told me that before!" Eren yelled.

"No need to shout." Hannes held up a hand. "Now listen, this isn't a huge problem. All you have to do is join a club or sports team or something along those lines and you'll be fine. There's plenty of things for you to do. You can join band, choir, wrestling, indoor soccer, prom committee, student council, history club, math club, there's tons of things to choose from. I'm sure you'll find something you'll like."

That didn't sound so bad. Eren could join a club that didn't require him to do much and then he'd be off the hook. "Alright. How long until I have to find something?"

"Well, depending on what you choose, you don't have to actually participate until that activity starts, unless it has already started. But I need to know what you've chosen by the end of next week."

"Okay, thanks Hannes." Eren stood to leave.

"You're welcome Eren. Have a good day. Oh, and a word of advice."

Eren faced him as he opened the door.

"Get to school on time."
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Eren starts looking for an extracurricular activity to join. As time goes on, his choices become more and more limited. At the end of the day he's left with a select few options.

Chapter Notes

If you're wondering why this was updated so quickly, it's because I already had this written. We're finally getting somewhere plot-wise!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a long day and Eren was eager to walk home with his sister. He didn't live far from school, which was a plus. Especially when he was running late. They enjoyed walking home together because it was calming and this time of year, they would stop and jump in piles of dead leaves just to hear them crunch. That never got old.

Mikasa felt the need to discuss events from earlier that day. "Eren, you know what you said to Levi was wrong, right?"

Eren huffed grumpily and avoided her gaze. "You saw how he was trying to pressure me! Are you defending him?"

"Okay first, he was not pressuring you. He asked you a couple questions. Second, I'm talking about what you called him. I know what the bible and dad say but there's nothing wrong with gay people. And that word is horrible to use. I don't want to hear you say that ever again."

"... Whatever." Eren muttered.

"I'm serious, Eren." Mikasa's voice raised slightly. "You could end up pissing off the wrong people."

Eren relented. He knew she was right, he just didn't want to give in so easily out of his irrational fear that any compassion for people of different sexualities would give him away. "Fine, I won't say it anymore."

The two siblings entered their home and were greeted by their cheerful mother, Carla. "Hey you guys, how was school?"

"Good." They replied in unison, monotonously.

"What did you learn?"

"Nothing."
"Ah..." Carla stared blankly. She was so lucky to have such enthusiastic children. "Anyway, we're having bratkartoffeln for dinner. And there's kugelhopf for dessert."

"Aw, are you making that weird German food again?" Eren whined.

Carla gasped and placed her hand over her heart, showing how hurt she was. "Weird? Is it weird to remember our roots and celebrate our culture and past? Is it weird to try something new every once in awhile?"

Eren rolled his eyes. His mother was a fantastic cook but every time she tried to follow a German recipe, it never ended up the way it was supposed to. Although, she never screwed up any dessert, German or not.

"I like how you celebrate our culture." Mikasa said.

"Thank you, Mikasa. It's nice to know someone appreciates my hard efforts around here." Carla faced away from Eren, exaggerating her hurt feelings.

"You're not even German!" Eren accused Mikasa.

She merely shrugged, smirking smugly. "Suck up." He muttered under his breath.

Eren went to his room and catapulted himself onto his bed, staring at the ceiling. What activity would he take up? He knew that he wouldn't be allowed to join a math or science club. They simply wouldn't accept him. Maybe he could join history club. That wouldn't be like banging his head against the wall. Band was out of the question, considering he didn't own or play any instruments. He never fancied himself a singer but who knows? Perhaps he'd be let in chorus. There were only girls in prom committee so he wasn't going to choose that. Eren could use his athletic talents and play a sport. Soccer or football would be fun, maybe even track. Well, he had another week to figure it out.

~

Later that night, Eren and Mikasa were called down stairs for dinner. Just as they sat down, the door opened and in walked their father, Grisha. "Sorry I'm late, I had to take care of some things at the hospital."

Carla walked over to him and greeted him with a kiss. "That's alright, you're here now."

They all sat down and started eating their dinner. Eren hesitantly tried the meal in front of him. Much to his surprise, it wasn't nearly as bad as he expected it to be. Perhaps Carla was improving her skills after all. Everyone else at the table seemed to think the food was just fine. Carla and Grisha were occupied with idle chitchat. Eren wasn't really paying attention to what they were talking about until half way through their conversation.

"Do you remember that new nurse, Amelia?" Grisha asked. When Carla nodded, he continued with a sigh. "I just found out she recently had an abortion."

Both Mikasa and Eren refused to show that they were listening. They didn't want to be a part of this uncomfortable conversation. "You don't say?" Carla replied casually.
"Oh yes. Who would've thought, such a kind, faithful girl to do something like that? What a shame. Now kids," Eren and Mikasa faced him. "we are not going to condemn her, that's not what we're about. I think she'd appreciate it if we all kept her in our prayers. Tomorrow I'll have a talk with her and see if she's aware of her faults. I know her and I believe she deserves a second chance."

Eren and Mikasa remained silent but both gave a vague nod.

"Enough about my day, what did you both do in school?" Both siblings were about to say 'nothing' but their mother gave them a warning glare.

"We started a project in shop class today." Mikasa decided to go first. "We're making a clock." Both parents seemed to be very interested and asked her how it was going, if it was hard and other little things like that. "It's kinda fun so far. Oh and during lunch Eren said-

Eren glared daggers at Mikasa, daring her to tell them what he had said. His state reminded her of his promise to never say it again, so she switched topics.

"He said... he told me that he was given an offer to join a sport."

"You didn't tell me that." Carla perked up. "What sport?"

Eren scrunched up his nose a little more than necessary and rolled his eyes. "Pfft, color guard. It was really dumb of them to ask me."

Grisha broke out into laughter. "Color guard? That's not a sport! Why on earth would they want you to join that?"

Eren shrugged, unconvincingly. "I don't know. I think they're just desperate." Mikasa kicked him under the table, expression remaining impassive. This seemed to go unnoticed by their parents.

"Well, make sure you make it clear to them that you're not interested. You tell them you won't be joining a girl team."

"Right..." Eren muttered. He half expected his mom to say something to disagree with his father but she never did. He gazed at her and she looked like she was a bit agitated. He picked at his food, feeling a little disappointed, though he didn't know why. The rest of their meal was eaten in silence.

~

Eren waited until the following Wednesday to start looking for an activity to join. He walked to school on time for once, with his sister.

"You only have three days to look, why did you wait so long?" Mikasa chastised Eren.

"Ugh, I don't know. But I don't see the problem. I have plenty of time to find something."

Mikasa didn't look convinced. "I hope so."
Eren sat down in his math class, waiting for Ymir and Christa to arrive. When they did, Eren sat up and put on his polite facade. He cleared his throat. "Excuse me, Ymir?"

She turned around to faced him with a bored look. "What?"

"You're in history club, right?"

"Yeah, so?"

"Well, I need to join some sort of extracurricular activity and I'd like to join history club." He lied. She looked at him skeptically. "What's your grade in history?"

He thought about it for a moment before he remembered. "Uh... 82 I think?"

"Hm, sorry." She feigned sympathy. "Only people with a 90 or above average in that class can join history club. Same thing goes for any academic club."

Eren shrunk in his seat, dejected. "...Oh."

Christa noticed how let down he appeared and tried to cheer him up. "You know Eren, if you're looking for an extracurricular activity to join, there's always color guard! I don't know why I didn't ask you on Thursday." He looked pointedly at Ymir.

"Wait, you're in color guard too?" Why didn't that shock him?

"Yup! I think you'd be good at it! It's really fun and we need another member." She smiled sweetly.

"Yeah, so I've heard." He tried to think of a way to not offend her. She hadn't done anything to him. "Look, I'm just not interested. It's not really my thing, sorry."

Christa nodded in understanding. "That's alright. But if you ever change your mind, we won't turn you down!"

"Right... thanks." Well, that was quite a few clubs that Eren had to cross off the list.

~

Eren made his way to earth science. He dreaded the conversations that were more than likely to take place there. On Friday, Hanji had asked him to join color guard. Everyone seemed to be on that team.

Of course, today was another day that they had to work in a lab. Ever since their teacher had allowed them to pick partners, Hanji chose him every time. He was somewhat grateful because having them as a partner meant that he was guaranteed a high grade.

It was worth listening to their lectures about how earth science was so fascinating, how Wicca differed from Buddhism, how color guard was such a great sport, how physics played into color guard and many other things he couldn't care less about. He got high grades and that's what mattered. He could endure it.
He once made the mistake of asking them about a pentagram on their backpack and the conversation started off on why they had it, how it was important to Pagan religions and witchcraft, that 'no, witch's don't actually fly or break the laws of physics,' and they somehow ended up talking about their astronomy unit and explaining how the Venus transit made a pentagram. Eren picked at every little thing that looked like it was related to the devil just to see if they would admit to it. Of course, he regretted it soon after every time.

The current lab that they were working on was testing out the hardness of minerals and then placing them into categories. Again, the two finished before anyone else with record time and had extra time to talk.

Hanji was in the middle of explaining what the difference between calcite and quartz was, when Eren interrupted. "Hanji, sorry to interrupt, I'd reeeally love to hear the rest of what you have to say but I need to ask you something."

They didn't seem to mind being interrupted very much. "Sure thing, what is it?"

"Other than color guard, is there a sport or club you're in that you can put in a good word for me?"

"Well," Hanji started. "I'm in math club, science club, student council, and photography club."

That was two more options. "Great, could I join student council?" Eren asked.

"Student council isn't the type of thing you can just join. You need to be picked by teachers and they're not picking people any more." Hanji added apologetically.

"Oh," Eren furrowed his brow. "What about photography club? Can I just join that?"

Hanji sighed. "I wish you could, I think you'd like it. Unfortunately, you're required to use the school's cameras and there's already people that have to share."

What a bummer. Eren was becoming more and more limited as the day went on. But that didn't stop him, he was sure he'd find something by the end of the week.

"Thanks anyway, Hanji."

"No problem. I'll let you know if I can think of anything else!" They gave him a thumbs up.

Hanji seemed genuinely concerned for him. Maybe they weren't so bad.

～

Perhaps music theory would be his lucky class. Before the bell rang, Eren walked up to Mr. Bozado to talk to him about joining the school's choir.

"Is there any way I could join chorus?"

Mr. Bozado looked rather shocked. "You could, I suppose. You seem to be able to read sheet music very well. You'd need to audition first, of course."

"Really? That's all I have to do?" Eren grinned with hope.
"Yes, that's all. You can audition during your next study hall. When would that be?"

"Sixth period, today." Eren answered.

"Okay, then come down sixth period. You can sing any song off of a list I'll give you and if your voice is within a voice range that we need more of, you're in."

"Thanks, Mr Bozado." Eren took his seat, relieved that he might actually have a chance.

Lunch time came around and Eren couldn't wait to tell his friends the good news. As usual, Armin and Mikasa were already sitting at the table waiting for him to arrive. He ushered his friends into the lunch line and out as fast as he could, so he could get to explaining.

"So what's the big deal?" Armin said when they all say down.

"Good news! I found an activity to join so I don't have to fail!" Eren couldn't keep the mad simper off his face. All his stress had gone away.

"That's great!" Mikasa congratulated him.

"So soon, I'm impressed!" Armin added. "So what are you joining?"

Eren paused for dramatic effect. "Chorus." He crossed his arms and stuck out his chin to show off his accomplished attitude.

"Chorus? I didn't know you sing." Mikasa furrowed her brows in confusion.

Eren dropped his prideful posture and scratched the back of his head. "Oh, well I don't. Not yet anyways. Mr. Bozado said I'm good at reading sheet music so that might give me the upper hand. I'm going to go audition during my study hall. Singing can't be that hard, right?"

Armin and Mikasa both looked at each other and shrugged. "I guess." Armin said. "Maybe it's all technique." He didn't know a lot about music so he couldn't offer much help to his friend.

The three started to pick away at their food and kind of dropped the subject in favor of eating. Out of the corner of Eren's eye, he saw a black mass moving into his field of vision. He turned his head to face it dead on and realized that it was the weird goth guy again. He couldn't look away. There was just something so intriguing about him that held Eren's attention captive. There was also something threatening about him that made Eren scared to look away.

"Eren?" Eren was pulled out of his reverie by Armin's confused voice. "What are you staring at?"

"Huh? O-oh, um nothing." Eren shook his head to knock some sense in to himself.

Armin cocked an eyebrow. "Well clean up your mouth. You're drooling." At this, Eren noticed that Levi turned around to witness the sight.

Eren did as suggested, trying to hide his embarrassment. "Sorry, I was spacing out." He dug into his food and kept his gaze towards his tray. He didn't want to face the scrutiny of his friends or even worse, Levi's terrifying stare.
"Hey, are you okay?" He heard Mikasa's voice. He refused to look up at her.

"Who, me? Never better." He said a little too exaggeratedly. He took another bite of his food, trying to occupy himself so the others would ignore him.

Eventually, he had to look up. He had to know if Levi had turned away. He slowly lifted his head and glanced in his direction. During that split second, their eyes locked and Eren saw that Levi didn't have his normal, bored look. The bastard was smirking, as if he was toying with him. It was so cruel.

Eren's breath picked up pace and he tried to look anywhere but at Levi. He wasn't looking straight at him but he could see that Levi was still staring.

"Eren, why are you blushing?" Mikasa chortled. "You look like a tomato."

If there was any time that Eren could choose for Levi to stop staring, now would be that time. But his eyes remained glued to Eren and Eren could see them intensifying.

"I'm... just warm is all." Eren replied as smoothly as he could.

"If you say so." His sister giggled. She always got a kick out of embarrassing him.

From what Eren could tell, without actually turning his head, Levi stood up from his chair. He begged to god that he was going anywhere but near him.

He didn't beg hard enough.

He heard a thump from the right of him. Eren saw the nervous expressions of his friends and wanted to ask 'He's sitting right next to me, isn't he?' But that was a stupid thing to say.

Instead, he looked to his right with apprehension and sure enough, there sat Levi with crossed legs and an arm leaning on the table. He sat leisurely, inspecting his nails, not even bothering to look at Eren.

"So," Levi began in his low voice. "It's been a few days since we've talked. Do you have an answer for me yet?" He regarded Eren with his head still down, peering through his eyelashes.

"About what?" Eren asked dumbly. He couldn't exactly focus on what Levi was saying. He was still getting used to the fact that they were at such a close proximity.

Levi brought his head up to face him fully. He raised his pierced brow. "About color guard, kid."

"Oh..." Eren blinked, coming out of his daze. "Yeah, I'm still not certain." He was too scared to give him a flat-out 'no.' "I'll, uh... need some more time."

"Suit yourself." Levi walked back over to his own table, where his friends began pestering him with insistent questions. Eren still couldn't bring himself to avert his eyes.

"Wow, what a creeper." Mikasa said, less amused by his actions than she had been the week before. "I'm all for you trying new things Eren, but this guy seems like trouble."

"Can't he tell that you're not interested?" Eren couldn't tell if Armin meant interested in color guard or interested in Levi.

"I'm not sure..." Eren said absentmindedly.
Eren marched down to the music room, ready for his audition. He was a little nervous about singing but he didn't really mind as long as he got in and could have an activity that counted so he could graduate.

Once he arrived, he noticed that Mr. Bozado was already sitting at the piano, ready to play.

"I'm ready to audition, Mr. Bozado." He called his attention.

"Good." He started to pull out different sheets of paper, each with a simple song written on them. "I have four songs for you to try, you can choose any one you're most comfortable with. I'll give you a minute to look it over and practice. Tell me when you're ready."

Eren nodded and looked over the papers. He hadn't heard any of the songs before but he didn't really expect that the chorus would sing the latest rock hits. He unknowingly picked the most difficult of the four, though it was still fairly simple compared to what the group normally sang.

"Ballad of the Tempest?" Mr. Bozado hummed approvingly. "Good choice. Are you all set?" Eren nodded confidently.

Mr. Bozado began playing the intro of the song and gave a subtle nod for when Eren needed to start singing.

The song was at a much faster tempo than he anticipated and he struggled to keep up. His singing was very flat and he was slow to start. After awhile his singing matched the pace of the song but that didn't help that he couldn't keep an even voice to save his life.

When the song ended, Eren looked at his teacher expectantly. "How'd I do?"

Mr. Bozado did his best to not show how awful he sounded. Even if Eren had chosen an simpler song, it was easy to tell that he didn't have an exceptional voice. He barely had a decent one to begin with. He needed to let him down gently. "Your singing was very good... you could obviously read the music very well..." Eren was starting to lose his patience. Was he in or wasn't he? "but I'm afraid you're a tenor. We have more than enough tenors, perhaps if you were a bass or baritone, I could let you join. I'm sorry, Eren." That sounded believable.

Eren slumped his shoulders. There went all his hope. "It's okay, thanks for giving me a chance, though."

~

He didn't have many options left. The next day, he was determined to find something to join, anything.

Gym class could be his hope. Those three new kids may have been in sports and Marco was too nice to not offer assistance. Who knew, maybe even Nanaba could help him out.
He walked into the weight room and searched for the group of friends. He spotted them easily, as they were all surrounding Reiner lifting weights. He walked up to them and they all turned to greet him.

"Hey, Eren!" Marco beamed.

At the mention of his name, Reiner hastily put down the barbell and sat up. "Ay, Spiderman!"

Eren felt a little pride after hearing the nickname, but then remembered he had something important to discuss. "Hey guys. Sorry to bother you all but I was wondering if any of you knew of any sports I could join? I'm kind of in a tight spot and need to find something by tomorrow."

They were all surprised that Annie was the first to speak. "Well, Reiner, Bertolt and I are in wrestling and I'm in boxing but they wouldn't allow you to enter either so late."

"Oh..." Eren mumbled. "Is there anything else?"

"Bert and I are on the football team. Though, we're not the ones you would talk to if you wanted to join." Reiner added.

Football wasn't Eren's first choice, but it was something. "Then, who would I talk to?"

Bertolt was the one to answer this time. "I'm not sure if you know him, it's Jean Kirschtein."

That fucker. "No way." Eren stated. "I'm not asking a favor from him."

"Why not?" Reiner asked.

"Because. That asshole has been trying to get with my sister for years, he's an arrogant jerk and he stole five bucks from me."

"Jean did all that? I don't believe it." Marco chimed in.

"Yeah, well it's true." Eren folded his arms like a pouting child.

"That's a shame." Reiner sighed. "Sorry, but if you want to be on the team you'll have to talk to him."

"I'll find something else. It's fine." Eren decided. He couldn't stoop to the level of being civil with Jean. That much was for sure. "Is there anything else you guys can come up with?"

They all seemed to be deep in thought. Even Nanaba and Annie. Eren was sure the two hated him by now.

"I know!" Marco declared. He looked at Bertolt, Nanaba and Annie to see if they knew what he was thinking of. All of them knew of course but Annie was the only unenthusiastic one of the three. "You can be in-"

"Marco." Annie interrupted.

He looked at her in confusion. "What?"

She talked barely above a whisper. "He can't join."

Marco's voice dropped to her level. "What do you mean?"
Eren thought it was a bit comical. He was standing right in front of them and could hear them perfectly fine.

"He just can't." Annie muttered. "I'll explain later."

Marco didn't look too convinced, but he took her word for it. "Never mind. I can't think of anything, sorry Eren."

Eren looked perplexed. "Wait, huh? What is it? If there's something you thought of, you really need to tell me. I'm kind of cutting it close here."

Marco glanced at Annie, pleading for her to let him tell Eren but she stood her ground with a warning glare. "It's nothing. I thought you could join but apparently you can't."

Eren sighed agitatedly. "Okay. Thanks anyways." They all gave him the best of luck and he left the group.

For the remainder of the period, he went around and asked people for help. He asked about all the sports and clubs he could. There was no such luck. He asked about nearly everything. Tennis, soccer, lacrosse, track, basketball, baseball, softball and anything else there was. They all had the same conflicts. They wouldn't allow an amateur, had too many people already or couldn't let him in this late. Eren was worried before but now he was terrified. What if there wasn't a single thing he could participate in and he had to repeat a grade? He had to stop thinking like that. He'd find something, he was sure of it.

~

Eren was late to lunch. He was too busy taking his precious time on the way there. He lacked all motivation to hurry to see his friends.

Armin and Mikasa had already gotten their lunches when he got there. When he sat down, he let his head fall to the table and he let out a frustrated groan.

"Eren, pick up your head. These tables are filthy." Armin warned.

"What's the point?" Eren's friends could barely hear his words as they were muffled.

"Is everything alright?" Mikasa asked, concerned.

"No," Eren picked up his face at last. "I've tried to find some sort of activity and no one will let me in."

Armin offered his advice. "There's always color."

"Don't. Even. Say it." Eren palmed his face. "I'm not gonna be on their stupid team."

Eren looked through his fingers to see if they had attracted the attention of a certain dark mass. They had. Levi sat in his normal seat. This time he wasn't looking directly at anyone at their table but his head was angled just enough to know that he was eavesdropping.

"Fine, fine." Armin relented. "Mikasa and I want you to graduate so we looked into every extracurricular activity to see which ones you would be eligible for and we came up with a few."
Eren dropped his hand. "Really?! What are they?" He was practically jumping in his seat. He felt so lucky to have such thoughtful friends.

Mikasa took out a piece of paper. "Tell me if these will work." When Eren nodded, she proceeded to list off the activities. "Band?"

"I don't play an instrument. Next?"

"Chorus you told us you couldn't take, so I'll skip that. Creative writing club?"

"My grade in English isn't high enough for it. What else?"

"Lacrosse?"

"Not accepting amateurs."

"Student council?"

"You have to be picked."

Mikasa listed off several other options before she ran out. "This is our last suggestion. Football."

"Goddammit." Eren muttered. It looked like he'd have to kiss up to Jean after all. "I guess I could ask to be a part of the football team. Is there any other option you didn't look into?"

Armin shook his head. "We looked at every activity our school offers. The ones we just named are the only ones you're eligible for. That and color-"

"No way, José." Why couldn't Eren have joined something sooner? "I'll ask to join football. That's my last chance."

"And what if you don't get in?" Mikasa asked. That thought terrified Eren to his core.

"Then I'll think of something else." Eren shrugged.

"But there isn't anything else! We just discussed this!" Armin jabbed his finger at the list they made.

Eren detected movement and saw that Levi had fully turned back to his group and started muttering something. Whatever it was, all his friends looked pleased.

That only fueled Eren's determination. "They'll let me in."

~

Eren didn't need to ride the bus home so he had time to look for Jean after school. Mikasa came along to make sure Eren didn't get 'screwed over.'

"You didn't have to come with." Eren said.

"Who knows, maybe if the pervert sees me with you, he'll be more nice." Mikasa suggested. "And remember to not fight with him, your graduation is on the line."
The two siblings scanned the parking lot in search of Jean. He drove to school and because he didn't need to hurry to get on a bus, that left more time for Eren to haggle with him.

They caught sight of him just in time. He was about to get in his car when Eren and Mikasa made a mad dash to get to him.

"Hey! Jean!" Eren called out.

The ash haired boy turned around with a look of distaste already printed on his face. That was, until he saw Mikasa. He smoothed back a bit of his hair and put on a suave smile. "Why hello, Mikasa." He didn't even bother to address Eren. Mikasa rolled her eyes.

Eren stepped in front of his sister to gain his attention. Jean immediately frowned. "Um yeah, hi. Look, I was wondering if there was any way I could get on the football team?" Eren wore a forced smile that looked uncomfortable.

"Nice try, Jaeger. You're not gonna get on our team." Jean spit out.

"Are you sure? I really need to be in some sort of club or sport and you're my last chance, so... please?" Eren was in physical pain, doing his best to restrict himself from being rude.

"Nope. Can't let you in. Sorry." Jean said smugly.

Mikasa had no choice. She couldn't let her brother be held back another year just because some dickhead stood in the way. She stepped out from behind Eren. "Jean, if you let Eren on the team, I'll..." She gulped, "I'll go on a date with you."

Eren whipped his head around to face her. "Whoa whoa whoa, let's not get too crazy."

Jean's eyes widened to the size of saucers. "Wait, seriously?!"

Mikasa took a deep breath. "Yes. But only if you let Eren on your team."

Jean's mouth widened into a massive grin. "Alright!" He then lost his joyous expression. "But-but I can't."

"Why not?" Mikasa questioned.

"Because... we've already started playing against other schools. It's too late, our coach wouldn't allow it."

"Are you kidding?" Mikasa asked incredulously.

"I wish I was... for your sake." Mikasa wanted to vomit.

This couldn't be happening. This was Eren's last chance. He bent his knees and grabbed Jean's arm. "Please let me join! I'm begging! You have no idea how important this is for me, you don't understand!"

Jean tried to push himself out of Eren's grip. "Get off me! I told you, there's no way I can let you in!"

Eren stepped back next to Mikasa, not really looking at anything. He wasn't really mentally there. He only had one choice left.

Mikasa put her arm around her brother and started to lead him home. "Come on, let's go."
"C-can we still go on a date?" Jean hollered after Mikasa.

"Nope." She said, not even sparing him a glance. "You've proved to be useless. No deal."

And that was Jean's last chance walking away. Out of frustration, he kicked the side of his car, leaving a dent. 'Just great.' He thought.

~

Friday, at lunch, Eren refused to get food. He didn't want to eat or think or even be in school. Armin was the only one left out of the loop. "What's wrong?" He asked.

When Eren didn't answer, Mikasa filled in the blanks. "He couldn't be on the football team and he's left with that one other option."

Eren couldn't even bring himself to groan at the mention of it. He had accepted his fate at long last. He was so out of it that for the first time, he didn't see the black mass moving out of his field of vision. He felt a rather forceful pat on the back and jumped in his seat. Eren clutched at his racing heart and turned around.

He was faced with a wicked smirk and an ominous greeting.

"Welcome to color guard."

Chapter End Notes

Show of hands, who saw that coming? Next chapter, we're getting into the good stuff! Fair warning, if I'm a little inconsistent with updating these next few weeks, it's because of the holidays. If you liked this, please leave a kudos or comment to let me know! If you want to check out my tumblr, it's dr-s--art. Sorry about any errors. Thank you so much for reading, I hope you enjoyed!
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Eren seals his fate by going into color guard. He attends his first practice and it's a bit different from what he expected to say the least.

Chapter Notes

This chapter took way too long to get out. Sorry about that. So, I was asked on tumblr if this fic is going to get really serious and I thought I'd answer that here as well. This fic is going to be very lighthearted and just for fun. Although, there will be brief moments of angsty/triggering topics, in which case they will be tagged and mentioned in the notes. And also because I am complete and utter trash with no self control, there will be smut. But for the most part, this is supposed to be a fun, calm fic. (At least I hope it's fun, I don't know. I hope it's enjoyable to read.) Alright, go ahead and read! I hope you like it!

"Color guard, hmm..." Hannes stroked his chin in deep thought. "It's not the first thing I pictured you choosing but I'm glad you found something. I'll just add it in your files."

As Hannes typed away at the computer, Eren sat in his seat with a borderline traumatized expression. He was staring off into space trying to figure out how he could let this happen. How were his peers going to react? Or his parents for that matter? He imagined that his father would call the school in a fit of rage, saying that he wasn't going to allow his son to be forced into a 'girl sport.' He could hear all of the slurs tossed his way from people around school. Everyone would think that he was gay. Not that they'd be wrong, but he didn't want anyone to think it. It was going to be so humiliating, but his fate had been sealed.

"I guess all there's left for me to do is to print off a practice schedule for you. I'll be right back." Hannes left his office to go wait by the printer.

How would he face the other members? He was sure he had pissed off several of them already. There was one member in particular that he was scared to face for many reasons, some of which he couldn't explain. He'd probably make a fool of himself too. Eren had never attended a color guard show or payed attention to them when he watched a marching band so he had little to no idea of what would be required of him.

Hannes came back, sat down and handed Eren a calendar with marked dates written on it. "There you go. Is there anything else you need to know?"

Eren shook his head.

"Well, then I believe we're finished here. Have a nice day, Eren."
"Thanks... you too." Eren mumbled. He stood up and left.

~

Eren sat in his seat in history, his last class of the day. Ever since his meeting with Hannes, he felt kind of numb. Even after he realized that color guard was quite literally the only option he had left, it didn't sink in until he finalized the details. Ymir walking in and taking her seat next to him only served as a reminder. Perhaps he could get some information off of her. She was dating Christa and Christa was in color guard, so maybe Ymir could help him.

"Hey, Ymir." Eren said flatly.

She looked over to him lazily. "Hm?"

"You know how you're dating Christa?"

Ymir narrowed her eyes at him. "Nooo, I wasn't aware. Please enlighten me."

Eren rolled his eyes. "You know what I mean. Well I know that she's in color guard so I was wondering if you happened to know when they would need me to come in? It's kind of an odd question and I don't expect you to-"

"Hold up." Ymir interrupted. "I thought you said color guard wasn't your thing. What happened? Gave in and realized your passion for the sport?" Ymir mocked with a smirk.

"No!" Eren denied. "I needed an extracurricular activity to join and no one else was accepting."

"Ah, last resort. What a splendid turn of events." Ymir sat back and crossed her arms, too delighted over his misfortune.

"Listen, do you know when or not? I'm assuming you don't but-"

"Tomorrow, 12:00." She answered simply.

"Wait, did you memorize her schedule or something?" Eren asked, puzzled.

"No, I'm in color guard too." Fantastic. Another person who hated him that he'd have to deal with. "I'm guessing you're an amateur and you'd need as much practice as you can get. You start tomorrow."

"Great." Eren sighed heavily. "Is there anything I should bring?"

Ymir pondered this over for a moment. "Not much, just wear clothes you can move in easily. And bring a lot of water. Oh and something to eat. But not too much because the instructors will bitch at you."

Eren nodded. It wasn't a bad start. Such simple little things to remember grounded him and almost made him forget how much he dreaded the next day.

~
"What are you going to tell mom and dad?" Mikasa asked. The two siblings were walking home again. They both were well aware that once their parents found out about the news, that one would take it better than the other.

"The truth I guess." Eren shuffled along, staring at his feet. "It's not like I could hide it forever. I'd rather dad be mad now than both of them being mad later because I lied."

"Yeah, but what are you going to say? I'm not saying you should lie but you should have some way to put it that won't make dad throw a fit."

Eren kicked a nearby stone out of his path. "I'll just tell him it wasn't my choice and that there's no way out of it. That's not technically a lie."

The two kept walking in silence just before they entered their home. "Oh, by the way..." Eren started.

Mikasa looked at him to show that she was listening.

"Thanks for trying to help out with Jean yesterday. Even though I didn't get in."

"Don't mention it." Mikasa smiled.

"No really, thank you-"

"I'm serious. Don't mention it. Just saying it left a bad taste in my mouth, I want to forget about it already." She shuddered at the memory.

She was happy to see Eren laugh at that after being so down all day.

~

The whole family sat at the dinner table enjoying yet another cultural meal made by Carla. This dish was slightly burnt but was otherwise appetizing. Eren pushed his food around with his fork, trying to find the exact words he would use to tell his parents. After a good ten minutes, he figured it was time.

Eren cleared his throat. "Uh, mom, dad..." He waited until he had their full attention before he started his explanation. "I have to be at the school tomorrow at twelve o'clock."

"On a Saturday?" His father asked. "What for?"

"Uh, practice." Eren gulped. "I found out awhile ago that I have to participate in a club or a sport in order to graduate. So I'm going to my first practice tomorrow." Both of his parents tensed up at this new information.

His mother raised her eyebrows. "You need that to graduate? Why did you find out so late?"

Eren shrugged. "I don't know. But it's not an issue anymore. I joined something, so I can graduate." Carla and Grisha visibly relaxed.
"That's a relief. What sport are you doing?" Grisha said, turning back to his food.

Eren could feel his forehead start to sweat. "It's... uh, color guard."

Grisha paused with his fork halfway to his mouth and regarded Eren with a confused stare. He studied him for a moment before his gaze softened and he let out a soft chuckle. "Good one. Now honestly, what did you join?"

"Color guard." Eren repeated.

Grisha paused again, looking at him incredulously. "Why would you choose that of all things? Just last week you were telling us how they were being foolish to ask you. Did they force you to join? I'll call the school and complain if you want me to."

"He didn't have a choice." Mikasa interjected before Grisha got too defensive. "No other sport or club had room. It was either this or no graduation. And we checked and there's no possible way to get out of it." She then ejected herself from the conversation and returned to eating her dinner, signaling that there was no place for further argument.

Grisha turned his attention back to Eren, who was mentally thanking Mikasa. "Is that true? This is your only choice?"

Eren nodded.

Grisha shook his head in disappointment. "I can't believe they're doing this to you."

Carla sighed exasperatedly at her husband. "I don't think it's such a bad thing. Eren'll be active and getting exercise. He might even make a few new friends, I don't see why we should look at this as a bad thing. If this is his only option, then we need to be optimistic about it."

"That's not the point." Grisha said firmly. "No school should force a boy into something like this, it's just not right."

Eren noticed his mother clutching her fork harder than necessary, but didn't say anything. Grisha's words were enough to quiet the whole table.

~

The next morning, Eren took his sweet time getting ready. If he was going to be dragged into color guard, then he was going to be late if he wanted to. He put on an old t-shirt, a pair of loose shorts and his good sneakers. Even if he was going to be late, he wanted to be prepared. He didn't want to make the experience more uncomfortable than it needed to be.

Eren came down the stairs, into the kitchen and started packing what he thought he'd need. He filled up a large water bottle and got to preparing his lunch. Ymir said not to bring too much food, but how much was too much? Just as he was wondering this, his mother walked in the kitchen to fetch herself an apple.

"Hey mom, how much food is too much?"

Carla looked at him, amused. "Too much for what?"
He shrugged. "I don't know, they just told me not to bring too much."

"Alright." Carla said, thinking over her response. "Do you want my help?"

"Sure." Carla started picking away at a wide variety of food to pack but in little quantities. She packed half of a ham sandwich, a bit of cheese and crackers, a banana, a small bag of chips and she also snuck in a couple Oreos while Eren wasn't looking.

"Is this all you need?" Carla asked, handing Eren his food and giving him a jacket.

Eren sighed. "Yeah, I should get going now."

Carla gave him a hug. "I hope you have fun."

"Not likely." Eren muttered.

Carla stood back and held his shoulders. She looked him in the eye and said, "I know you're not overly thrilled about this, but try to make the most of it, okay?"

Eren exhaled heavily, puffing out his cheeks. "Sure."

"I mean it, Eren. If you go into this with a negative attitude, it's going to be negative. I can guarantee you that."

Eren just wanted to appease his mother so he could get going and get it over with. "I'll do my best."

"That's all I ask." She smiled. "Have a good day."

~

It should've been illegal, having to enter school grounds on the weekend. Eren walked into the school with his shoes squeaking every time he took a step. The place felt lifeless without anyone in the front office and without any lights on near the entrance. The only signs of life were the chirps from beneath his feet.

It had just occurred to him that no one ever told him where they meet. Though, it was obvious that they met in the gymnasium, but perhaps he could wander around a bit to kill some time and blame his tardiness on the fact that he wasn't told where to go. He diverged to the hallway that led away from the gym when he heard the padding of tiny feet behind him.

"Eren?" A familiar voice followed.

He turned around to face Christa. There went his plan of pretending to be clueless. "Oh... hey Christa."

The girl grinned from ear to ear. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here for practice." Eren said, nervously.

She gasped. "For color guard? I'm so excited! You're going to have so much fun, you won't regret this!"
"Yeah, well... I kinda didn't have much of a say in this. It was either this or no graduation." He was hoping that this would deflate her joy and give her the impression that he still thought it was a dumb sport.

Much to his dismay, it didn't work out like that. "Wow, no other options, huh? Regardless, you'll love it. Let me fill up my water bottle and I'll lead you to practice."

That didn't sound too bad. He'd do anything to delay getting to practice.

Unfortunately for Eren, she didn't take too long to get her water. As they were walking down the empty hallway, he decided to strike up a conversation. "So what exactly are we doing today?"

Christa took a sip from her bottle before answering. "We've only had two practices so far, so nothing too involved. One of the instructors will probably take you aside and teach you the basics, though."

That didn't sound too bad. Taking it nice and slow was what he needed.

The two walked into the gymnasium and Eren's breath immediately left his lungs. Every pair of eyes in the room were locked on him. Many were not happy to see him. Sitting against the wall, there was Ymir eyeing him, looking bored. Stretching, in the center of the gym, were Farlan and Isabel, seeming almost confused when they caught sight of him. Near the back, Eren saw Marco standing with Nanaba, both glancing at each other and back at him in silent question. Bertolt and Annie were with them. Bertolt looked apprehensive and Annie appeared to be damn near murderous. Close to the entrance stood Sasha and Petra, inching closer together in defense. Eren never felt more targeted in his life. He was almost certain that everybody there with the exception of Christa had issues with him.

Marco looked over to Annie. 'So this was what she said I couldn't join.' Eren thought.

"Wait a minute..." Marco started to confront Annie for lying to him. And that's when all hell broke loose. "YOU said-"

"What are you doing here?" Petra hollered.

"Since when is HE in color guard?" Sasha asked.

"We don't want you here!" Another voice sounded.

"LEAVE." Eren wasn't sure where all the shouts came from. Soon the entire group erupted into loud bickering. Eren had been the cause of it and he felt mortified. No one seemed to be calming down anytime soon. He looked to Christa for help, who was just as shocked as he was at his offensive welcome.

Eren bent down to whisper in her ear. "Should I go?"

Christa seemed to be too occupied with calculating the situation to answer him right away.

"What's going on in here?!!" A voice boomed over the rest. The room was silenced and Eren and Christa turned around to look at the source. A short, gray-haired woman with circular glasses strutted between the two and glared at the team. "Well? Anyone care to explain?" Everyone remained speechless and still. She put her hands on her hips, awaiting an answer. When she didn't receive one, she looked to Christa. "What happened to-" Her gaze switched to Eren. She didn't recognize him, so it was fair for her to assume that he could've caused the uproar. "Who the hell are you?"
Feeling more and more insecure, Eren shifted to his other foot. "Eren Jaeger." He answered. "I'm new to the team."

She looked him over briefly before she gave an approving nod. "So you are." She stuck out her hand for him to shake. "Welcome to the team, Eren. Call me Rico."

He thanked her and took her hand. "Are you one of the instructors?"

"Technically, yes." Rico replied. "I'm the adult that is required to accompany the team and watch over them. However, I don't direct anymore. I leave that to two responsible seniors each year. I only come in when the student instructors need assistance or need me to smooth things out with the routine. I'm here now because I was called in for some reason."

Eren was a little relieved to know that this intimidating woman wouldn't be their coach. "When are the other instructors coming in?" Rico jabbed her thumb to the side, pointing behind Eren.

He looked over his shoulder and was greeted with a sight that made his stomach drop. Sauntering towards the gymnasium was one tall ball of enthusiasm and one small shadow of a figure.

"What the fuck was all the noise about?" Levi asked, bumping shoulders with Eren as passed him.

"You'll have to figure that one out by yourself. They're not talking." Rico said, crossing her arms.

Levi sighed, not wanting to be the babysitter of the team. He lazily faced Eren. "So, you did show up..." Eren looked away. Levi directed his attention back to Rico. "That's why I called you in. I wanted you to meet the rookie."

"I already have. Although, briefly. He seems promising from what I can tell. I trust that you two will make a hardworking member out of him?"

Hanji came around a patted Rico's shoulder. "Yup! You can count on us." They said. Eren noted that their glasses were finally replaced with ones that were still in tact.

"Good." And with that, Rico left.

Hanji nudged Levi with their elbow. "We should get to the bottom of that racket, don't you think?"

Levi nodded in agreement. He clapped a couple times to gain everyone's attention and walked with Hanji to the front of the gym. "Everybody sit down."

The team did as told, sitting on the ground in the center of the gym, distancing themselves from Levi and Hanji. Eren sat in the back a bit further away from the group. Everyone looked so tense, he remarked. And their distance from the instructors was a little exaggerated. Eren would've thought that they were all nervous about what was to come.

"All that noise was unnecessary and unprofessional. What was it all about?" Levi glared down at his fellow members.

Everyone with the exception of Christa, Farlan and Isabel avoided eye contact with him. He didn't scare his siblings, and Christa and them weren't the cause of the problem.

"Well?" He snapped.

"People were shouting at Eren to leave." Christa chimed in.

Levi nodded slightly as if he had been expecting that answer. "Did Eren do anything wrong since
"No, sir." Christa gave Eren a thumbs up. At that, he gave a grateful smile but shrank into himself, hating to be the center of attention.

"Well in that case, I'm very disappointed in all of you. You should be ashamed of yourselves for treating someone so poorly. What's the first thing we learn on terms of how we act towards each other?" The crowd looked down on their laps, recognizing their error. "Come on, what's our first rule?"

Everyone quietly muttered the answer in shame. "Welcome anyone into the guard regardless of their skill and be kind to them."

"And how do we treat our fellow guard members?" Hanji asked.

"Like family." Everyone responded.

"Very good." Levi hummed approvingly. "You'll all do well to remember that. We can't function as a team if we're being hostile to one or more of our members. Understood?"

There was a collective agreement throughout the team. "But Levi," Annie spoke up. "Eren was being transphobic towards Nanaba. We can't just let that go."

"Yeah," Petra said. "And you remember what he called you. I can't even repeat it."

Hanji turned to Levi and furrowed their brows. "What did he call you?" They whispered.

"Doesn't matter right now." He muttered. He looked back to his team to address the matter at hand. "So you're saying that he was disrespectful and acted like an asshole, right?"

"Yes." The two girls said simultaneously.

"And you're saying that what he did was wrong, correct?"

"Yes." They replied.

"Then what makes it okay for any of you to turn around and do the same thing?" He raised his eyebrows at them. They remained dead silent. "You think it's okay to treat people like shit just because they did it first? That makes you a hypocrite. That makes you an asshole too. If you really want to prove that you're better than them, then you be nice."

"Levi, you're not condoning what he did are you?" Petra eyed him curiously.

"No." Levi began his slow journey, walking over to stand in front of Eren. "But I'm not going to condemn him either. He knows what he did was shitty, I can tell. And if he comes in here thinking that he's going to continue to act that way, then he's dead wrong. He'll learn to respect us and what we do. He'll follow the rules we just laid down and if he doesn't, we'll ... educate him." He stopped, staring down at Eren. "Is that clear?"


Levi had a smirk small enough for only Eren to see. "Good." He faced the rest of the team. "Alright, let's get the floor and equipment out."
Levi and Hanji stood back at the front of the gym while everyone was lined up in two rows. Levi helped Isabel hook up her iPod to a sound system so that they could have music to listen to while they get warmed up. Hanji had announced that it was time to stretch. "Eren," they called his attention. "For this first stretch, we're going to bend down and touch our toes. I'm going to count to eight and you're as far as you can go on eight. We hold for sixteen and go back up for another eight. Understand?"

"Yup." Eren sighed.

Hanji snapped to a slow rhythm, counting on the beat. "Five, six, seven, eight. One-"

Everyone began lowering themselves to the slow pace until the reached the floor. All except for Eren set their palms flat on the ground. Eren only touched the tips of his toes with his fingers. Levi walked around, having stretched beforehand to give help to anyone who needed it.

"Sasha, straighten your legs a bit... Good. Farlan you're going a little fast, next time make sure you're halfway down on four." When he caught sight of Eren, he rolled his eyes. "Hanji, keep going. I have to help Eren." He stomped over to to where he stood and crossed his arms. "Stand up."

Eren straightened his back up to a standing position and glared at Levi. "What was I doing wrong?"

"Just about everything. But first, take your shoes and socks off, they'll get in the way." Once Eren did as he was told, Levi continued. "Try again." He snapped his own rhythm. "Five, six, seven, eight. One-"

Eren started bending down to the beat.

"Wrong. Feet at second position."

"What?" Eren looked over his shoulder at him.

"Second position. Feet are shoulder's width apart." Levi stuck one foot between Eren's legs and kicked at each ankle, moving them slightly outwards.

"H-hey! What are you doing?!" Eren gawked at him.

"Getting you in a good position." He said in a low voice.

Eren's face heated up and he stared at the floor. "... Am I doing it right, now?"

"Not yet. Your knees are bent, straighten them up." Eren did as told and kept his ground. "Now reach lower."

"But I can't. This is as far as I can go." Eren protested.

"I disagree." Levi placed his hand in the middle of Eren's back and pressed down.

"Hey, what the-"

"I know you can go farther. There's no way you could've scaled that wall and not be able to go farther. Keep breathing."
Eren felt pain in his back and his knees were shaking. Within a few seconds, his palms were flat on the ground. He was impressed with himself and felt a bit of pride until he heard Levi's next words. "Hold for twenty-four."

"Wait, I thought it was sixteen!" Eren whipped his head around.

"Yes, but you took so long getting it right that doing it multiple times will make you late for the next stretch. After this, you'll do it one more time with a different foot position."

When Eren's time was up, he let out a large breath he was holding in, relaxing his shoulders.

"Okay now, same thing in fourth position." When all he received was a blank stare, he lead by example. "Here are all the positions. First. Feet together. Second. Feet shoulder's width apart. Third. Right foot straight, as you center of gravity, left foot is horizontal, pointing to your left, heel at your right foot's toes. Fourth. Same thing only a foot's length of separation between your feet. Fifth. Same thing with another foot's length of separation. Do fourth."

Eren repeated his stretch, switching his feet. Levi was pleased with his effort and didn't find any faults so he let Eren move on to the next stretch with the team.

Eren pulled off the next few stretches with minor issues but otherwise did very well. The next stretch was a little more involved so Levi sat next to him, on his right to guide him through it step by step. They both sat with their legs straight out.

"Okay, first you place you right leg over your left leg, heel up against the knee." Eren watched closely and repeated after him. "Turn your trunk to your right and look over your right shoulder." Now that Levi's back was turned, Eren could examine his body up close. He'd only seen him in jean jackets, ripped pants and things of the like. Now he was in a black undershirt and a pair of long, black workout pants. He raked his eyes down his back, admiring the protruding muscles. He knew Levi had a good build but he didn't know just how muscular he was until now. Eren wished he was that muscular. He couldn't really fathom why he was so intrigued by him but he couldn't look away. Who could? His gaze had just met Levi's hips when he heard someone clearing their throat.

Eren's eyes flicked up to see Levi raising his pierced brow at him. "Are you listening?" Eren nodded frantically. "Then what are you staring at?" Levi asked exasperatedly.

"Nothing, I'm just... trying to get the form right."

Levi studied him for a moment more. "Well, you have it right. So pay attention." He turned back around to resume stretching. "Use your left elbow to push back your knee and put your right hand on the ground, but you don't put your weight on it." He turned back around and saw that Eren was doing it right. "Very good. Hold that position for eight and switch to the other side and hold for eight. Do that a few more times and then we'll move on." He stood up and brushed himself off, then walked around so he could help other members if need be.

Eventually, they were all finished with their stretches. Eren was a sweaty mess and couldn't take much more of what they had to throw at him.

"Okay! Warm up time, let's run!" Hanji yelled, walking over to pick a song from Isabel's iPod that had a song with the right tempo. They chose "You're Gonna Go Far, Kid" strictly because the beat of the drum went in time with their footsteps.

"We have to run?" Eren whined.
No one payed him any mind. Instead, everybody began running in one big circle around the gym. So, he joined in not thinking anything if it. Running was easy. How could this mess up?

Apparently, messing up was easier than he thought.

"You're doing it wrong." Levi pulled Eren out of the way of other people, so they wouldn't be disrupted.

"How could I possibly be running wrong?" Eren flailed his arms about.

"You're going too fast and you're out of control." The second verse of the song played. "You hear that drum? You take a step on every beat and keep that pace while running. Got it?"

Eren sighed, but nodded nonetheless. He got back into the flow and did as Levi told him. As soon as he starting running as he was supposed to, he wanted to stop immediately. It was hard on his ankles and fairly difficult. He had never ran in such a manner before. Because he was running so slowly, there was enough to time for the weight of his entire body to catch up with him at each step. Using this method, he couldn't build up enough momentum to run comfortably.

This lasted for two songs. By the end of them, Eren's joints were screaming. Halfway through the third song, Eren was caught completely off guard when he heard Hanji yell, "Sprint!" As soon as they said that, Eren felt someone run into him with the speed and strength of a train and they kept going.

Upon falling to the ground, he lifted his head up to see Christa looking over her shoulder and saying, "Sorry, Eren!" Who knew that such a tiny girl could be so forceful?

"On your feet, Jaeger!" He heard Levi yell. With all the strength he could muster, he brought himself to his feet and tried his best to sprint along with everyone else.

Luckily for Eren, the sprinting lasted about thirty seconds, before Hanji counted them off. "Five... four... three... two... aaaaand walk!" The sound of stampeding feet faded to soft pats. Eren walked off to the side and crouched over to rest his hands in his knees.

Levi grabbed on to Eren's shirt as he was passing him and yanked Eren along with him. Eren was taken by surprise and almost tripped over himself. "Walk. If you stop moving immediately after that workout, you'll cramp up. You need to cool down, not stop all at once."

"I think I'm already cramping up." Eren muttered bitterly as he walked beside Levi.

"That's because you didn't stretch well enough." Levi explained simply.

Eren sent him a glare that he never caught.

After about a minute, they were dismissed to get a drink of water. Eren ran over to his bag and dove for his water bottle, downing as much as he could while laying down. He sat back up when he figured he had enough, panting with some excess water running down his chin.

He heard some giggling to his left and turned to see Isabel and Farlan trying to cover up their laughter. They didn't even break a sweat, they weren't even fazed. Eren felt inadequate compared to them. He took a look around and saw that everyone was only breathing slightly heavier than normal at most. He made a mental note to not show his exhaustion next time. He wanted to be as fit as them.
It was time to actually begin practice. Hanji and Levi called Eren over to watch the small portion of the routine that they had put together. They hadn't had many practices so their routine was fairly short.

Eren sat cross legged on the floor and watched as everyone got into their designated spot. The group was split in half. On his left, there were Levi, Petra, Farlan, Annie, Ymir and Nanaba. On his right there were Sasha, Bertolt, Christa, Isabel, Marco and Hanji. Everyone on the right had a flag with black and iridescent red silk. The flags of those on the left had the same pattern only with iridescent blue instead of red.

Hanji counted them off, and all at once, the team tossed their flags into the air, catching them flawlessly. After the toss, each side separated to do their own separate routine, mirroring the other side and inching closer. The ripple of the flags tore through the silence as they spun their equipment. The side with the red flags threw down the equipment and started doing ground work, rolling and pounding the ground in some sort of rhythm while remaining professional looking. The blue side gently set down their flags and and picked up their sabers to start doing fluid consecutives, spinning the sabers in one hand. It was easy for Eren to see that each side had their own personality in a way. The blue side was more graceful, whereas the red side performed with more passion. The two sides were just about to merge when they paused, signaling the end of their routine.

Levi walked over to Eren at the end and cocked a hip. "Think you can handle that?"

Eren's mouth hung open. "Are you kidding me? I've never even touched a flag, I don't know how to do any of that."

Levi rubbed his temples with a sigh. "Everyone keep practicing. I'm going to spend this practice teaching Eren the work." He held out a hand to help Eren up. "Come on, let's get you your stuff."

As Eren and Levi walked to the supply closet, Eren couldn't help but wonder; where would he fit in? "Levi, it looks like there's an equal amount of people on each side. Wouldn't it be uneven with me? Which side would I go to?"

Levi opened the doors to the supply closet and started rummaging through things. "It won't be uneven. You're going to replace Hanji on the red end. They're planning to do this solo middle-ground work. We just needed them there to make the sides even until we found another member."

Eventually, he found what he was looking for. He handed Eren what he thought looked like a weird, white, trigger-less gun with a strap. "This is your rifle." Next was the red flag, along with another flag that had a blue and red flaming pattern. "These are your flags." Lastly was what Eren considered a taped up sword. "And here's your saber."

Eren struggled to hold up all the equipment when he had to start walking to keep up with Levi. They stood in a corner away from the others who were practicing. "The first thing I'm going to teach you are drop spins. It's the easiest thing to learn and everyone can do them." He handed Eren what he thought looked like a weird, white, trigger-less gun with a strap. "This is your rifle."

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Eren nodded with furrowed brows, concentrating on repeated by what Levi had taught him. His attempt was choppy but at least he had the hand movements right. Levi helped as much as he
could, trying to get his movements more smooth.

Eren perfected it within fifteen minutes. It wasn't necessarily hard.

"Alright, next let's try to do a toss, we'll work our way up to a triple. That's the first toss that you saw." He held out his flag for Eren to observe. "To start, your flag should have the silk on the bottom and your right hand should hold where the silk and pole meet. Put your left hand, thumb down, towards the top and push. When you push, release with your left hand and bring up the flag with your other hand. The release point is when your right hand is thumb down, above your head. When you catch it, it should be straight up and down, hands at the places where they began. Let me show you, then I'll have you try." Levi executed the procedure flawlessly about three times, starting slowly at first so Eren could see his movements, then rapidly so he could see what it should look like. "This is just a single pop toss. Now you try."

He helped Eren get the hand placements right, and asked that he stop at the release point just to get the feel of it. When Levi decided that he was ready to give it a shot, he backed up, aware of the possible outcomes.

The first few tries were decent, Eren's hand placements and maneuvers were correct but he struggled with catching. There were a few occasions when the flag would hit Eren's hand or even his foot. He'd always hiss in a breath trying to not show his pain. Every time the flag made contact with the ground, are long ringing noise filled the gym, drawing the attention of a few people, but otherwise went unnoticed. Eren became frustrated, letting his hand movements get sloppy. The more he dropped, the faster he'd attempt the next toss. Levi noticed and told him to breathe and focus on where the flag needed to be caught, not the fact that the flag was coming down.

He tried and tried again, and on the twenty-eighth try, he caught it. His eyes lit up and he gasped, proud of himself. "I did it! I caught it!" His moment of joyful success was heightened when he heard clapping from the other portion of the gym. He looked up, surprised and saw that everyone had stopped their work and was now applauding him.

"Good job, Eren!" Christa beamed.

"We're proud of you!" Marco shouted from the other end.

"That was a great toss!" Sasha yelled.

Eren allowed himself a moment to smile softly. Levi just had to ruin it. "Aw, little Eren's first toss. Should I have taped it to show your family?"

Eren frowned at Levi. ... Shut up. He mumbled.

Levi blew an amused breath out of his nose. "Okay, but in all seriousness, that was good. You seem to pick things up really fast."

"Thanks..." Eren said.

"Lunch Break!" Hanji exclaimed. Eren was the most enthusiastic about stopping to eat. He practically ran to his bag, ready to stuff his face. He paced himself once he saw that people were staring at him. Everyone gathered around ready to eat. They were all in a sloppy circle, all bunched together, pulling out their own bags and lunch pails.

"I'm so starving." Eren muttered, raising his ham sandwich to his mouth. He would've taken a bite too, if he didn't feel the eyes staring at him. Everyone, with the exception of Isabel, Annie and Petra were staring at him with warning and concerned gazes. He looked to his left to see Levi's
stare baring down on him. "What's everyone looking at?" He whispered.

"Put it down." Levi whispered back. "Don't eat it." Was this what Ymir was talking about? Was this too much? He looked around at other people who had more in their hands than he did. It couldn't be too much.

Petra heard the low conversation and looked at Eren, widening her eyes. "Hey, Izzy! Did I tell you about-" she went on about something completely random, trying to keep her focus.

Nothing made much sense to Eren at this point, but he didn't want to argue, so he put it away, hearing a unanimous sigh of relief. 'Weird.' He thought. So, he picked up the next thing he was craving, cheese and crackers.

Again, he was about to take a bite when he was interrupted. This time, it was because of Levi's hand gently pushing Eren's away from his mouth. He shook his head at Eren, trying to be discreet.

"What?!" He said agitatedly. Upon saying that, he heard a small, halfhearted gasp. He searched to find where it came from and locked gazes with Isabel, who had sad, puppy dog eyes and a quivering lip. The entire team stilled when they saw her reaction. "What's the deal?"

Levi leaned in close. "When you eat with the guard, or more specifically, Isabel, you eat vegan. It's an unspoken rule. As much as we hate to force anything upon our members, this specifically is necessary, because Izzy gets really triggered."

Eren's brows smoothed out at the realization. "Oh." He breathed out. He didn't quite understand it, but it wasn't too big of an inconvenience, so he didn't mind. As long as he could eat something, he didn't really care.

"What are you guys talking about?" Isabel asked. "You don't have to eat vegan around me, I'm not gonna judge you. I don't mind."

Levi addressed Eren again. "If you eat meat or dairy around her she'll cry."

"No I won't!" She defended.

"Yeah you will." Farlan said.

"I know." Isabel looked down at her lap, defeated.

"It's okay, I'll just avoid those things, I guess." Eren said, picking up a banana. "But what's the thing about eating too much?"

"Well, you're not supposed to eat before or during exercise." Hanji explained. "When you do that, the food kind of rots in your stomach and messes things up. But you know, we're not going to make you starve, so we allow you to eat a little bit."

That didn't make much sense to Eren, but he didn't think to argue with them. He looked at the rest of his lunch and sighed. "So I guess I can't eat these, huh?" He held up his little bag of Oreos.

"Actually, you can." Isabel said. "Oreos are vegan."

"Okay," Eren held up his hands. "What the fuck?" Nothing made any sense anymore.
After lunch was finished, they got back to work. Levi taught the first few steps of the existing routine to Eren but didn't have enough time to teach the full routine. Eren was moderately embarrassed and extremely tired. It took more out of him than he would've thought. His hands hurt and his knees and ankles ached. He had a hunch that his foot was broken. He had just got through the first few beats of the floor work when practice was over.

"Time for notes!" Hanji declared.

The guard migrated back to the center of the gym, sitting on the floor. Eren joined them, this time amongst the others rather than avoiding them.

"Alrighty, there's not much to touch upon, everybody did well." Hanji started. "Ymir, very nice saber work. Farlan, you're getting better with the flag, but make sure you catch vertically. Work on that a bit, other than that you're doing fantastic. And Sasha..." The addressed brunette looked up, biting her nails in anticipation. "Very good work today. You've already improved so much in two days! I'm proud of you."

Sasha's face heated up as she smiled to herself. A short round of applause went around the team. Eren wasn't aware of the significance that went along with that statement, but he assumed it was a big deal for her. Christa crawled up to give her a high five and Petra leaned over and gave her a side hug.

"Now this should go without saying, but we expect everyone to practice hard until our next meeting. Tuesday we should be getting fit for shoes and gloves, so you can get excited for that! And that's about it. Now, let's fold up the floor."

With that, everybody stood up and went to one end of the giant mat that they performed on. Eren didn't have to be told what to do, as it was clear that everyone needed to participate and it was the easiest task asked of him that day. The floor was black and a bit dusty from people stepping on it. Once it was folded up into a massive block, it was hauled onto a rolling cart and wheeled away.

Eren had a couple more things to take care of before he could go home. Levi went back to the supply closet and dug out something that was wrapped up and in the shape of a square. "This is your new best friend, a flag bag." Eren unwrapped it and unfolded it out into its normal form.

It was a long, black bag with a large strap on the side, capable of fitting many pieces of equipment inside. There were even extra pockets on the side for smaller items.

"Did you bring your schedule with you? I'd like to make some notes." Levi said absentmindedly.

"Yeah." Eren took out his schedule from his bag and brought Levi a pen. Levi looked at it and sighed, circling every Monday and Friday and putting times on them.

"On these days, at these times, I'm bringing you to my place to practice. Even though you're a fast learner, there's no way you can be ready in time with our limited practices. I'll pick you up after school and take you home."

Eren groaned. That just meant more time he'd be tortured by Levi in more ways than one. That also meant he only had two days in the week that he'd have free.

"So, how did you enjoy your first practice?" Levi asked.

Eren wanted to say that even though it was hard, he actually had a bit of fun. He wanted to express that he was happy to accomplish a triple toss so quickly. He wanted to say how he was starting to feel comfortable around everybody. But he couldn't. He had to give off the impression that this was
less than nothing to him, that he couldn't be further from being interested. "Meh, wasn't too special. After all, it's just glorified cheerleading... only you twirl flags and stuff."

He shouldn't have said that. He shouldn't have said that and he knew it before it was even said. There was the sound of a couple flags being dropped and Eren didn't need to shift his gaze to see the looks of hatred baring down on him. But he did anyway. He looked to his right and saw that Annie was being slightly held back by Bertolt and Nanaba. She looked ready to attack.

Levi glanced at everyone and waved his hand, telling them to go on and that he'd take care of it. He looked Eren dead in the eyes and got into his personal space. Eren could feel his knees shaking. "Listen, first of all, we don't twirl, we spin." The way he said something so minuscule so seriously, would've made Eren want to laugh if he hadn't felt so threatened. "Second, I'm not giving you a choice. You are going to get rid of that shitty attitude if you intend to stay here. And trust me, I know this is the only way you'll graduate and I am not above kicking you out for making other people miserable while trying to do their favorite hobby. Start thinking about other people for a change."

Eren gulped, inching slowly backwards until he hit the wall.

"Is that clear?" Levi said, lowering an octave.

"Mhm." Eren nodded desperately.

Chapter End Notes

There you have it, sorry again for the long wait. If you liked this, please leave a comment or kudos to let me know! I didn't edit, so I'm sorry if there are any errors. If you'd like to check out my tumblr, it's dr-s--art. Thanks for reading!!!
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Eren has his first private training with Levi. It doesn't go as expected, but it's for the best.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year! I am so exhausted right now, I just tried to find crackers in the fridge. I looked for like five minutes before I realized. Anywho, there is a trigger warning for this chapter for self harm, other injuries, eating disorders and a homophobic slur used once. With that being said, proceed with caution or not at all if that's what you need to do. It's all good, you do you. All in all, I think this chapter may have been all over the place but I don't even care. This is what I wanted to write, though it may have come out sloppy. But I don't mind. My over tired brain is satisfied with the garbage that ensues. I meant to write this fully awake but... I'm not sure. I might've been busy. Who knows? Not me. The songs used in this chapter are "Gooey" and "Hazey" by Glass Animals. ALSO. I made a little tweak in the first chapter. Nothing major, it was just a little change in Petra's description. It's not really important, but if you want to reread it, knock yourself out. So yeah, go ahead and read! ^-^ See the end of the chapter for more notes

After Levi backed off from Eren, the entire guard huddled around him, lowly hissing what Eren assumed to be complaints. He could hear them saying things like, 'make sure he knows...' 'He needs to understand...' And 'I swear if he says something about ...' He couldn't make out exactly what the overall conversation was about, but he knew that he was in trouble.

Levi kept replying with things like, 'yeah, I'll tell him.' 'Are you sure? Okay.' and 'don't worry, I'll handle it.' Eren sighed, gazing towards the ceiling. This was going to be a very irritating time for him.

Levi turned away from the group, strutting back towards Eren. "You can go now." He passed him, walking out of the gymnasium.

Eren didn't need to be told twice.

~

Eren struggled with his flag bag as he tried to get through the door. It was fumbling in every direction, heavy and taller than he was. Carla happened to be passing through the kitchen as she noticed Eren having trouble. She trotted over and held the door open for him. "What is all that?"
He finally worked his way in and answered his mother with gruffness. "It's the stupid equipment."
Eren lugger his bag up the stairs, frowning all the way.

As he reached the top, he passed Mikasa, heading for his room. "Hey, Eren." She said taking a bite of an apple.

"No." He slammed the door.

"But I didn't ask you..." She furrowed her brows, then shrugged, walking down stairs and taking another bite of her apple.

Eren threw down his flag bag, walked over to his bed and with no real effort, fell down on it. He groaned into his pillow. "I'm gonna die."

There was a knock at his door, followed by Carla cracking it open. "Honey, come down stairs. Mikasa and I want to hear about your first practice."

Still facing down, Eren muttered his reply. "There's not much to talk about." Carla only barely heard him, as his words were muffled.

"Come on, Eren. It couldn't have been that bad. Let's go, we want to hear about it." With that being said she closed the door, walking down stairs. Eren took that as a confirmation that he had to go down, regardless of what he wanted.

He raised himself off of his bed and walked downstairs, slumping his shoulders. When he reached the living room, Mikasa was already sitting cross legged on the couch and Carla was sitting in a chair, knitting a hat.

Eren plopped down on the couch next to his sister. "What do you wanna know?" He said bitterly.

"Well, how was it?" Mikasa prompted.

"Dumb as hell." He said crossing his arms.

"Watch your language." Carla sighed. She didn't even mind when he swore. She cursed more than he did but she figured that, as a parent, she should at least try to get him to clean up his vocabulary.

Mikasa tried to lighten the subject. "It couldn't have been that bad. What happened? Walk us through it."

Eren tried thinking back to the first thing that happened. He thought about Christa being so nice to him before the onslaught took place. "Well... I thought that there was going to be more than one person that was going to be nice to me, but it turns out the entire team hates my guts."

Carla stopped her work. "Why? What did you ever do to them?" She gawked at him.

Eren could think of plenty of things he did to them. But he shrugged. He'd rather not tell his mom about what a jerk he had been.

"I don't think that's right. They don't even know you. I don't think people should judge others without even knowing who they are." She knitted angrily.

Mikasa stayed silent, for she had an idea of why they would be judgmental towards him. Eren on the other hand, shrunk into himself, knowing exactly what he had done to piss them off.

"Aside from that, what happened?" Carla asked.
Eren pursed his lips. "I had to run really slow, which hurt. Then I learned some of the routine. It was really dumb. I think I broke my hands and everything is sore."

"Aw, I'm sorry to hear that you didn't have a good time." Carla said. "But who knows? Maybe next time will be better."

Eren rolled his eyes. "Yeah, sure. By the way I'm gonna be late getting home on Monday. The instructor says I have to go to his house to get in extra practice on Mondays and Fridays."

Carla snapped her head up. "Wait a minute. You're instructor wants you to come to his house? That sounds a little fishy."

"He's not some old geezer, he's another student. Both of the instructors are students."

"Oh," Carla let out a relieved sigh. "That's alright, then."

"Who are they?" Mikasa asked.

"Levi and somebody named Hanji. You remember that person I told you about who wasn't a girl or a boy?"

"That's interesting!" Carla beamed. "Not a girl or a boy, huh? How cool."

"No, ma." Eren scrunched up his face. "It's weird." Eren thought that his mother would've said something a little more judgmental. Then again, his mother was always more accepting than his father.

Carla sent him a warning glance. "I hope you're being nice to them, Eren. I know what your dad says about people like them and how it angers God, but I think it would anger him more if you're cruel to his children."

Eren felt conflicted. He never liked when his parents talked about God. Mostly because he heard about him all the time and he was sick of it, but also because his parents disagreed, but never around each other. He thought his dad knew more, but he thought his mother had more reason. He didn't know who to believe. "I'm being nice."

"Good. I won't have my kids bullying people," Carla returned to her work. "Dammit! Missed a stitch." She unraveled a few rows to get to where she had made her mistake before she put everything down, blowing out a heavy breath. "I need a new hobby."

Eren used this opportunity to retreat back to his room. He laid down on his bed, staring at the ceiling. He thought about his experience. It was then that he remembered that he didn't hate the activity itself. What he hated was the fact that he angered everybody. He didn't know why, but he was particularly upset that he made Levi mad. He dreaded his next encounters with anyone from color guard.

~

Eren walked with Mikasa to school on Monday, as usual. Only this time, he dragged along his flag bag and a change of clothes, intending to put them away in the gym when they got there.
"I'm a little upset with you, Eren." Mikasa said.

"Why?" Eren asked, thinking he knew the answer. He assumed it had to do with how he treated others.

"Because, you'll be ditching me after school. I'll have to walk home all by myself." She said with an amused tone.

Eren's lip quirked up. "Oh, right. Sorry about that."

"It's fine." Mikasa chuckled. "How long are you staying at Levi's place?"

"A couple hours."

Mikasa hummed in acknowledgment.

~

The first portion of the day was slow and agonizing. The classes that Eren had with guard members were exceedingly awkward. His conversations with them were curt and meaningless, with the exception of Christa and Hanji. With some of the members he didn't even bother trying to talk with them. He couldn't avoid it with the other two, though. Christa was too polite, asking him about his weekend, whereas Hanji lectured him on how fascinating the moons of Jupiter are.

It was time for lunch and Eren happily made his way to his friends as they got their trays. They sat down at their table and Eren groaned at how exhausted he was.

Eren had promised to tell Armin all about color guard practice over the phone. He already explained the details of what he had to do, but Armin had to get off of the phone before he could tell him about everyone there.

"Sooo..." Armin started. "What are the people there like? Did you make any new friends?"

"Pfft, I think I might've made a few new enemies." It had completely slipped Eren's mind that he had a few fellow members in his presence. "So there's this girl, Annie, and she's so creepy. She has like this resting bitch-face. At one point I thought she was gonna kill me."

He took a bite of his food before he continued. Armin and Mikasa glanced at each other nervously. Everything he was about to say didn't reflect his actual feelings towards the other members, but he had to convince his friends that he hated the sport.

"And this guy named Bertolt is a fucking giant. He's okay I guess, but he sweats like crazy. It's so gross. And there's this other girl named Isabel." Eren didn't notice Levi's head whipping around to face him. "You probably would know her if you saw her. She's the PETA wannabe. Anyways, she almost started crying because I was gonna eat something with meat and dairy in it. It was so annoying. Talk about pathetic."

The three heard a loud screeching noise and turned around to see Levi in his chair, further away from his table than normal. Sasha, Connie and Petra were holding their hands out too him. They appeared to be trying to calm him down when he put his hands up defensively, muttering something that made them back off.
Armin and Mikasa turned back around. "You were saying?" Armin said, lacking all enthusiasm.

Eren seemed to be in deep thought, trying to remember. "Hmm, what was I talking about? Oh right, about eating. Speaking of eating, Sasha was there too. I didn't know she was on the team, but yeah. During lunch, we're not supposed to eat too much because apparently you shouldn't do that cuz it messes with your body or something. I don't even know, but they let Sasha eat as much as she pleased. She just forced everything down, she practically inhaled the food. It was disgusting. And no one said anything. Which somebody definitely should have. I mean, she's not the thinnest girl ever, you know what I mean?" He took another bite of his food, ignoring his friends' cautious stares.

"Um, Eren?" Mikasa tried to stop him, but he didn't hear her.

"And what's even weirder is she wore this long sleeve jacket the whole time. She was dying in it. She was sweating horribly and she never took it off. How stupid can you get?"

"Eren." Armin said firmly.

"What?"

Armin jutted his head behind him to direct Eren's attention.

Eren looked and wished he had shut up sooner. He could see Petra patting Sasha's shoulder, placing Sasha's lunch in front of her. Levi leaned out of the way and he could see that Sasha's head was bowed, her eyes were shut and she was biting her trembling lip. She pushed away her food that Petra was trying to give her and spoke in a wobbly voice. "I don't want it." She looked to be on the verge of tears. Connie was rubbing her other shoulder and glared daggers at Eren. Lastly, Levi turned around and mouthed the words 'what the fuck?' to Eren. His eyes gave Eren the impression that he wanted to say, 'Could you get any worse?'

Eren internally screamed. How could he be so rude? How could his timing be so bad?

"Why would you say that?" Mikasa hissed across the table.

Eren wanted to say 'I don't know' or 'I didn't mean it,' but nothing came out. He just sat there mortified that he said something so terrible about someone he barely knew, right in front of them. For some reason, he felt worse about saying it in front of Levi, and he wasn't even the person he offended. If there was a time for the ground to open up and swallow him in, that would've been a great time.

In all honesty, he didn't mean a word of it. He was just picking at little flaws he noticed and exploited them in an effort to make himself look like he was above being in such a sport. To make it look like everyone in color guard was lowly and he was there by mistake. When in reality, he made himself look like the only piece of scum on the team.

"I can't believe you." Armin spat. "What possessed you to think that saying something like that was okay, whether or not she was around?"

Eren searched for the right words. "I... I don't..." He was so perplexed, he had no idea how to make things better.

"Never say stupid things like that again." Mikasa said with a tone of finality.

"Okay, I won't." He agreed hastily.
At the end of lunch, Eren told Mikasa and Armin to go on ahead and that he had something to take care of. They both seemed to understand what he was referring to.

He waited until Sasha was alone and approached her. She still looked like she was nearing tears.

"Hey, Sasha." He stopped in her tracks, surprising her. She looked up at him. "Look, I didn't mean a word of what I said earlier. I don't know what was wrong with me, but I'm sorry. I am so sorry."

She sniffled and tried to catch her breath. "It's okay, Eren. I'm not mad at you."

"You're not?"

She shook her head. "No. Everything you said was true, so I'm not mad at you. I'm just upset because you were right. I've got some problems and I know about them. It's not your fault that you noticed." A single tear worked its way out of her eye and she was quick to catch it.

Eren started waving his hands frantically. "But none of it was true! Don't think any of it was true! I didn't mean any-"

"No, Eren." Sasha interrupted. "All of it is true. It's fine, just... it's okay. I'm okay." Her words weren't directed at him but more so herself, as if she was trying to convince herself. She hurried past Eren and met up with Levi, who seemed to have been watching them closely the whole time. When she caught up to him, he asked her something that was out of Eren's earshot. She seemed to think it over before glancing back at Eren then nodding yes.

Eren was overly curious, desperate to find out what they were talking about but it would have to wait for another time.

~

Eren had finally reached the end of the school day with minimal cringe worthy moments. Levi never told him where they should meet, so he made sure that as soon as the end bell rang, he made it to the main entrance so he wouldn't miss him. Armin and Mikasa already wished him luck and said their goodbyes. He waited impatiently for Levi to arrive.

Oddly enough, Levi wasn't the one to greet him.

"EREN!" He heard the footsteps behind him grow increasingly louder. He made a move to turn around and before he could do so, he was tackled by an immovable force. As he regained his balance, he looked down to see that Isabel had him in a steel lock of a hug. "Eren gets to come to our house today, Farlan!"

"Okay, Izzy. He probably doesn't like that." Farlan came from behind and dragged Isabel off of Eren.

She reluctantly let go. "I'm so excited! You didn't seem too happy about joining color guard when
"We first asked but you joined anyway! I knew we could count on you!" She was practically jumping in her spot. "And just so you know," she leaned up to whisper in Eren's ear. "I forgive you for what you said about us twirling flags."

"O-oh... That's good to hear." Eren said nervously. He had forgotten that Isabel and Farlan were Levi's siblings. He couldn't tell why, but he felt a little disappointed that he wouldn't be alone with Levi.

Soon, Levi approached and pat Eren on the back a little too hard. "Come on, let's get your equipment."

"Let's go!" Isabel chimed in.

"Actually," Levi stopped her. "You and Farlan go on and get to the car. I need to talk to Eren about something in private."

"Alright, let's go Izzy." Farlan led her back to the car.

As Eren and Levi walked to to gym, Levi didn't even spare him a glance. "I'm sure you don't need to be told that what you said during lunch wasn't acceptable."

"Yeah. I apologized to Sasha. I won't say those kinds of things again."

Levi hummed. "Good. And you'll do well to be especially nice to my little sister. I don't appreciate what you said about her. I'm not going to tell her about it, because for some reason she likes you and I don't want to make her upset."

"I thought she would hate me by now." Eren muttered.

"No, not Isabel." Levi said. "She's too nice. She always gives people the benefit of the doubt and tries to see the best in them. I like that about her."

Eren nodded. "And I thought you would've kicked me out by now."

Levi sent a short look at him. "I'd like to, but I don't think you're an asshole. I think you've just been taught some shitty things. But I don't hate you or anything like that. I just think you need to think for yourself."

Eren had to force away a smile that was creeping onto his features. He liked to know that Levi didn't hate him. 'Wait,' he thought, 'what do I care if he hates me or not? He's a freak... I think.'

"So you won't be saying dumb shit about any of the guard members or anyone who doesn't deserve it from now on, right?" Levi raised a pierced brow at Eren.

"Right." He said honestly. He didn't want to go through another incident like the one with Sasha again with her or anyone else. He didn't want to hurt Isabel's feelings because she was now one more person in the guard who didn't hate him. More than that, he didn't want to disappoint Levi. He didn't like when Levi got mad at him, though he was still trying to wrap his head around why he cared so much.
After gathering Eren's equipment and clothes, the two went back to Levi's car. Levi placed Eren's belongings in the trunk and got into the drivers seat. Eren opened the passengers door, only to see Isabel already sitting there, drinking a soda.

"Hey." She smiled up at him.

"Uh, hey." He closed the door, opening the one behind her and slid inside.

"Hi, Eren." Farlan gave a small wave.

"Um, hi." Eren cleared his throat, feeling awkward.

Isabel got up and turned around in her seat. "Sorry, Eren. But I always ride shotgun when Levi drives."

"Izzy, sit down and buckle up. You're not being safe."

Isabel did as she was told. "Sorry, big bro."

Levi started driving and Eren tried to calm down. He was going to Levi's house. With his siblings. That he held dear. Eren had to be on his best behavior.

"Hey Levi," Farlan spoke from the back. "Can we listen to our new CD?"

"Of course, hand it to Isabel."

Isabel took the CD that Farlan handed to her, putting it into the CD player. "I think you'll like this one Levi, we got it the other day."

Levi gave a quick nod. "Okay, let's hear it."

"Skip to the fourth track." Farlan said.

"You got it!" Isabel skipped to the song Farlan requested and Levi turned up the volume.

Soon the car was filled with subtle little notes that Eren thought sounded a little reminiscent of the seventies or some sort of dripping noise. Then came a hushed voice that Isabel immediately harmonized with.

~Alright, come close
~Let me show you everything I know

Eren had never heard music like this before. He wasn't familiar with this style but he knew that he liked it. He could see that once the song really kicked in, Farlan started drumming his fingers along the car door, keeping in perfect time.

~My, my simple sir, this ain't gonna work
~mind my wicked words and tipsy topsy slurs

Isabel and Farlan were often made fun of and called 'band geeks,' but Eren could see that they were genuinely happy to be surrounded by music. They were just doing what they loved. He envied them for that. He wanted to find something that he was absolutely in love with.

The song ended sooner than Eren would've liked, but that wasn't a problem.
"Izzy," Farlan said. "Play the seventh track."

She skipped to the seventh song like he asked, and Eren thought that he liked this one even better. He could see that Isabel was swaying in her seat, becoming fully immersed in the song. Farlan was no different, gently moving along with the rhythm.

~ Come back baby, don't you cry

~Don't you drain those big blue eyes

About a little more than half way through the song, the four arrived at their destination. They got out of the car and Eren gaped at the sight before him. He was too focused on the structure to hear Farlan and Isabel's whines about having to stop the music. The house was absolutely massive. He didn't know that such a luxurious home was in the area.

"Did you like those songs?" Farlan asked.

"Yeah, you two have good music taste." He turned around and saw Eren's expression. "Hey, kid." Levi hollered. "Close your mouth and get inside."

Eren was pulled from his daze and rushed indoors. "Wow, this is a huge house." He mused.

"Yeah, well with three kids who have loud, space consuming hobbies, we need at little bit of a larger home." Levi said as he entered the kitchen to start a kettle of tea. "Izzy, Farlan, you guys want some?" They both denied. "Eren, what about you, want some tea?"

"Uh, sure." He said absentmindedly, still taking in the house. Everything was spotless, the kitchen was covered with chrome appliances and granite counter and table tops and Eren could see into the living room, which had white carpets, white walls and a brick fireplace. His attention was called when he heard a tiny bell and felt something rubbing up against his legs. He looked down to see a brown tiger cat mewing for him to pet him. "Aw, you have a cat!" He knelt down to scratch behind his ears.

"That's Buster. He likes everyone." Farlan said, petting Buster's head, earning him an appreciative meow.

"He's so cute, can I hold him?" Eren smiled down at the friendly creature.

"That depends," Farlan picked up Buster, putting him on his shoulder. "Do you mind getting clawed to death?" As if on cue, Buster dug his claws into Farlan's skin. Farlan cringed, dropping his mouth open and stiffening. "Ow, I l-love you too, buddy." He pet Buster, which only made him claw at his shoulder more.

Eren chuckled. "It can't be that bad. I'll hold him." He stretched his arms out, taking Buster from Farlan. He laid him on his shoulder, just as Farlan did and pet him. He heard him purring and smiled. "He's so soft. See, it's not that- ow ow ow! Take him back! Take him back!"

Isabel and Farlan laughed and even Levi snickered a little at Eren's misfortune. Isabel was the one to relieve him of his pain. "That just means he likes you." She set him down and he went running to Levi.

Levi scratched Buster's head for a bit then turned on the stove to heat up the water. He gasped lightly and dug into his pocket. "Isabel, I almost forgot. I found two quarters on the ground for you."
"Yes! Thanks, big bro!" She jumped over to Levi, taking the quarters and putting them into her pocket.

"How come you only give her the change you find on the ground?" Farlan pouted.

"Because she's been saving for longer and she still doesn't have enough money." He stated simply.

"Saving for what?" Eren asked.

Isabel ran over to him. "I'm gonna get another bunny! I've been wanting another for over a year! But I don't have a job, so I have to save whatever I can find."

Eren thought he heard Levi mutter something about her 'being too young to have a job,' but otherwise ignored it. "Another? You mean you already have one?"

"Yup! Let's go see her." Eren was thrown off when Isabel grabbed his wrist and ran into the living room. Levi followed, mainly to make sure that Isabel didn't break anything in her excitement.

In the far corner, next to a piano, there was a large cage with a Belgian Hare drinking some water.

"Her name is Kitty." Isabel said, squatting down to be at eye level with the Hare.

"Kitty?" Eren stared at her curiously.

"Blame Izzy for that name." Levi said, crossing his arms. "She thought it would be hilarious if someone went 'here Kitty, Kitty' and the next thing you'd see was a rabbit hopping through the doorway instead of a cat."

Isabel giggled to herself. "It still is funny."

"Alright, enough of show and tell. Eren and I have to get to work."

"But Levi!" Isabel whined. "Just let Eren pet her for a bit and I have to show him one more thing. Please? After that you can have him."

Levi squinted his eyes at her and she combatted him with the most convincing puppy dog eyes Eren had ever seen.

"I'll be really quick." Isabel said, pouting even more.

He narrowed his eyes even further. "... Fine. But make it fast."

"Will do!" She smiled, giving him a salute. "Now pet her, she's really soft."

Eren didn't argue. He would never admit it out loud, but he's been wanting to do that since he'd seen the hare. She was right, Kitty was very soft.

Levi left shortly after and Farlan muttered to Eren as he was passing by, "He never says no to her. If you want something from him, ask her to get it." Isabel rolled her eyes.

"Alright, now I have to show you something." Isabel whispered, waiting until Eren got his hand out to the cage to drag him away by the arm. She led him upstairs and down a hallway. The last room on the left was her bedroom, which was where she took him.

Eren took a brief look around, seeing that the walls were a bright orange, the carpet was a a deep purple, there were fairy lights around the bed post and she had pictures on the wall of past color
guard performances. He didn't get the chance to take a good look at them because Isabel directed his attention to a tall cage, hidden beside her dresser.

"Isn't she pretty?" Isabel asked in a hushed tone.

Eren saw a tiny bird inside the cage, resting with a small bowl of bird feed and another of water laying near it.

"Buster got a hold of her. Luckily, she wasn't too hurt, so I'm keeping her until she can fly again. I named her Renée. After Renée Fleming."

Eren restrained himself from asking who that was and instead observed the small bird. It was so peaceful and relaxed. He'd never had the opportunity to see a bird up close, they'd always fly away. Now that he was looking at a bird that wasn't chirping relentlessly or hopping every which way, he appreciated it's beauty a bit more.

"Are you two done yet?" Levi yelled from down stairs.

Isabel sighed. "Yeah, he's coming!" She turned to Eren. "What do you think? Isn't she awesome?"

"Yeah, she's cool." Eren took one last glance at Renée before he headed downstairs.

Levi was sat at the dining room table with two cups of tea prepared. Eren took his seat where the second cup was placed. "It was another fucking bird, wasn't it?"

Eren nodded with a small, amused grin. Levi shook his head in disbelief as he took a sip from his tea. Eren noted that Levi held his cup in a strange way.

Before Levi could start the conversation, Eren asked something that had been on his mind. "Where are your parents?"

"Our mom's at work." Levi stated simply.

Eren wanted to delay practice as much as he could, so he deepened the conversation. "Where does she work?"

"At the diner at the end of the street."

Eren's eyebrows shot up. "At a diner? Does she own it?"

Levi frowned at him. "No, she's a waitress. Why, does that surprise you?"

"A little bit." He admitted. "How can you guys afford a place like this when she's just a waitress? Where does your dad work?"

Levi pinched the bridge of his nose, irritated. "To answer your first question, my uncle gave us this place and pays for most of it. It used to be his and he can still afford it. To answer your second question, he gave her the place because she couldn't afford any place else and she didn't have anyone to help her keep a house. Our dads are gone, so she needed help finding somewhere to live."

Eren nodded in understanding. "Wait, 'dads?' You guys have more than one?"

"Are you stupid?" Levi furrowed his brows. "Isabel, Farlan and I don't look anything alike, how could we all have the same parents? Those two look like their dads and I look like our mom. We're all half siblings with the same mother."
Eren snorted a laugh. "Wow, three different dads. Your mom must've been a real-

Levi slammed his fist on the table. If looks could kill, Levi had never appeared so enraged to Eren before, not even after what he said about Sasha. "I fucking dare you to finish that sentence." He spoke in a threatening baritone.

Eren gulped. "Uh... A-a nice lady. She must've been a real nice lady."

Levi relaxed and took another sip of his tea. "You bet your ass, she is. Never speak an ill word of my mother."

Eren nodded and took and sip of his tea, wanting to move past the awkward position he'd put himself in. "So, uh... Let's get to practicing, shall we?" Practice didn't sound like such a bad idea now that he hit a nerve with Levi. He made a move to stand up.

"Sit down. Not yet."

Eren sat down, clutching his cup.

"This isn't just going to be practice for color guard. Every time you come over, we're going to spend a little time having attitude boot camp. You need to get your head out of your ass and realize that you need to be respectful towards people. Not just guard members, but everyone."

"But I already told you I won't say stupid shit anymore!"

"Maybe so, but that won't help your problem of talking before you think. What I'm going to do is go through every guard member to let you know about their insecurities so you don't tread over rough territory. I've already gotten everybody's permission to be honest with you. Then I'm going to tell you a little bit about them so you remember that they're still people with lives and they aren't stereotypes. You need to learn a little empathy. Are you ready?"

Eren nodded meekly.

"First, let's talk about Izzy. She doesn't have any insecurities that I know of. She just loves animals and gets upset when they're hurt. What does bother her a bit is when shitheads like you call her a 'PETA wannabe.' She hates PETA because they do some bad things. If I hear you calling her that again or doing anything to hurt her, I'll wring your neck." Levi punctuated his statement with a pointed glare. "But she's not some stereotypical vegan extremist, she's very accepting and animals aren't the only thing she cares about. As I'm sure you already know, she has an obsession with music. She loves it."

Eren gave a small smile at that. He thought it was nice how she was so passionate about something so harmless.

"Now for Farlan. Don't make fun of the way he dresses. He's been picked on for looking classy. I don't understand it, he dresses better than half the shitbags around here. People tell him he looks stupid or like he's trying too hard, so don't be one of them. And he's just as passionate about music as Isabel. He plays nine instruments."

"That's impressive." Eren mused.

Levi smirked at that. "Yeah, it is. Who should we discuss next? Hm, let's talk about Hanji. They're very touchy about their identity, even though they don't seem like it. Hanji is asexual, aromantic and agender."
"Can I interrupt for a sec?" Eren asked. "Hanji already told me what agender is, but what're the other two?"

"Asexual means no sexual attraction. Aromantic means no romantic attraction. And because of all of that, they say that you can call them 'Triple A.' But no one ever calls them that. So, if you want something from them, call them that and you'll get it."

"Triple A, huh?" Eren giggled.

"Yeah, I don't get it either but you know. Whatever floats your goat."

"Um..." Eren glanced around, waiting to see if it was a joke. "I think the expression is 'whatever floats your boat?'"

"And I believe I wasn't done talking." Levi said with a cock of the head. "Anyways, that's not all there is to them. They love science and math and shit like that. They're very smart and people sometimes seem to ignore that. And they practice Wicca and they get really excited to teach people about it. So, that's another way to get on their good side if you ever need to."

"Marco's fall back is also his best quality. He's a really kind person, almost too kind. Don't ever take him for granted or take advantage of him, because he'll let you and he deserves better than that." Levi finished off his tea and Eren took another sip, halfway through with his.

"Petra doesn't appreciate when people talk about the dirt on her hands and knees, sometimes her face as well. It's really horrible, the filthy jokes people make about her. She has all that dirt because she's a gardener. She's the president of the earth club, where they talk about preserving the planet and she can't keep away from flowers and it's discouraging when people tell her she looks dirty. She knows she has dirt everywhere, she doesn't need to be told."

Eren hadn't even noticed the dirt, but it made him upset to know people were so rude about it.

"Then there's Christa. Don't let her looks fool you, she may look all sweet and pretty and girly, but she's dangerously skilled with a rifle. She's gotten a rifle solo three years in a row, she's that good." Levi got up to pour himself another cup, but kept talking. "One thing that she doesn't let anyone outside her family or the guard know is that she's dyslexic. During breaks, Hanji will help her with her math because they're the only one who can explain it right."

"Ymir is Christa's girlfriend, I'm sure you know. Ymir is a history buff, but she doesn't go around flaunting it. She seems like the kind of girl who doesn't care about what others think of her, but she hates it when people call her a nerd. She can't help it if facts spew out of her mouth, but she doesn't scream that she's a history genius. My advice would be to learn from her, not reject what she knows."

"Nanaba is a very sweet girl. I'm disappointed that you've already been rude to her, so I'll talk to you about her now. She's trans, but that shouldn't matter. She's always been a girl and if I hear you address her as a boy or say anything transphobic, I'll gut you like a fish." Levi spoke casually, as if it was nothing while he took a sip of tea. "She's a really good person and I'm not gonna tolerate any abuse towards her."

"Now for Bertolt. Yeah, he's sweaty sometimes, big whoop. Do you know why?"

He continued when Eren shook his head guiltily.

"It's because he has anxiety. He gets nervous easily and deals with so much stress. He's on the football team, the wrestling team, the basketball team and the color guard team. Being involved in
that many sports tends to get to you." He glowered at Eren, who in turn bowed his head. "But he's
talented. He would be grateful for some praise."

"Now for Annie." Eren visibly cringed. "It's not even a personal thing with her, people just don't
like being told they have a bitch-face. It's just common manners, so don't say it again. Anyways,
she has problems going on in her family, so it's best that you avoid the topic. Her dad's all she has
left after her parents got divorced and her mother moved away. And her father's been her biggest
supporter. She's a bit like Bertolt, taking on a few sports. She's in wrestling, boxing and color
guard. Another thing that Annie and Bertolt have in common is that they're from the same school.
We got a lot of new kids this year. Those two and some other kid are the only ones from their
school here. Annie told me that Bertolt and her used to be in color guard at their old school too."

"Last, but not least, we have Sasha." Levi sat forward to stress the importance of the next subject.
"If there's any one person that you should be extra nice to, it's Sasha. She's gone through more shit
than anybody deserves. Do you know why she wears long sleeves all the time?"

With his head shamefully lowered, he whispered a weak "No."

Levi took his time trying to not be too blunt about what he was preparing to say. "... She has... self
inflicted injuries. And she's not proud of them. Do you know why she does that to herself?"

Another soft "No."

"It's because of her depression. It's because of her low self esteem. And do you know why she has
low self esteem?"

Eren shook his head.

"It's because she's self conscious about the way she looks. She's self conscious over her weight.
She's not thin, yes, but she's not fat either. She wants to be beautiful and she has a hard enough time
believing that she is without people saying she's overweight. Even if she was, she'd still be
beautiful, but she's having trouble knowing that. She had some... problems with eating a few years
ago. She didn't eat enough. I suppose I don't have to spell out what was wrong, do I?"

Eren but his lip, his stomach turned and he shook his head.

"Anyways, Sasha wanted to get better, so she did. So, we let her eat as much as her heart desires
because she doesn't want to feel hungry ever again. But that doesn't mean that she's not worried
about weight gain anymore. Color guard keeps her focus off that. She may not be the most skilled
person on the team but she surpasses everyone on terms of drive and effort. This sport means a lot
to her and I'll be damned if you ruin it for her or anyone else. Even if we were all completely
different in every way, we're still a part of the same team and we need to have synergy in order to
function."

Eren didn't know what to do, other than stare at his hands in his lap. He couldn't have been more
disgusted with himself.

"Did the message sink in?"

"Yeah," Eren mumbled. "It did."

"Are there any other things you'd like to know so you don't say anything stupid again?"

Eren scratched the back of his neck. "Um... god, I feel like a dick now. I guess as long as there
aren't any satanists in the guard, then I have no problems with anybody, heh." Eren did what he
could to lighten the mood.

Levi sat back in his chair, crossing his arms and wore a sly smirk. "Too bad, you have to get along with Annie too."

Eren's face fell. "Oh, um... I was joking."

"I wasn't."

Eren raised his brows. "Annie's a satanist?!"

"Yeah." Levi's grin only widened when he saw Eren's mouth drop. "Knowing you, you'd probably think that they worship the devil. Well, I've got news for you. Satanists are atheists and they don't sacrifice babies or any of that bullshit you've been taught. They're actually nice people. And another thing, I won't have you judging people for their religion. No matter what their religion is. We have a few atheists, pantheists, a Wiccan, a deist and some other beliefs that I haven't been told yet. If it makes you feel better, Petra is a Christian like you. But she's a nice one, you should learn from her."

"How did you know I was Christian?" Eren asked.

"Because it's obvious as shit." He took a sip of his tea. "I'm good at reading people."

Eren tried to figure out just what had given him away.

"That, and Hanji told me."

Eren knitted his brows together. "What do you believe in? If I'm allowed to ask."

"I'm agnostic." Levi said, inspecting his nails.

Eren supposed that that suited him. He thought for a moment. There was one person Levi left out. "What about you?"

Levi cocked an eyebrow at him. "What about me?"

"What are you like? You told me about everyone but you."

Levi pondered it over for a moment. "I don't know." He shrugged.

"Oh, come on. You're not that deep. Just tell me something you like."

The older teen huffed out an amused breath. "Ah, let's see..." He crossed his leg over the other. "Uh, I like music, though not nearly as much as my brother and sister. My favorite band is The Cure. Uh... Oh, I like languages."

"You like languages?" Eren asked exasperatedly. "Could you elaborate a bit?"

"I like to learn languages. My mom taught me French very young and when you learn young, it's easier to learn others later on. I took an online course to learn German. When I get into college, I'm hoping to learn Welsh and Japanese. I'd like to be an interpreter."

"You know German?" Eren jumped up in his seat. Levi nodded. "I'm German! My mom is nuts for our heritage."

"Do you speak German?"
"No."

"Hmph. Come back when you learn to speak your own damn language."

Eren laughed at that. "Alright. Now one insecurity."

"I don't have one."

"Yeah, right! Everybody has at least one." This was becoming a bit of a game for Eren.

Levi shrugged. "Well, I don't. Sorry to disappoint you."

"You're lying." Eren kicked back in his chair. "I'm gonna find out what it is."

"Yeah, sure you are." He studied Eren for a moment. "Now let me tell you about you."

"What?" Eren crossed his arms. "You think you know enough about me to summarize my personality like you did with the others?" He challenged.

"I'll give it a shot." He leaned on his elbows, observing Eren closer. "You're a hardcore Christian as we have previously stated... um, you like to be active. Hence the parkour. You're really athletic. Uh... you can be an ass sometimes."

"Hey!" Eren yelled.

"No no no, I'm not done. Please hold all questions until I'm finished." Eren hushed up. He wasn't actually mad, he knew it was true. But it was a cheap shot. "Let's see, one insecurity." Eren adorned a smug grin, thinking that Levi could never come up with anything. Levi looked pensive before straightening up. "I got it." Eren waved his hand to permit him to speak. "You're extremely gay."

Eren lost all mirth. The color drained from his face and he could've sworn his heart stopped. "I'm... I'm what?"

"Gay." Levi said calmly, acting as if Eren had asked him the time.

Eren knew he should've stayed calm, but Levi could read people, right? The first day they met, Levi told him he knew what he meant when Eren used the slur. 'No,' Eren thought. 'He couldn't possibly know.' His breathing noticeably picked up and he could feel his heart rate increase. "N-no I'm not."

"Yeah, you are." He continued nonchalantly, sipping his tea.

Could Isabel and Farlan hear their conversation? Levi needed to stop talking. "I'm not, Levi." Eren shook his head, feeling a bead of sweat trickling down. "I'm not." He said more to himself than Levi. He stared down at the table, trying to focus on his breathing.

He looked up when he heard a low chuckle. Levi was hiding his smile behind his cup. "You know, I was just teasing you."

Eren let out a heavy breath. "Oh... that's a re-"

"But based on your reaction I think I've struck oil."

Eren's eyes widened three times their size. "Wait- what do you mean?!"
Levi hummed and took his time explaining himself. "It's just that... I would've believed you if you only shrugged it off. Or if you got angry. But you just dug yourself a hole because you're not offended or calm about it. You're scared."

Eren took a shaky breath. "No, Levi. I can't..." Eren felt like he was caught in a trap. "How did you know?"

"And that just confirmed it." Levi wiggled his eyebrows.

"Levi!"

"Sorry, right," Levi sat properly. "I wasn't really sure, but ever since you called me a fag, I kinda had a feeling that you were. I don't know, something in your voice kind of made it sound like you felt like you had to say it. So you could take the attention off of you, ya know?"

Eren knew exactly what he was talking about. He slumped his shoulders and put his head in his hands, hiding his face. "Oh my god, I can't believe this." He muttered to himself.

"Eren." Eren tiredly raised his head. "I'm not going to use it against you." Levi looked at him seriously. "I understand if you don't want people to know."

"Please Levi," he whimpered. "Don't tell anyone. Oh god, I can already hear the things people will call me. Levi, no one can know, I'll get so much shit for it at school. Oh my god, my parents would kill me." He hung his head once more.

"Like I said, I understand. You don't need to tell anyone until you're ready. But if you need to, I can guarantee that everyone in color guard can keep a secret. They'd support you too." Levi finished his second cup of tea.

"No." Eren shook his head. "For now, no one else can know. Not even my friends know." He thought over his predicament. "Is it obvious? Because I'm in color guard?"

Levi sighed in annoyance. "Eren, there's nothing wrong with being gay. You're not committing a crime because you're attracted to someone with the same parts, so you shouldn't act like it. Besides, not every guy in color guard is gay. Though we do have some gay people on the team. Like Ymir... and Marco's as straight as a circle."

"Isn't Christa gay too?"

"Nah, she's pansexual. There's not just straight and gay, you know. Annie's demisexual. Hanji's asexual as I already-"

"I don't know what two of those mean but you'll have to tell me later. Farlan and Bertolt are guys, are they gay?" Eren had to know if it was unanimous that all the boys were gay, because if they were, he thought he couldn't defend himself.

"You're not allowed to go out with my little brother if that's what you want to know." One glance at Eren's sour look and he backed off. "I'm just kidding. But Farlan's straight and Bertolt is... hmm." He used his tongue to play with his lip ring as he tried to think. "Huh, I don't know. Hmph. Oh well, it's not any of my business anyway."

Eren didn't process his last few sentences. "What about you? You're a dude, are you straight or gay?"

"How observant of you." Levi said sarcastically. "The answer is no."
Eren looked at him funny. "What do you mean no?"

"You asked if I was straight or gay, no. Like I said, those aren't the only two sexualities out there. I'm bi."

Hearing that made something in Eren's stomach turn, but not in a painful or uncomfortable way. He dropped his head into the table, groaning. Just then Isabel trotted downstairs. "Hey, Levi? Do we have any sunflower see-" she stopped when she saw Eren's head on the table. She faced Levi. "Did you break him?"

Levi looked Eren over. "I think I might've, yeah."

"Well unbreak him." She frowned. "We have practice tomorrow."

~

"Are you sure you can handle practicing now?" Levi asked cautiously.

"Yeah, I need something to distract me." Eren said, rubbing his face after emerging from the bathroom, changed. Levi, a person he he felt so uneasy around, someone he barely knew, found out something that no other soul knew about him. He was nervous to say the least.

"Alright, if you're sure. Let's go to the practice room." Levi led him to another corner of the house. He opened a heavy door and walked into a large open area. Eren was taken out of his anxiety as he regarded the room that he entered. It was such a wide, open space. He wanted to run to each corner several times over. One of the walls was glass and had two doors on either end that led outside. He could see what looked to be a sound and light board on the other side of the room. And the ceiling. Oh, the ceiling. It seemed to go up forever. It was so high because there needed to be room for when they did tosses. He wanted to ask how they went about changing a light bulb.

"This is a practice room?!" Eren gawked.

"Yeah. Our piece of shit uncle had it put in seven years ago." Levi shrugged.

Eren wandered in. "If he does all this for you, how come you don't like him?"

"He only pays for the house because he feels like he has to, not because he wants to do something for his family. He only added on this room because my mom begged him to. He avoids us like the plague and never visits, so I don't like him."

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine. Now let's get warmed up." Levi grabbed Eren's equipment and set it in the corner.

Eren felt a little off that Levi was so casual about baring hatred about his uncle. He felt sorry for him. But work needed to be done, so he pushed his feelings aside.

They flew by the stretches and warm up running. Eren had improved his flexibility a bit, so stretching was easier now that he knew how to approach it. Though, it didn't make it any less boring. "Do we really have to stretch every time?"

Levi looked at him incredulously. "Cramps are not fun and they are no joke. Always stretch or
you'll regret it later."

Eren rolled his eyes and didn't argue further.

When Levi decided that they were ready to move on, he had Eren get his flag out of the bag. "Do you remember the routine I taught you?"

Eren thought about it for a moment. "I think so."

"Well, after this time, there will be no 'I think so's. You need to practice when you can. But let's see what you remember." Levi patted his thigh and counted off.

Eren tossed his flag in the air, but as it came down, he panicked and jumped out of its path. A loud clang echoed through the room. "I'm sorry!" He dove for the pole.

"Don't apologize, no one catches it every time. And you're just starting, you'll get the hang of it. One more time. Five... Six..."

Eren tossed it again and caught it, but celebrated instead of continuing. "I got it!" Nice!"

Levi's lip quirked up. "Very good, you're stance when you catch is a little off but we can work on that after. This time continue with the routine. Okay, five... six..."

Eren repeated his work, this time fumbling with the catch, but otherwise continued with no issues. He second guessed the moves a couple times but never actually missed anything.

"That was good. You have a great memory. Now, I need you to do a toss but when you catch it, freeze completely. I'll show you how you're supposed to stand when it's caught."

Eren threw another toss, reaching out for it as he normally would and froze. He realized that his position was a very uncomfortable one to hold. His back was bent over, his arms stretched out as far as they could go and he was standing on the balls of his feet. He didn't need to be told that this was bad form.

Levi stood at his side. "Rest your feet flat on the ground." Eren lowered himself. Levi took a step closer, placing one hand on Eren's chest and the other on the small of his back, pushing at each. This action earned a quiet squeak from Eren, also causing him to tense his muscles. "Keep your back straight... and loosen up a bit." Eren released a breath he hadn't realized that he was holding in. Levi walked in front of him and grabbed ahold of Eren's hands. "You're elbows need to be bent so the flag stays close to you."

"But if I do that, the flag might hit me in the face on the way down." Eren argued.

"Yeah, that happens." Levi said coolly. "We call that learning the hard way." He pushed Eren's arms inward. "Now, your hands are in the right place but you should be holding the flag at a slight angle. Sometimes you hold it vertically, but for this routine, it'll be diagonal." He directed Eren's hands into the position they needed to be in. "When you catch a flag, you shouldn't have to dive to catch it. That tires you out... god, your hands are sweaty." Levi brought his hands back, wiping them on his pants. Eren stared at the floor, avoiding his eyes. "Now try catching it like that."

The next few attempts were unsuccessful. The first two times, the flag hit Eren's wrists. The next time, it landed on the floor, causing Eren to jump out of the way. Lastly, his prediction came true, as the flag landed on his head once and hit his forehead twice. Eren took a short break, hissing at the pain.
"What's the matter?" Levi inspected the injuries.

"My wrists hurt." Eren winced.

"Are they broken?"

"Well, no. But-"

"Then you're fine. Come on. Try again." Levi clapped twice to get him going.

Eren huffed, but tried again. He didn't catch it correctly until the third attempt, but he caught it right, nonetheless.

"Alright, let's put it all together. Do the routine."

With great concentration and effort, Eren succeeded in completing what he knew of the routine with no errors. He looked at Levi with one raised eyebrow as if to say, 'How was that?'

Levi scoffed. "Don't get cocky, but you did a good job." Eren grinned wider. "I said don't get cocky, kid."

"I'm not, I'm just... happy." Eren looked off to the side.

"Good, now let's learn the rest of the routine. This is the groundwork, this is where you left off."

"I have a question." Eren prompted.

"Ask away."

"You don't do this routine, you're on the other side. How do you know what to teach me?"

Levi shifted his weight onto the other foot. "As an instructor, it's my job to know everyone's part. Plus, I'll be mirroring you, so it helps to know your next move."

"You're the one mirroring me?" He asked.

"That's what I said, isn't it? Now let's get to doing the groundwork."

Eren felt a bit lucky. Levi was one of the talented instructors that had a place in the front. He would literally be at Levi's level.

Levi taught him the rest of what there was left to learn. Eren got a little embarrassed at times. He thought he looked ridiculous rolling around on the floor, doing odd dance moves that he thought looked liked he was throwing a rhythmic tantrum. But Levi assured him that he was not only doing it right, but looked professional in the way he approached it.

They finished after doing the entire routine multiple times. Levi tossed Eren a bottle of water while getting one for himself. Eren changed into his normal clothes and packed up his things. He groaned in pain. "Everything's sore."

"It's because you didn't stretch enough." Levi was quick to say, opening his water.

"Like hell, I didn't! It's because I kept getting hit by the-"

"No... It's because you didn't stretch enough." Levi took a swig of his water. "But I know how you feel." He stared off into space. "When I was seven, I had never been hurt in my life. Now pain is all
I know." He took another drink, still staring at nothing.

Eren stared at him like he was insane.

"I'm just kidding." Levi looked back at him, with his typical bored expression. Eren let out a relieved sigh. "No, but seriously. You're gonna get fucked up."

~

Eren held an ice pack that Isabel had given him to his head. Levi was driving him home, listening to an eighties radio station. "Remember we have practice tomorrow, so don't forget your things. And practice tonight if you can. If you can't, just run through it in your head."

"Mhm." Eren nursed his injury, only half listening.

They reached Eren's house and Levi offered to help him carry things in. Eren refused but thanked him for the ride. Levi rolled down the window as Eren was about to step inside.

"Hey." Eren turned to him. "Remember what I said about trusting the guard. Not just with... you know, but anything. They trusted you enough to let me tell you about them, you can do the same if you need to."

Eren nodded. "Thank you, Levi."

"Anytime, kid." Levi drove off as Eren entered his house.

Chapter End Notes

"She knitted angrily." Quite possibly my favorite sentence I've ever written.

I have a lot of pointless and credit giving notes so let's get into this. *cracks knuckles* First, you have no idea how much self restraint I had to have every time I wanted to write 'smol birb' instead of 'small bird.' Another thing, I'm going somewhere with Petra being obsessed with protecting the environment. So, if you know where I going with it, please don't comment your guess because I want it to be a surprise. My goal is to get everyone to throw away their computers when I reveal it. Also, I had the bird named after Renée Fleming because Isabel loves singing and I have a chorus teacher who's obsessed with that singer. Every time we have a free day, she pulls up one of her concerts and she never stops talking about her and it's kind of funny. Also, if you think I'm milking it with the Christian talk in the Jaeger household, I'm not. You haven't met my family, they actually say stuff like that on a regular basis. Fair warning, the future notes are going to have so many nostalgic rants from me, god I miss color guard so much. This chapter reminded me of the pain you go through. After color guard, you are an emotionless vessel. You get hurt so many times and you are required to not care and keep going. It's a skill you learn over time. Ah, precious memories. I remember we used to show each other out cuts and bruises like they were little progress trophies. If you saw someone get hurt, your immediate thought wasn't "Oh my god, are you
okay?" It was "That's gonna leave a wicked mark, I'm jelly." We are made of stone. I really hope this chapter made sense and had few errors, I wrote over half of it while falling asleep. Hell, I'm half asleep right now. Oops. If this chapter was shit, blame it on that. But I do hope that you liked it, please leave kudos or a comment if you did, it would mean a lot! If you wanna check out my tumblr that has all my fics and art on it, it's dr-s--art. Thanks for reading!!! <3
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Eren can't always avoid everything he wants to. His subconscious makes sure of that.

Chapter Notes

First things first, it has occurred to me that I suck at describing things and I don't know how many of you know what consecutives are. Here is a vine that shows you what they are. I suggest that if you listen with headphones, turn them down, it gets loud very suddenly. https://vine.co/v/iqT5VV1H36q
With that being said, enjoy!

Eren sat down in his room after having been dropped off by Levi. He put his head in his hands, using one to hold the ice pack in place, moaning in distress. Everything was going to be so awkward. Could he trust the only person who knew his secret? Yes. Was he safe from others finding out? Absolutely. Did he feel some small bit of relief that someone finally knew and they were accepting of him? Of course. Was he happy it was Levi? Hell fucking no.

Something stirred in Eren whenever Levi innocently touched him. He couldn't keep his eyes off of him, regardless of his attire. Every time the guy was even in his presence, his mind went foggy. He refused to come to terms with what it all meant. He had far too much to worry about already.

Eventually, his head stopped hurting enough to the point where he assumed he could put the ice pack away. He lept down stairs and put it in the freezer. Just then, he heard footsteps coming into the kitchen.

"Eren?" His mother called. "Oh you're home." She raised up the phone on her hand. "Your father just called, he won't be home until after you're asleep most likely."

Eren rolled his eyes. "He's literally never home."

Carla sighed. "He's a busy man with an important job and has to oh my GOD WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR HEAD?" She rushed over and tilted Eren's head back to get it in the light to observe the mark.

"It's fine! It's fine!" He squirmed, trying to get away from his mother's prying hands. "Don't poke it! It's a bruise from where the flag hit me!"

"The flag?!" Carla looked at him incredulously.

"Yes!" He escaped, at long last. "I did a few tosses and the flag hit me in the head."

Carla put her hands on her hips. "Well that's ridiculous. Why didn't you catch it?"
"Because it's hard!" Eren defended. "I'd like to see you try and catch one of those things."

Carla relented. She reached into the cabinets to get a glass for some water. "Did you at least have fun? What was it like?" She exited into the living room and Eren followed.

"The actual practice portion was hard, but they have this really big house. I can't believe I've never driven past it before." He sat next to Mikasa, who was playing on her DS. "They had some cool pets too."

"Oo, like what?" Carla asked, sitting down to continue knitting a scarf.

"They had a cat. His name was Buster. They let me pick him up but he scratched me really bad."

"That means he liked you." Mikasa whispered, still invested in her game. Carla snickered at the comment.

Eren rolled his eyes. "Yeah, anyways. They-"

"Why do you keep saying they?" Carla interrupted.

"Oh, um, Levi has a brother and sister." Carla nodded, signaling him to keep talking. "So, they have this rabbit and they named it Kitty. Apparently, they thought it'd be funny to call it that and surprise people when a rabbit came running instead of a cat." Both Mikasa and Carla giggled at that. "Then Levi's sister, Isabel, showed me a bird she saved. She's taking care of it."

"How sweet! Saving a bird." Carla smiled, thinking about the good deed. "She must be one of God's little helpers."

Mikasa and Eren stiffened when they heard that comment. Carla never noticed. That little reference made Eren think about what had happened earlier. It made him ponder over what his parents would do if they knew what Levi knew.

"I'm pretty tired." Eren stood up to go to his room. "I think I'm gonna rest a bit." He quickly ran upstairs.

The only noises left of the living room were the sound affects from Mikasa's game and Carla's knitting needles occasionally clinking together.

"Shit." Carla muttered.

"Miss a stitch?" Mikasa asked without looking up.

"No!" Carla mumbled defensively.

Mikasa looked at her with a raised eyebrow.

"Okay, a little." Carla mumbled, embarrassed at her mistake.

~

That night, Eren laid in his bed, contemplating possibilities of what could happen, should his secret ever get out. He wondered how many friends would stay by his side. He thought about all the
guard members that would hate him for taking out his insecurities on others. He feared what his parents would do to punish him.

He curled up on his side, stressing over all the uncertainties. Just then, he heard a little 'tick.' Eren stirred at the noise. 'Tick tick.' He lifted himself up off the bed. His attention was brought towards his window when the small 'ticks' became more insistent. He smiled to himself. A roll of thunder came next. Eren laid back down, tucking himself in up to his chin. He closed his eyes and reveled in the symphony of the pattering rain.

Thunderstorms were his favorite thing in the world. The constant rumbling lulled him to sleep.

~

At some point in the night, Eren's dreams took an interesting turn. He dreamt of a cavern with no light, no ground and no roof. The dripping noises were consistent and surrounding him completely. Eren was somewhere hovering in the center. Though there seemed to be no end and no way out, he felt completely at peace. He felt something cradling him, something warm and nurturing. He leaned into it, wanting more of the physical security. Whatever it was, it remained faceless.

He tossed and turned in his sleep.

Whatever Eren was feeling in his dream, had a voice and started shushing in his ear. It seemed friendly and not at all threatening. He had the feeling that it was protecting him, taking care of him. He felt as if the presence "loved" him in a way. He knew he loved it back. Though he was engulfed by darkness, he felt so safe. Nothing was coming to harm him, he was in complete bliss.

His blankets aided only in making him warmer.

Eren wondered what would happen if he tried to talk to it. He didn't know what was the most intelligible thing to say, so he simply said, "Hello?"

He heard a low rumble in reply. "Mn?"

"Who is this?" He asked, leaning into the presence even more.

"Me." Was the only response he got. It was a low, familiar baritone. Even though the voice was unmistakable and entrancing in every way, he couldn't put a name to it. The presence developed hands that held Eren's waist gently. They were rough, but soft at the same time. Eren gave a delighted hum. Grinning from ear to ear.

The storm from outside never relented.

The dripping noises became louder, little by little, and almost seemed to be getting closer. The hands started roaming over his chest and hips. It was then that he realized that the hands only came into contact with his bare skin. He looked down and saw that hands were fair in skin tone and had black painted nails. He didn't feel nervous, if anything, he was curious. "What are you doing?"

"You're okay." Is all the voice said. That sultry, smooth voice that held him willingly captive. It was beautiful. It was magnificent in every way. The hands were enthralling. His mind became fuzzy and he couldn't feel happier.
It was five minutes until his new alarm clock went off.

"What's happening?" Eren asked lazily. He was too busy taking everything in to really concentrate on his words.

"Shh, I'm yours." Another vague answer that lacked any sense. It was hushed but Eren could tell that it was mere centimeters away from his ear. Eren thought that if he turned around, he could catch a glimpse of this presence. He turned his head and was met with a pale visage and a pair of eyes that resembled the storm that took place outside of his dream.

"Levi?" The offensive sound of his alarm clock filled the room. Eren wiped his forehead and observed it, taking notice of the sweat that it was now drenched with. It took him a minute to start breathing at a normal pace. He fell back to the bed, hitting the off button on his alarm clock.

'That was an intense dream.' He thought. 'It was like I could actually feel him. Wait...' Eren thought about just who he had dreamt about. When the realization hit him, he slapped his hand to his forehead. This couldn't be happening. He shifted and noticed how uncomfortable his pajamas were. Reaching down, he felt the hardness at the front of his pants. Why did everything have to be so difficult?

Eren could no longer deny his feelings for Levi, but that didn't mean he wouldn't hide it from him for as long as he could. Then again, the last time he tried hiding something, it didn't work out in his favor.

~

Downstairs, Eren finished getting ready. (He had taken care of his stiff situation earlier.) He got his equipment together and put on a light hoodie, waiting for Mikasa to be ready to go.

Mikasa ate the last of her toast and walked up to Eren. "All set?" She asked.

He nodded and opened the door, revealing the storm that never stopped. While he grinned to himself, Mikasa whined. "Come on! We have to walk in this?" She left to go get a couple umbrellas.

She came back offering one to Eren. He waved her off. "I'm good." He simply put up his hood.

She gawked at him. "But it's pouring! You'll get soaked." Eren shrugged. "Pfft, you and your dumb love for rain."

The two siblings made their way to school carrying two separate composures. Mikasa, with her trusty umbrella, walked moderately annoyed with the weather and stayed mostly dry. Eren on the other hand, was drenched from head to toe, lugging his equipment and back pack and smiling so brightly that it combatted the dreary sky. Eren couldn't understand why people hated the rain. He loved it ever since he was little. To him, when he was a little boy, he felt like it was a special occurrence. A special time when the night seemed to come early when the sun disappeared, but it was still light enough to see. And then the water would come, warm or cold, it never mattered. He never minded darkness and he never minded water.

They reached the school, parting ways. Mikasa went to her history class while Eren went to the gym to drop off his equipment, then walked to his math class. He walked in still wearing a sated
simper and lazy eyes. He took his seat, looking happy as a clam. A few amused chuckles and fleeting glances were shared. Eren was dripping wet, whereas everybody else was completely dry. A couple girls giggled amongst themselves and whispered about how 'ridiculous' and 'cute' he was. This happened every time it rained, almost no one in the school was unaware of his fixation.

A small laugh from Christa brought him out of his reverie. He looked at her, still smiling. "What?"

"It's just funny, I've never seen you look so happy." She said, still laughing.

Ymir turned around in her chair and observed Eren. "You look like a wet dog."

Eren wasn't even fazed. Nothing could ruin his mood, not even Ymir.

~

At the end of the day, Eren was still a little damp from the rain. And because he couldn't get enough, he made up the excuse to accompany Mikasa to the sidewalk, just to be in the rain a little longer.

He came to practice with wet skin and hair and dry gym clothes that he had changed into. A few snickers went around the team when he walked in. Eren didn't care. He wore a proud smile as he waited with everyone for Hanji and Levi to arrive.

The instructors showed up not a moment too soon. Hanji clapped for everyone's attention, telling them it was time to get the floor out. Levi fell in step with Eren who had his water bottle with him, getting hydrated before they got to work.

Levi raked his eyes up and down Eren's body with a slight tilt of the head. Eren was still unknowingly grinning like a fool. "What are you so giddy about?" Eren only shrugged, blinking lazily and taking a sip of his water. "You look like you've been thoroughly fucked."

Eren choked on his water, earning a smug quirk of the mouth from Levi. "Wha-? Why would you say that?!"

Levi smirked. "It was the first thing that came to my mind."

Eren became flustered, cheeks heating up and all. "And you say I'm the one who should think through what I say."

The two journeyed in silenced until they were at the supply room. The team pulled out the floor and sat on it, waiting for instructions.

Hanji cleared their throat. "Okay, time for the moment you've all been waiting for! We've got the gloves and shoes for everyone to try on, so let's get it done with so we can practice!"

The two instructors went back out into the hallway, Hanji returning with one box and Levi returning with two.

Hanji set down their box first and everyone crowded around. Eren thought that it was only right that he would do the same. He peaked around other people and heard Hanji cutting through the tape. A glimpse inside and he could see black material in little clear packages.
"They're black this year!" Marco exclaimed excitedly.

"Good," Ymir said. "My other black ones are falling apart."

"Alrighty, we have sizes extra small through extra large. Take a size you think fits, if they don't, put them back and grab another. And let's try to be neat about this!" Hanji tried in vain to get the others to control themselves.

Everyone clawed at the box trying to get theirs first to try them on. Eren was last, though that was completely fine with him. He didn't want to find out what would happen if he came between one of the others and the gloves. Eren picked the first medium sized pair he found. He didn't think his hands were overly small or large, so it seemed like a fair guess.

Once he tore open the package, he saw that the gloves weren't like any he had seen before. They were entirely black and fingerless. The palms were thickly padded and the material was rather rough. "Why do they have pads?" He asked aloud to himself.

Hanji, hearing his question, gave helpful reasoning. "Trust me, Eren. You do not want to go without gloves when you do consecutives and tosses for hours with your rifle or saber. Your hands will hurt so bad."

"It doesn't bother me." Levi said offhandedly and honestly.

"Yeah, well..." Hanji chuckled as they argued. "That's different. You're... made of stone or something."

Levi rolled his eyes and Eren stared with concern. People got hurt in this sport more often than he imagined.

He slipped on his gloves and stretched them out a bit, setting them in place with the velcro strap. They felt odd, but somehow comfortable.

"It might feel a bit weird when you first wear them while performing, but you'll get used to it." Hanji provided. "Okay, everyone! It's shoe time!"

The mania from before returned at Hanji's announcement. The guard surrounded Levi this time. "Single file!" He barked. Everyone hastily got into a line, Eren being dead last again. "Tell me your shoe size, try them on. If they don't fit, we'll work from there, you know the drill."

Bit by bit, Eren got closer to the front of the line. He looked at the people trying on their shoes with excitement. They looked like plain shoes to him. They were flat, black, had solid, yet flexible bottoms and stretchy material for the rest of the structure.

Eren became closer and closer. Now, he started to panic. He finally got out of his daze about the rain and was brought back to reality. He was getting closer to Levi. Eren was too unfocused to get nervous before, but now he was apprehensive about facing the guy. His dream was stuck in his head and the memory of who he had to think about to get off that morning now haunted him. 'Just don't look at him.' Eren thought. 'That'll work.'

When it was Eren's turn, he kept his head angled and tilted down.

"What's your size?" Levi asked.

Eren told him and used his peripheral vision to see the shoes he was being handed.
"Did you see someone kick a puppy or something?"

"Huh?" Eren accepted the shoes, keeping his head down.

"Earlier you looked like you jizzed your pants and couldn't get over it." Levi explained. "Now you look like someone shit all over your parade."

"Oh, I-I'm fine." Eren said, with his head still lowered.

Hanji noticed the exchange going on. "Eren, what happened? You can tell us."

The entire guard was now giving their undivided attention to Eren.

"What's wrong?" Isabel asked.

"Are you hurt?" Marco inquired, stepping next to him.

"Do you need to talk about it?" Petra put an arm around his shoulder. That was a shock, he thought she hated him. Soon the entire guard surrounded him, demanding answers about his wellbeing. Why were they so worried about him?

He finally lifted his head, raising his hands in defense. "Guys, I'm fine! Really, it was nothing." He became overwhelmed with the attention. He was absolutely perplexed, he had no idea why a little gesture made everybody so concerned. With a little more convincing, they all backed off. Well, that was one idea that he couldn't pull off.

~

With shoes and gloves that fit perfectly and the stretches and warm ups out of the way, it was time to begin practice. They all ran through the routine perfectly around twelve times before everyone heard it. The clang of a flag hitting the ground. Hanji spun around. "Who dropped?!"

The whole team looked around to see who had dropped their flag. What was bizarre was that everyone was holding their flag.

"Come on guys, who is it?" Hanji skimmed to see who looked guilty.

It was only a matter of time before Nanaba spoke up. "It was Ymir."

"Bitch ass snitch." Ymir muttered under her breath.

"Ymir, we don't say that!" Hanji chastised. "You know the drill. Twenty tosses, off to the side."

Eren turned to the nearest person, which was Isabel. "What was that about?"

"If you drop, you have to do twenty of whatever move you messed up on. So don't drop!" She advised.

~
After their lunch break, everyone was allowed to work on whatever it was they wanted or relax, while Hanji retrieved some equipment. Eren chose to sit out and watch everybody.

Off in the corner, he could see Christa talking with Bertolt and Marco close by, doing consecutives with his rifle. Petra and Annie came over to sit with Eren.

Marco started to count off how many he had reached. "Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty!" He stopped his rifle, firmly. "Nice!" To celebrate, he did a toss. Unfortunately, it went a little off to the side and he was unable to catch it. Before any warning could be put into place, the rifle made contact with Christa's leg. "Christa!" Marco tried, but it was too late.

"Ow!" She yelled, fumbling off to the side. Marco and Bertolt instantly ran to her assistance. She balanced herself on one leg, but otherwise appeared unharmed.

"Damn, that's going to leave an awesome mark." Annie noted from Eren's side.

"Right?" Petra said in agreement.

Eren could only stare, wide eyed at the two girls in mortification. "Are you joking? That looked like it really hurt! Those things are heavy and solid!"

"Oh..." Annie said. "Yeah, I guess."

He blinked a few times. 'Am I in a madhouse?!' He looked back at Christa and saw that she was now texting, remaining completely stoic and uncaring about what just happened.

~

Hanji came in with Levi trailing behind them. The two were carrying large wooden circles. "Get in your line up position!" Hanji directed.

After everyone was in their place, Hanji and Levi set down the three black wheels in a line, separating the two sides.

Hanji then explained their purpose. "These are sturdy enough that you can walk on them, but loose enough that of you give a little push, you can spin on them. We've got an idea for later parts of the routine involving these, so we should get used to having them out now."

Just as everything was set into place, two extra students came in through the door.

"Knock, knock!" Connie yelled. Reiner followed in behind him. "Heyy Sasha!" He pointed in the girl's direction.

"Heyy Connie!" She replied back, pointing just as he did.

Reiner gave a curt wave to his four friends and they returned the gesture. The two walked over to the bleachers and sat down.

Eren raised an eyebrow. "Hanji?" The instructor faced him. "Are they allowed to just come in and watch?"
"Oh, yeah. Anybody is allowed to have their friends come in and watch as we practice."

Eren thought for a moment. Maybe if Armin and Mikasa were up for it, they would be able to come and watch. This excited him, perhaps his future practices would be less awkward.

~

The practice ended sooner than Eren expected it. The team had added a few more steps to the routine, but had yet to incorporate the black wheels. Everybody put the wheels and floor away and we're now seated in the center of the gym, waiting for notes.

"Okay, that was a very good practice!" Hanji began. "I think everyone collectively did well, so I don't suppose I should single out anything that any of you would need to work on. Just practice the new parts we learned today and of course, everything else. Now, I can't promise anything, but sometime next week, we may be revealing our song for this year." There was a hushed murmur amongst the group. "We have practice again on Thursday, I'm sure you already know. And don't forget to be at the school at 6:30 on Friday for the football game! I think that's everything. You're all dismissed!"

Eren stood up, watching Sasha leave with Connie and Reiner, Bertolt, Annie, Nanaba and Marco all leave together. He overheard Isabel and Farlan talking about the possibilities of what the song would be. He walked over to Hanji, while they taped up some equipment. "Why do we have to be at the football game?"

Hanji craned their neck to face Levi. "Levi, dumpling, can you explain it to him? I'm a bit busy."

Levi groaned at the nickname, but came over to stand next to them regardless. Eren faced him but avoided eye contact. He also felt like asking why everyone swarmed around him earlier, but that didn't seem to be happening any time soon. "Color guard isn't funded by the school. We're a self sufficient sport because we were part of the budget cuts. We work the concession stands at our football games and keep all of the profit. Everyone except the people in football are required to help."

Eren nodded to show that he understood and walked away nervously. He didn't see the calculating stare Levi had.

"Eren, come back here." Levi said sternly. Eren went rigid, but returned nonetheless. "You don't need to say something to someone in order to be rude. Sometimes ignoring them is disrespectful. Now, face me when we talk."

Eren fixed his gaze on Levi and was immediately met with those glorious, stormy orbs. He didn't need a mirror to know that his face was heating up. "R-right. I'm sorry."

Levi had his brows knitted together in confusion. After a brief moment, they smoothed out and he smirked slightly. "It's okay. Just remember to face people when you're speaking with them. It's basic manners." He then brushed past Eren to find his belongings. Eren watched the subtle sway of Levi's hips as he walked over to his bag. Then, as Levi bent over to pick up his things, Eren stared at his perfectly round- 'Look away! Stop it! Stop that right now!' Eren reprimanded himself and forced his gaze to go in another direction.

Quickly, he gathered his equipment and book bag and rushed out of the gym and out of the school.
In an instant, as the rain bore down on him, he was greeted with what was now his second favorite storm.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, memories. I still have two pairs of padded gloves, though they're slowly deteriorating. Oh well, I never needed them anyway. Some people have an easier time without gloves and their hands just don't get hurt. (Example: Levi & me) Their song will be revealed in the next chapter or a couple after that, so I don't know about you guys, but that gets me excited. You're more than welcome to guess, but I hardly think that I've given it away... at all. By the way, some schools (ours) actually have to do that concession stand thing. (That is, until they cut that sport anyway, which is stupid.) Side note, the next chapter for Just Say Something is halfway finished, but I needed a break, I got overwhelmed with the feels. It'll be out no later than next week. In all honesty I just want to finish that fic so I can immerse myself in the writing of this one. But don't worry, I'm not going to rush it, I don't want it to be crappy. So yeah, that's that. How will Eren deal with his crush in later chapters???? Let's find out. Sorry for any errors, I don't edit. My tumblr is dr-s--art. If you liked this, please leave a comment or kudos! I really appreciate them! ^_^ thank you so much for reading!!!
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

It's Eren's first time helping out with the concession stands and he's faced with more awkward moments than he'd appreciate.

Chapter Notes

Sorry if this chapter is late, I've been really busy. However, I'm very happy with how it turned out and I hope you guys like it too! Winter guard is mentioned in this, so in case there's somebody who doesn't know what that is, it's just another name for color guard. Color guard can also be referred to as drill team. I just wanted to clear that up. Anyways, go ahead and read! ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thursday's practice was particularly embarrassing for Eren. They had started to work on a separate routine that would be used later on and they had put the black wheels to use. As it turned out, one use was for Eren and Levi (along with two other mirroring groups) to perform a little trick on them. They were required to set one foot on the wheel, while grasping the other's hand, using the other person for balance and rotate once. The fact that he was relying completely on Levi to not fall was nerve wracking. The fact that they were so close and made contact, made him a little flustered. Eren almost refused to do it. When asked what was wrong, he started out saying that it felt weird to do it with another guy. This caused quite a few members to roll their eyes and mutter about their annoyance. Some even went as far as to say that if he made another homophobic statement, they'd be forced to tear their hair out.

Another embarrassing instance, was when a few members talked about the last year's winter guard and he asked what winter guard was. A collective groan went through the team. Some put their heads in their hands. Others said things like 'how did he make it this far?' and 'either he goes or I go.' but it was all simply teasing. Though, that didn't make it any less embarrassing.

The two instructors stressed that everyone was required to go to the football game the next day. Eren was slightly disappointed that he wouldn't be able to watch the whole game with his friends, like they normally did. Hanji explained how everyone would take shifts, so that they could all watch at least a little bit of the game, but still work the concession stand.

~

"Do we get discounts because we're friends with a member of the guard?" Armin asked, sitting at Eren's desk in his room. Eren was dismissed from his lesson with Levi, so he invited Armin over.
Eren rolled his eyes. "Please, I'm in the guard and I don't get a discount."

Mikasa giggled from her spot on Eren's beanbag chair. "What are you going to be doing? Flipping burgers? Handling the cash register? Making the drinks?"

"They haven't told me yet. I guess I'll find out when we get there."

It was predicted that it was going to be cold that night so the three bundled up a bit. Eren put on a gray hoodie, while Armin wore a heavy blue jacket and Mikasa wore an oversized black coat, keeping her scarf that she never really forgot to wear.

"We'll sit near the edge of the bleachers, so we can meet up with you when you're free." Armin promised.

"Thanks, I appreciate it." Eren looked at his clock. "We should probably get going now, I don't want Levi to bitch at me for being late."

"That guy's an asshole." Mikasa said. "He'll bitch at you for no reason."

"Hey, he's not an asshole." Eren defended. Both his friends eyed him curiously and he retreated. "I mean... he's not just an asshole, he's a huge asshole." He smirked uncomfortably to add to his facade.

Armin and Mikasa shrugged it off, and the three got going.

~

The ground was still wet from the major storm that took place a couple nights prior. The grass was incredibly damp, while the pavement was a beautiful, shining black. Eren appreciated the remnants of the rain.

The football field was behind the school and had wide bleachers in front of it and one needed to enter through a fence to get on the field. Next to the bleachers, off to the side, was a little white hut with two service windows and a door, where the concessions were being held. A table was being set out to the side of it, as was a grill.

Eren sighed. "This is my stop. I'll see you guys in a bit." He waved goodbye to his friends and put his hands in his hoodie's pocket, walking over to the hut.

As he walked over, he recognized a familiar face, firing up the grill. "Eren, you made it." Rico said.

"Did I have a choice?" He joked.

Rico blew out an amused breath. "Not really. Take those boxes from underneath the table and display the candy nicely. That'll be your first station."

Eren lazily took out the box and did as he was instructed. He noticed that all the candy had a familiar theme. He looked over at the burgers that were about to be grilled and they had the same theme. He caught Rico's attention. "Are those burgers...?"

"Vegan." She filled in. "Yup, this brand tastes just like the real thing. No one has to know."
"Let me guess," Eren said. "It was-"

"Isabel's idea."

"Right." Eren took out the last thing in the box, which was a register with a few bills for starting change. "Am I the only one here?"

"Nope." Rico replied, cutting open the packages of vegan burgers and vegan hot dogs. "The Ackermans, Hanji and Marco are here. They're in the hut setting up other hot food and the drinks. Actually, if you're done there, make yourself useful and go help them."

Eren entered the hut, feeling apprehensive. It was no surprise that the first person to greet him was Isabel with a side hug. "Eren! You're here!"

"Hey, Isabel." He found himself smiling a bit. She always welcomed him warmly, it made him feel like she was his little sister. "Do you need help with anything?"

"Yes!" She dropped her arms and made an overwhelmed expression. "I have loads of soda I have to put in the coolers, it's gonna take forever!"

He took a look around. The hut wasn't nearly as small as it looked from the outside. Everyone greeted him from a different spot, doing their own job. Farlan was starting up coffee makers, Hanji was figuring out the cash register, Marco was stirring soup and Levi must've been helping Isabel. He stood up from his spot on the ground next to a cooler. "Look who showed up early." He muttered.

Eren reminded himself what Levi had said about looking him in the eyes when they talk. "Uh, yeah. I didn't want to upset you." That came out wrong.

Levi looked at him curiously, stepping up to him. Eren could feel his face heating up. Fortunately, Levi walked past him to busy himself with another task. Eren and Isabel took Levi's spot, taking all the soda cans out of their cases and putting them into the coolers. Eren also was left in charge of adding more ice.

"You're gonna have SO much fun!" Isabel started. "It gets busy at times, but you'll like getting into the swing of things."

"I'm sure I will." Eren said, dripping with sarcasm. Eren felt very thirsty all of the sudden. He looked around to see if anyone was watching him. He tried to sneak a Coca Cola into his pocket without anyone noticing. One drink couldn't hurt, right?

As he reached for more ice, he saw a pair of transparent combat boots, with bright purple socks underneath, standing in front of him. He looked up to see a figure with a shawl that had star constellations on it, staring at him intensely. "Whatya doin there, hm?" Hanji asked with a knowing smile.

"Uh... nothing." Eren lied.

"Yeah, sure." Hanji stuck out their hand. "Pay up. We can't have any thievery going on. We need as much money as we can get. Sodas are two dollars."

Eren huffed, and dug into his pants pocket and gave them two dollars. He was left with one dollar in that pocket.

"Thank you for your purchase!" Hanji skipped away, putting the money where it belonged.
Eren internally panicked when he saw Levi ask Hanji something while pointing in his direction. Hanji only nodded, but that's all it took for Levi to look at him in disgust. Eren tried to appear as apologetic as possible, but Levi just turned away, pinching the bridge of his nose. He didn't have time to deal with him. Needless to say, Eren wasn't making a great impression so far.

~

One by one, each of the guard members came. Annie and Nanaba came with poster boards under their arms.

"What are those for?" Eren asked.

The two girls showed him their posters which read "Go Big Bert!" and "No Mercy, Reiner!"

"Showing our support for the team's MVPs!" Nanaba answered proudly.

The two left to do their jobs inside the hut. It was almost time for the game to start and people were already buying food. Eventually, Ymir showed up and took her place next to Eren. 'It could be worse.' Eren thought. Levi could be helping him with the candy. Sasha came soon after, helping Rico prepare the hot dogs and burgers. Almost everyone was there.

Petra showed up ten minutes later. The entire guard looked at her, worried. She looked very stressed out and overworked. Not to mention she was covered in mud instead of the usual dirt.

Levi came out to confront her. "Petra, where were you?"

"I'm sorry, Levi. I just... the storm, it was so bad. My garden... I had to..." Petra seemed a bit out of breath, as if she had been working in the garden for a long time and rushed to the game.

"It's okay, but you know you can't handle the window, right? You understand that?" Petra nodded solemnly. "Okay... I suppose you'll have to wash your hands and take care of preparing the hot drinks in the hut."

Petra gave a sigh of relief, glad that she wasn't told that she wouldn't be of use. Eren found himself feeling sympathetic. He felt sorry for her and hoped that her garden would be okay.

Before they got really packed, Eren thought he should get a little something to eat. He walked around to the first window and noticed that Levi was the only one currently available to provide food. Eren groaned, he just couldn't win. Levi was leaning on the counter, bored and playing with his lip ring, using his tongue. An idiosyncrasy that drove Eren mad. Levi also happened to make a plain, black sweatshirt look irresistible on a man.

Eren gulped and took a shaky step towards the window. "You're working the window?"

"That's right." Levi drawled out.

"When are you switching jobs?" Eren hoped that he could avoid him and get something later.

"I'm actually doing this the whole night." Eren breathed out a shy 'oh.' Levi rested his chin on his hand. "Do you need something?"

"Uh... what can I get for one dollar?"


Levi looked at him exasperatedly. When Eren still appeared confused, Levi pointed at a sign placed next to the window, that had prices.

"Oh. I'll get a bag of chips." Eren handed him his dollar. Levi took it and tossed him a small bag of potato chips. It wasn't much and it was probably half full of air, but it was something. Eren muttered his thanks and returned to his station.

~

The game had just started and Eren could hear Marco, Annie and Nanaba's cheers. They had the first break. They stood up against the fence, watching the game and hollering for their friends. Eren took a glance at the three when he wasn't busy and saw that Nanaba held up a sign, as did Annie, only she was sitting on Marco's shoulders.

Handling the candy wasn't overly hard, but Eren didn't consider it fun either. But it was calming. Ymir didn't say anything rude to him aside from her wishing that Christa could work with her instead of Eren. Though, that was understandable.

It was a bit awkward when other students started chuckling after they paid Eren and walked away. It was well known that it was the color guarders who worked the concession stand and he hoped that no one thought negative things about him for it. Eren hoped even more that they didn't assume things about him. He started to wish that he had a job on the inside, even if he did have to face Levi.

Ymir noticed his sour mood all of the sudden and figured it'd be polite to console him. "What's with that dumb face?"

Eren wasn't even offended. "People are laughing at me." He mumbled.

Ymir scanned the dispersed crowd. "They are?"

"Yeah, whenever someone finishes paying me, they turn around and laugh."

Ymir tried to think of what could've triggered the mocking. "Why do you think that is?"

"They're probably thinking that I'm gay, even though I'm not." He said in a bitter tone.

"Oh? Why do you think that's what they're thinking?" Ymir tried to stifle her laughter.

"Because," he gritted out. "Everybody knows that if a guy joins color guard, he's gay. Except for me, I had no choice."

"Pfft, well that can't be further from the truth." Ymir crossed her arms. "You see, color guard originated in the military. It was first used in the civil war, which as you probably know, the military was only open to men at that time. I can guarantee you that some if not most of those men were straight. They needed a person to bare the 'colors,' which was the flag. And thus, color guard was born. Color guard started off with, for the most part, straight men, so the jokes on you, you idiot. Also, Farlan is straight, in case you didn't know. And Bertolt is... hmm. We don't really know. He never told us... gosh, what is he?" She was now thinking out loud to herself.

Aside from the minimal insults here and there, Eren was thankful for that little explanation.
Though, he wished the mass majority was aware of those little facts.

"I mean, he's never shown any signs of liking anybody..." Eren had stopped listening completely at this point. "He can't be straight up gay, I would've picked up on that."

Eren drummed a random, sloppy beat on the table, waiting for anything to catch his eye. Luckily, he didn't have to wait long. Mikasa and Armin came into his view and he smiled, relieved.

"So, how are sales going?" Armin asked.

"Are they working you to the bone?" Mikasa joked.

"Ugh, you have no idea. This sucks!" Eren exaggerated.

"Watch it, Jaeger." Rico warned, flipping a burger.

The three chortled discreetly.

"How's the game?" Eren inquired.

"It's a pretty fair game. Both the teams are evenly matched. I think it's going to be close when they finish." Mikasa provided.

"Man, I wish I could watch it with you guys." Eren frowned.

"Well, there's always your break."

Armin added, trying to be helpful.

"Yeah, but I don't know when that'll be."

"We'll wait for you. But now, we're going to take a bunch of this candy off your hands." Mikasa took some bills out of her pocket, as did Armin.

Eren smiled, grateful for their contribution and helped them make the transaction. They left, wishing him luck and took back their seats at the bleachers.

"Those your friends?" Ymir asked, jabbing her thumb in their direction.

"Yeah, I'm gonna hang out with them once I get my break."

"They didn't laugh when they walked away." Ymir lowered her voice into a mocking tone.

"Shut up." Eren elbowed her lightly, causing her to snicker. For once, he felt like he was on good terms with her.

~

During a particularly slow part of the night, Levi and Isabel came out to the front to greet Eren. Eren tried to focus strictly on Isabel.

"Hey, Isabel." Eren gave a small wave. "What are you doing out here?"

"I wanted to see how my new best buddy was doing in sales." She said.
Levi snapped his gaze to her from behind. He looked a little offended. Eren on the other hand, felt honored that she already thought so highly of him.

"Oh, sales are going fine, I guess. I've never done this before, so I don't know what counts as good or bad." He shrugged.

Ymir leaned in from the side and interjected. "We're doing really well."

"That's great!" Isabel redirected her attention to Eren and slid a few bills on the table. "And I might've come out for some candy too." She whispered.

Eren gladly accepted the money and let her choose her candy.

"I came with to supervise." Levi said. "I don't trust her around you, you're a bad influence."

Eren widened his eyes. Bad influence? It dawned upon Eren that he was referring to when he tried to steal a soda.

"I told you," Isabel whispered to Levi, though Eren could hear perfectly well. "He probably misunderstood and thought that he was aloud to have free food."

Levi rolled his eyes and dropped the subject.

"Hey Ymir, it's your break." Rico called from the side. Ymir left and she faced Eren. "Jaeger, I need you to watch this stuff while I get a coat out of my car. Everything's three dollars and I have plenty of stuff already made, so don't try and make more." She turned her attention to Sasha. "You come with me."

Eren nodded and he was left with Levi and Isabel. Just then Eren's stomach grumbled.

"Are you hungry?" Isabel asked. "I'll see if I can sneak out some food for you." She went to hop away.

"No," Levi warned, grabbing a hold of the hood of her green sweatshirt before she could get too far. "If he wants food, he can pay for it."

"Right." Isabel nodded. "I can get you something Eren, just give me the money for whatever you want."

Eren reached into his pocket, realizing that it was empty. He patted his other pocket. Also empty. He checked every pocket he had for some bills or his wallet, and nothing. "Are you kidding me?" He whined. "I think that three dollars was all I had. God dammit."

"No worries!" Isabel smiled. "I got you covered, what do you want?" She took a few dollars out of her pocket.

"That's so nice of you, thanks Izzy." Levi glared at him as he used the nickname. Eren shrunk back.

"Um... I'll take a small soup. I'll pay you back tomorrow."

"You don't have to, this is on me. Be right back!" With that, she slipped away.

Levi stepped up to the table, glaring daggers at Eren. "You stay away from my little sister."

Eren looked at him incredulously. He gave a brief look around to see if there was anyone else in their vicinity. "I'm gay," he hissed. "How much could I do?"
"Trust me, a gay guy who's dead set on staying in the closet can do a lot." Levi hissed back.

"I'm not interested in your sister!" Eren argued.

"Okay, but do everybody a favor and at least be a good influence for her. I've told you already that she looks up to you, so act responsible. That means no stealing shit, but you should know enough to not do that anyways, you brat." Levi pondered over his next sentence. "Besides, what's that thing you Christians say? Thou shalt not steal? Holy fuck, you suck at your religion with all your gayness and robbery and whatnot."

"Shh! Could you keep it down?!" Eren begged.

"Oh please, no one's around to hear me. Calm your ass." Levi said. "Just use your head."

"Okay, I will!" Eren was cut off when Isabel came back.

"Some extra hot soup to warm you up!" She handed him the styrofoam bowl and a plastic spoon.

"Thanks Iz-" the look from Levi made him change his words. "Um, thank you Isabel."

"You're welcome." She smiled back at him.

"Okay, Izzy. I think we should head back now." Levi patted her shoulder and started walking.

As they left, Eren overheard Levi mutter something along the lines of 'You always say I'm your best buddy. What happened?' Eren laughed to himself.

"What's so funny?" Rico asked, walking back to the grill with Sasha, now both in warmer coats.

"Oh, nothing." Eren said.

"Take these." Rico tossed him a pair of gloves. "You look cold as hell."

"Oh... thank you." Why was everyone on the team so kind to him? He didn't think he'd done something that constituted such nice treatment.

~

Eventually, Farlan came to stand next to Eren at the table. "Eren, you're on break now." He told him.

"Really? Thanks!" Eren left excitedly to meet up with his friends. He sat down at the bleachers next to them.

"Hey! You finally got out." Armin said.

"I know right? It took them long enough." He looked out to the field, observing the two teams.

"Who's ahead?"

"It's a tie so far." Mikasa said from the other side of Armin. Eren noticed that her hair has now been put into a long braid.
"When did that happen?" He pointed to her hair.

Armin answered for her. "She got bored with the game and she was tired of waiting for you."

The three laughed. "Sorry it took me so long." Eren said. "I didn't think I'd-"

"Scoot over." A strong force knocked into Eren, causing the three of them to shift to the right. An arm blocked his sight. Eren looked to the hand and saw that it was offering Armin and Mikasa each a bag of chips. When they hesitantly accepted, he looked over to the arm's owner and saw that it belonged to Levi. Eren stiffened and focused on the game. "Oi, do you want it or not?"

Eren looked over and saw that Levi was also offering him some chips. "O-oh, sorry." He took them with a shaky hand.

"So how's the game so far?" Levi asked casually.

Eren remained silent, hoping that one of his friends would answer for him. When no one did, Levi cleared his throat and nudged Eren, making his heart rate go up.

"Well?" Levi lifted that pierced eyebrow, making Eren gulp.

"Oh, uh it's an even match... I think."

"Mn." Levi gazed over at the two sitting next to Eren. He looked at Mikasa and saw how she eyed him cautiously. Levi thought that Eren wasn't above having a fake girlfriend to hide his secret, so he thought he'd ask. "Is she your girlfriend?"

"What?! Ew, no!" Eren gawked at him making a disgusted face.

Mikasa did the same. "Ew ew ew! That's gross!" She said sticking out her tongue.

Levi leaned back, a little surprised by their actions. Armin just watched in shock.

"Mikasa's my sister!" Eren said.

"Oh, sorry." Levi said calmly. "Like step sister or...?"

"I'm adopted." Mikasa filled in.


"Um..." Eren avoided looking into his eyes, even though he knew Levi wouldn't like it.

"Hm?" Levi persisted.

Mikasa saw how uncomfortable Eren looked and it didn't sit well with her. Her blood boiled and she leaned forward to talk at him. "He obviously doesn't want to talk to you. Leave him alone." She barked.

Both Eren and Levi looked at her with raised eyebrows. Levi turned to Eren. "Is that true?" He asked, genuinely concerned.

Eren shook his head. "Yes- I mean no! I just... I... you know?" He turned to Mikasa with pleading eyes. He wanted to tell her to be quiet, but she got a different message. She nodded, signaling that she was going to help. He tried to stop her. But it was to no avail.
"You can just go." She glared at him.

It was Levi's turn to look uncomfortable. He sat back and looked to Eren, who was apologizing silently.

"Oh..." Levi relented. "Fine, I'll go." He stood up and left, not wanting to upset Eren's sister. He knew very well that Eren didn't have that much of a problem with him, but Mikasa apparently did.

Eren watched him walk over to the fence next to Sasha and watched the game. Eren turned back and leaned over to look at Mikasa with a dropped jaw.

She smiled at him. "You're welcome."

"Are you serious right now?!" He spat. "Do you know how rude that was? He probably thinks I hate him now!"

Mikasa lifted an eyebrow. "I thought you did hate him. I did you a favor."

"Well... I don't..." His cheeks flushed lightly. "I mean, he can be a bit much at times but I don't hate him."

Armin looked at him, confused. "Just this morning, you called him a huge asshole. Make up your mind."

Eren looked down at his lap and started fiddling with his gloves that Rico had given him. "Alright... He's not an asshole. Like I said, he can go a little overboard sometimes, but he's not that bad." He heard crunching noises and saw that his friends had opened their bags of chips and started eating them. "And he gave you both food, you couldn't act a little grateful?"

Armin and Mikasa both stifled their laughter as best as they could. "Well, well," Armin said. "Look who's starting to care about being polite to others."

"Shut up." Eren muttered, opening his own bag of chips. He thought about his words and realized that he had indeed changed in how he talked about others. He was far more concerned with other people's feelings, particularly Levi's. The more he thought about it, the more he was compelled to make up for what he let happen. "I'll be back."

He stood up and walked off the bleachers, leaving his friends to their confusion. He stopped a few feet away from where Levi stood, trying to convince himself to go through with his idea. He took a big breath and walked up next to Levi. Levi, noticing the movement from his side, faced Eren.

"I'm sorry if I upset you or your friends." Levi said.

"N-no, it's okay." Eren stammered. "I came over to apologize for how my sister acted. She's under the impression that I don't like you, it's this whole thing..." Eren broke off, shrugging and rolling his eyes to make it seem like he was relaxed and comfortable with the casual conversation. It didn't come across that way. In Levi's opinion, he seemed to be trying too hard.

"She thinks you don't like me?" Levi smirked.

"Y-yeah, I'm not sure where she got that from." Eren said, no longer maintaining eye contact.

"So, you do like me?" Levi turned around, resting his elbows on the metal fence.

"Yes." Eren nodded. Levi blew an amused breath out of his nose and Eren retreated. "Wait! No! I
do like you, but... not how you're thinking. Not that way. As... an acquaintance." He finished lamely, mentally kicking himself.

"Aw, only an acquaintance?" Levi comically stuck out his bottom lip.

Eren willed himself not to stare at his pierced, plump lip when he did that. "Or... something like that."

Levi smirked again. "You know I'm messing with you, right?"

Eren couldn't be sure, but he thought he heard Sasha giggling from beside Levi. Was she eavesdropping? "I knew that." He said a little too quickly. "And I'm messing with you too." He screamed in his head. 'I am so bad at this.' He thought.

Levi smiled and shut his eyes, trying not to break out into laughter. Eren adored that smile and he loved what looked to be the beginning of crow's feet at the edges of Levi's eyes. "God, you're a knockout." He turned around and resumed watching the game.

Eren didn't know if that was a compliment or not, but he took it as one. "Alright... I'll be going back now." He said quietly, shuffling away.

"Okay, go on." Levi's voice was full of mirth as he eyed Eren, waiting for him to officially leave.

As Eren left, he heard Sasha chuckle and whisper to Levi, "He's so awkward!" He knew she didn't mean it in a hostile way, but he still felt embarrassed.

Eren sat back down with his friends and forced himself to focus on the game.

~

Awhile after halftime, Sasha came to Eren and told him that his break was over and he was working at the window next. He reluctantly left and went inside the hut. Hanji steered him to the correct spot and sure enough, it was the one next to Levi. He groaned and accepted his fate.

"Welcome back to the shack." Levi said unenthusiastically.

"Thanks." Eren mumbled. No one was currently in line and Eren really wished their was, so he could have a distraction. After five minutes and nobody showing up at their window, he decided to break the silence. "Why are you at the same station all night?"

Levi shrugged, leaning in the counter with his chin in his hand. "Dunno. Ask Hanji, it was their idea."

Eren turned to said person, who was currently leaning on the wall. "Hanji, how come he's the only one with the same spot the whole night?"

Hanji grinned widely and walked over to whisper in his ear. "We needed some eye candy to attract more customers. Consider it an experiment of sorts. So far, it's going great!"

Eren tried to push away the blush that was creeping onto his face. He nodded and returned to his spot, trying not to look at Levi.
The game had ended quicker than Eren expected, which he was grateful for. There weren't any awkward run ins with Levi and his job at the window wasn't as hard as he thought it would be. As the game was winding down, people started taking care of the leftover food so their wouldn't be much to deal with at the end. Unfortunately, their team didn't win, which put a damper on everyone's mood, but nobody was too upset. When everything was finished, there were only a few simple jobs to do.

After the cleanup, Eren met up with Mikasa and Armin. "You ready to go home?" Mikasa said.

"Yeah, I can't wait." Eren was cut off when Hanji and Isabel came in from both sides, shouting his name.

"Eren! Are you coming with us?" Isabel said, hugging him from the side.

"You have to! It's a right of passage!" Hanji said, grabbing ahold of his arm.


"To Scouts, of course!" Isabel beamed.

"It's this restaurant nearby," Hanji explained. "The food there is so good and you are not an official member of this guard until you've eaten there with the team! This'll be Annie and Bertolt's first time too."

Eren thought it over for a moment. He was hungry. "I don't know, I'm out of money."

"It's all payed for by Rico, no worries." Isabel shook his arm. "So are you going or what?"

Eren eyed his friends, who were now looking like they just wanted to leave. "Can my friends come with?"

"Sure, everyone is invited!" Hanji looked at the two expectantly.

"Armin and I wanted to watch that new movie we bought. I'd like to go with you guys but it's getting late and I want to have time to watch that." Mikasa replied. "Maybe some other time. What about you, Armin?"

"I'm with her on this one." Armin nodded. "You can go if you want to, though."

Eren's stomach growled at that moment. "I think I'm gonna go." His fellow members on either side of him silently celebrated. "I'll be back home later tonight, tell mom and dad where I am, yeah?"

Mikasa nodded. "Well, we'll see you later."

Eren said his goodbyes to his friends and turned back to his teammates. "So, how are we getting there?"
"Oh..." Eren observed Hanji's rather large van. The vehicle looked a little rusty aside from the large mural of a purple dragon on the side.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Hanji asked, gripping his shoulders.

"O-oh, yeah. Definitely." Eren tried to sound as genuine as possible. Hanji didn't seem to notice his false agreement.

"Sorry to say, but everybody has dibs on the front and back seats. You'll have to ride in the back." Hanji slapped his back and made their way to the drivers seat.

Hanji, Levi and Rico occupied the front seats, while Farlan, Isabel and Christa took the back seats. Eren followed the rest of the team to the back.

Petra went to open the back doors and hopped inside. Everyone else was soon to follow. Eren noticed that two nonmembers, Reiner and Connie, also got into the van. He was one of the last to enter and noticed that the inside of the van was even larger than it appeared, but was still a tight squeeze to fit everyone in. The floor had a bright green carpet and Eren felt like he had been transported to the seventies.

"Attention, all van virgins," Hanji hollered. "There are emergency exits in the back and in the front. If you are in the back, feel free to stand up and move around, but for the love of the earth, hold onto something and don't rock the vehicle. Most importantly, if you get bored, there is a scrabble game under the back seats. Alright! Now let's get this show on the road!"

Eren furrowed his brows. "Who can play a game of scrabble in a moving vehicle?"

Farlan craned his neck around to address Eren. "You'd be surprised."

Hanji put in a CD and turned up the volume. "Eren! This is your song!" They yelled.

Before he could get the joke, Personal Jesus by Depeche Mode started playing and everyone on the van shared a laugh. He couldn't really be offended though, he found that he liked the song and he thought the joke was clever.

"Ha ha," Eren said dryly. "Because I'm the Christian guy, very funny." He found himself smiling more than he had planned the whole drive.

~

They all arrived at the restaurant and from the looks of it, Eren already liked it. The walls were all made of light gray stones, which were covered with vines and the lighting spilling out from the inside seemed warm and welcoming. From outside, he looked through the windows and saw a case with baked goods of all sorts on one side and sorted ice cream on the other.

He stepped onto the threshold and was met with a booming voice that rivaled Hanji's volume. "AYY, WHAT'S GOIN ON?"

Nearly everyone on the team yelled right back.
"LOOK WHO IT IS!"
"WE'RE BACK!"
"IT'S BEEN SO LONG!"

Eren looked at the person who started the ruckus. He was a tall man with hair that almost covered his eyes and he had a well-groomed mustache. He towered over the whole group, including Bertolt.

All at once, the team members rushed to him, attacking him with hugs. He returned every one of them.

"Mike!"

"Hanji!" He greeted them.

"Mike!" Isabel came running.

"Izzy!" He patted her on the back.

"Mike!"

"Christa!" The exchange looked like everybody found their long lost relative.

"Sup Mike." Levi muttered quietly, walking right past him.

"Sup Levi." Mike said at a higher volume with an exaggerated jut of the chin, smugly sneering. He knew Levi was happy to see him and he was just as happy. "How many?" Mike clapped his hands.

Levi glanced around briefly. "Table for... a fuck ton."

"Right this way." Mike grabbed menus and led the team to the back of the restaurant where there were several large booths and one round booth. Considering it was so late, there were very few other people in the restaurant. Eren sat next to Isabel, feeling safest with her. "So, how many newbies do we have?"

Hanji cleared their throat. "Well, Reiner and Connie aren't members, but they are friends of the team." They pointed to each of the boys. To which, Mike tipped an imaginary hat and started passing out the menus. "The blondie there is Annie, that tall drink of water over there is Bertolt and this bright eyes right here is Eren." Hanji gestured to each one.

"Oo, quite a few rookies I see! Have any of you been here before?" The five mentioned shook their heads.

"Oh..." Mike sniffled and wiped away a fake tear. "What can I say? I'm a little hurt." He spun on his heel and walked away, going into the kitchen.

Mostly everyone laughed, but Eren looked around nervously. He wasn't sure if he was serious. "Is he not coming back?" Eren asked, which made the others laugh harder.

Soon, Mike came out of a different door, smiling. "So, what can I get you all for drinks?"

He took their orders quickly. "Okay, I'll be back with those soon." With that, he left.

Eren looked over the menu. He nudged Isabel. "Is there a vegan section labeled on this? I don't want to eat something that'll upset you."
Isabel smiled widely. "Good news, it's all vegan! This is the only all vegan restaurant anywhere near here. Isn't that lucky?"

"Really?" Eren was starting to think that this whole vegan thing was getting a little suspicious. "It's so weird, where's all this vegan stuff coming from? You had it at the game and now there's a whole vegan restaurant?"

"There's vegan options everywhere. You just have to look." She shrugged.

Eren dropped the subject. After all, he didn't mind what he ate as long as it tasted good.

~

Awhile later, Mike had brought everyone their drinks, taken their orders and delivered the food. Eren found out that Mike was quite the character and served as great entertainment while they all waited for their food. After everything was severed, he held calm conversations with all the new people. He reached Eren last.

"I've just been informed the you're the only person who's actually new to color guard." Mike said. "So how's the sport been treating you?"

Eren swallowed a bite of his food. "It's hard and I get hurt a lot."

Mike let out a hearty laugh and slapped Eren on the shoulder. "Yeah, you'll get use to it though. We all do."

"Wait," Eren lifted an eyebrow. "Were you in color guard?"

"Yeah, I was on the team for six years. Graduated last year." Mike crossed his arms, smiling at the fond memories he was having. He cocked his head when he noticed Eren trying to be discreet when laughing. "Don't believe me?"

"I believe you... It's just that you don't strike me as the kind of person to join color guard."

"If you'll notice, years of color guard can build up a lot of muscle." Mike started to flex comically. "If you keep up with this for a few years, you'll be jacked. Mark my words." Eren nodded in understanding. "So, how's your food? I smelled it cooking earlier and I'm a little jealous that you get to eat it and I don't."

Eren looked down at his plate and back up at Mike. "It's really good."

"Good." Mike nodded and turned to start a conversation with someone else.

"Eren, scoot over." Isabel said. Eren complied and noticed that Levi was stepping over the seat of his booth to sit down next to Isabel. Eren stiffened. He had had enough uncomfortable moments with the guy already. He was dreading any interaction with him. Luckily for him, it didn't seem like Levi was going to converse with him anytime soon.

~
The clanging sound of silverware hitting cups filled the restaurant during the dessert portion of the meal. Eren looked around and saw that nearly the entire group was taking their forks and lightly tapping them against their glasses. Annie, Rico and Levi were doing it without any real enthusiasm.

Hanji stood up from their spot at the round booth, holding up their cup. "I believe it's high time for a toast! This one goes to all of us of course, but particularly the new members." They turned to face Bertolt. "Bert, I think I speak for everyone when I say that we are impressed that you can take on as many activities that you have and still excel in all of them. I don't think half of us could do what you're doing. You are one tough fella!" A universal hum of agreement went around and Bertolt smiled to himself. After losing the game, the toast had picked up his mood. Next, they turned to Annie. "Annie. Holy shit, you have some skill! We are all incredibly happy that you joined us and you're a terrific addition to the team. Welcome aboard!" Last was Eren. "Now for Eren. In all honesty, we thought you were an asshole in the beginning." Eren frowned and everyone shared a laugh. "BUT! But... you didn't turn out that way. Not completely anyway." Another frown from Eren, though this one was half hearted. "Though you seemed to be apprehensive about joining, you're a hard worker. Yes, you have said some questionable things-" Eren wondered where this was going. "But..." Hanji seemed to think over their next words. "I think you've changed... you're like a ... a Christian extremist gone rogue. And for that we appreciate you." Everyone looked at Eren pensively, as if that title fit him. "To the rookies!"

The group raised their glasses, yelled 'cheers!' and took a drink.

"Congratulations, Eren! You're officially a member!" Isabel said, shaking his shoulder. He smiled to himself. These people accepted him and he was grateful to be in their presence. At that moment, he promised himself to prove himself worthy of their company.

Chapter End Notes

Just a warning, if I don't have any chapters on either of my fics posted for awhile, it's because I'm so busy right now. I have all this work to do for my science fiction class, finals are coming up and I'm literally not even going to be home for the next three days. I'm going to try my hardest to get another chapter of one of my fics out by next week, but I can't promise anything. With that being said, I hope everyone liked this chapter, if you did, please leave a comment or a kudos! (Your comments are so nice, I am blessed.) I'm sorry for any errors, I don't edit. My tumblr is dr-s--art. Thanks for reading!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Eren attends another practice, filled with energy. He quickly figures out that he will need that energy to work off a bad case of jealousy.

Chapter Notes

Warning: there is a description of a bruise forming, so sorry if that's triggering. It's a brief section though, you can skip it if need be. Also, the restaurant I used in the last chapter was based off of a real one I read about on tumblr. I can't for the life of me remember the name of it & I can't find the post, but if I ever do, I'll leave a link. Okay, I hope you like this chapter! (I'm SO SORRY FOR THE WAIT!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren returned home rather late, though neither of his parents really minded since they'd been previously informed. He walked into a dark house with everyone already asleep. The light from the television, streaming in from the living room was the only thing that allowed him to see where he was going. He tiptoed into the living room to see why it was on and noticed Armin and Mikasa passed out on the couch. Their film was stuck on the menu screen and the volume was barely audible.

Feeling a bit guilty for leaving them to themselves, Eren reluctantly slipped away and went upstairs to his bedroom. He hadn't expected to have such a fun night, even if it was a little awkward at parts. The guard was finally starting to accept him, that was an improvement. This night was definitely one he wasn't going to forget. The dinner portion of the night had been passed in such a friendly atmosphere. Plenty of people included him in conversations, while actually caring about what he had to say. The food was amazing and he started thinking about going back very soon. Overall, he was grateful to have had a good time despite the fact that he didn't want to sacrifice his time with his normal friends.

He checked his phone to see if he had gotten any messages since he hadn't checked it in awhile. To his surprise, a strange number had sent him over a couple dozen pictures and a text saying "thought you'd like 2 have these pics."

He opened the messages and scrolled through the photos. They were all pictures from that night. Some of them had been taken at the game, others were in Hanji's van and a few were from the restaurant. He saw one of Nanaba, Annie and Marco cheering, some that showed the guard laughing in the van, a few of him smiling while talking to some of the other members at the diner. But the ones that really made him hold his breath were the ones of him and Levi. Whoever sent them had caught a perfect shot of when Levi was laughing at Eren's awkwardness and Eren smiling slightly. There was also an up close photo of Hanji with their arm slung around Levi's shoulder with him looking mildly annoyed at the fact that Hanji posed with a peace sign.
By the angles that the pictures were taken from at the restaurant, Eren could guess who had sent them, though he wanted to confirm his theory.

Eren: who is this?

Shortly after he sent the text, his phone buzzed with a reply. 'its Izzy!'

Eren: how did you get my number?

Isabel: I got it from ur blond friend. I wanted 2 send u these pics so u could remember how much fun we had!

Eren smiled at how thoughtful Isabel was. She was right, they did have fun. He was actually thankful that she had gone through the effort to send the pictures to him. Another minute later, she sent another text.

Isabel: dont worry. I gave ur number 2 Levi

A surge of panic rushed through Eren. Why would she do that? Did she know?

Eren: why?!

Isabel: bc he's the instructor. And u have private lessons with him. This makes things easier right?

Eren: I guess. Thank you for the pictures, that was nice of you.

Isabel: ur welcome!

Eren cringed at her grammar, but it also made him smile. Besides that, his heart was now racing over how Levi had his phone number. He tried to calm himself down. Isabel was the one to think of giving him his number, Levi hadn't asked. Or had he? Eren couldn't ask Isabel or Levi, that would be too obvious. He didn't want Levi to know he cared about something so minuscule.

He sat at his desk and scrolled through the photos again, saving them as he went. He would pause every so often to simply admire the ones with Levi. Eren adored how all his features were so pronounced and he loved the aura he gave off. Even in the picture where Levi was laughing, he seemed like a force to be reckoned with. The more Eren stared, the more he realized he was in too deep.

'It doesn't matter how much I like him,' Eren thought to himself. 'It's not likely I'd ever get a chance with him.'

He looked at the clock and saw that it was later than he thought. So, he saved Isabel's number in his contacts and went to bed so he could wake up early for practice.

~

Eren was woken up by the screech of his alarm clock that he was starting to regret ever using. He forced himself to get ready and gather his things for guard practice, though not much convincing was needed. He woke up with an amazing amount of energy.

Downstairs, he packed his lunch, keeping Isabel's feelings in mind all the while and jumping from
place to place. He took a plastic water bottle out of the fridge and threw it in the bag. Moments later, he was greeted with a yawning Armin and a drowsy Mikasa.

"Sorry I didn't come back with you guys last night." Eren said.

"That's alright." Armin said, scratching his head. "Did you have fun?"

"Yeah," Eren replied, reaching from cabinet to cabinet to find more food and containers. "I only went for the food, but it was actually pretty nice to hang out with them all."

His friends watched his movements for a few moments. "How are you so awake? It's so early." Mikasa asked.

Eren looked at her with knitted brows, still hopping around the kitchen, trying to fulfill his need to move. "... It's 11:30? And I just have a lot of energy, I guess." It dawned at him that this was a good thing. He could use all of that extra energy for practice. Perhaps if he worked really hard, he could gain Levi's attention and impress him with his effort.

Mikasa and Armin started picking through the cupboards, looking for breakfast tiredly. Eren watched them move in a lazy manner and he felt worse for abandoning them. He could be just as exhausted with them, not that he wanted to get out of his overly energetic state.

"Hey guys, I have an idea." Eren waited until they both faced him to continue, happily hopping over to the fridge. "If you'd like to, you can come to practice with me. We could hang out when there's breaks and you could get to see what we do. I'll pack extra in my lunch for you both if you'll go."

Mikasa lifted a curious brow. "What happened to 'color guard is so stupid?' What happened to it 'not being worth your time?' Are you trying to put us through a few hours of boredom?"

Armin and Mikasa sniggered a bit at Eren's sudden enthusiasm. "... Okay, it isn't the coolest thing in the world," Eren tried to cover up his tracks. "But it's not actually... all that bad. You don't have to go if you don't want to, but friends are allowed. So I just thought..." Eren trailed off, shrugging.

"I'll go." Armin perked up.

"I'll go too. It'll be fun to see what you guys do." Mikasa agreed.

Eren found himself smiling. "Alright then. I'll just pack you guys some things to eat and we'll head over."

~

The trio made their way over to the school, walking side by side. Eren could hardly wait to get active and start running through their routine. He felt so fidgety, even as they walked. When they entered through the doors, Eren couldn't take it anymore, he needed to do something. "You guys dare me to walk on my hands the rest of the way there?" The gym was a ways away and doing such a thing would require a lot of concentration.

"No." Mikasa said plainly.
"Are you sure about that?" Eren tried, nudging both of their shoulders.

"Yep." Armin nodded.

"You guys are so crazy." Eren shoved his flag bag at Mikasa, forcing her to hold it and did the same to Armin with their lunches. "I can't believe you're making me do this." Within a matter of seconds, he bent over, placing his palms on the ground.

"Literally no one is asking you to do this." Armin stated.

"If you insist!" Eren happily lifted himself off the ground and began walking forward on his hands.

"Wait, no, stop." Mikasa said sarcastically, lugging the flag bag. She turned her attention to Armin. "You know there's no point in trying to deter him, right?"

"I know." Armin sighed.

The two followed their overly excited friend down the hallway that led to the gymnasium. Eren kept the same pace the whole time, never faltering, which wasn't surprising. This kind of thing was normal for him and his friends had made peace with it. That's what they got for hanging out with the parkour kid. It was actually a little amusing for them at times. He had the energy of a child and the skill level of an olympic champion.

Eren knew he reached the gym when his hands passed the glossy floors and he heard a round of stifled laughter from his teammates.

"Eren you made it, you can get down now." Mikasa set down his flag bag, no longer needing to carry it.

"I wanna see how long I can go." Eren replied. He walked forward a couple feet and started turning around. As he looked ahead of him, his gaze landed on a pair of black socks.

"Your shirt is riding up." Their owner noted flatly.

At the recognition of the voice, Eren's breath hitched, causing him to lose his balance. He saw the feet move out of his way as he started flailing his legs, failing to regain his composure. He tipped forward and landed on his back, hitting the ground with a loud thud. Eren scrambled to pull his shirt back down to cover himself up. He looked up and saw Levi staring back down at him with an amused smirk and a quirked brow. He hoped that the heat he felt in his cheeks wasn't an indication of how red they were. Eren didn't want to think about how stupid he looked, not when Levi was standing right in front of him in his dark, revealing workout clothes.

"I didn't know an exhibitionist could be so modest." Levi teased. So maybe impressing Levi wasn't working at the moment. "I see you brought your friends?"

Eren stood up and looked away as he nodded.

"They can stay, as long as they don't distract you when we work." Levi stalked away, leaving Eren to his embarrassment. "They're not the distracting ones." Eren thought to himself.

Mikasa leaned in to whisper to Eren. "I don't like that guy, he's such a creep. Did you see the way he looked at you?"

'Yeah, and I never want to forget it.' Eren wanted to say. "I did, but I promise he's not that bad. Please don't do anything that'll make him angry."
"I won't, but only if he stays in line. I'm not going to be quiet if he's being a jerk to you." Mikasa frowned at Levi.

Armin tried to diffuse the tension. "Hey, Eren. Where should we stay while you guys practice?"

Eren gave a brief glance around before he pointed him in the right direction. "You can sit on the bleachers. That's usually where I see people go." Eren watched his friends shuffle away to go and sit down. As they seated themselves, Eren noticed that there was an unfamiliar man sitting not too far away. From what he could tell at a distance, the man was rather tall and had blond hair. It occurred to him that he may have seen him somewhere, but he couldn't be sure. The stranger seemed to be relaxed, taking vague notice of Armin and Mikasa's presence.

Eren was slightly alarmed when he saw him light up as Levi walked over to talk to him. Levi also seemed quite pleased to be talking with him. Eren started to feel bitter over the fact that they were speaking so casually and fondly. Why couldn't he talk like that with Levi? What made that other guy so special? Unjustified jealousy bubbled up inside Eren and he felt the palms of his hands getting sweaty with anger.

Just then, Levi said something that made the other man laugh, causing Levi to smile. It wasn't fair, or at least that's what Eren thought. He couldn't explain why the whole thing irked him so much, they were probably just chatting about something unimportant. But it stirred a possessive feeling in Eren. At that moment, he decided that he'd do anything he could during this practice to win the attention and hopefully the praise of Levi.

~

Eren had completely forgotten that his friends were even in the same place. He was focused entirely on putting forth every bit of his effort that he had to excel in everything they did.

He forced himself to stretch farther than what was needed, causing him to feel sore. He pushed the pain away though, not wanting Levi to think he couldn't handle it. That plan may have backfired, because Levi hadn't stopped to help him and as much as Eren wanted to impress him, he also wanted to be near Levi.

Running wasn't the most comfortable thing he'd gone through. He hid every sign of weakness and laziness he had in him and when it came time for the quick sprint, he used everything he had left in him to bolt past all the others. It helped that this activity allowed him to let off some steam.

As the team was given time to take a quick drink, Levi eyed Eren with a concerned expression. Eren, noticing this, stood up straight, faced forward and held back the need to take in huge gulps of air after that workout. That probably wasn't the best idea he'd had that day, but he didn't care.

"Alright, everyone!" Hanji hollered, clapping their hands together. "Get in your positions, we're doing a run through!"

Once everybody was in their designated spots, Hanji continued with an announcement. "Okay, after we have a few successful run throughs, I'm going to be joining you guys. I've finally figured out a cohesive routine that'll work with the existing one. Everyone ready?"

There was a unanimous agreement and they started their routine, tossing their flags into the air. Eren may have caught his flag a little late, having used more force than required to toss it.
Regardless, he caught up to the rest of the team and performed to the best of his abilities. He kept an intense facial expression throughout the entire thing without even realizing it. He knew that Levi wasn't going to be watching him the whole time, as he had his own work to focus on, but even little glances to Eren were enough to motivate him to do his best. The ground work was the most rewarding, as it was actually part of the routine to pound the ground, seemingly out of frustration.

When they finished, Eren's breath picked up. It was expected after the amount of work he did, but he still mentally kicked himself for letting his exhaustion show. He looked over to Levi how was staring at him with a face of utter confusion. It bothered Eren that he appeared to be worried rather than fascinated.

"Eren, very good effort!" Hanji praised him. "It would be best if you didn't push yourself so much, but I'm digging the enthusiasm! Good work."

Eren prided himself for a brief moment but was then brought back down when he remembered that it was Levi's attention he wanted to grab.

The guard got back into their starting positions for another run through. This time, Eren cursed under his breath when his flag hit the floor, sending a loud ring through the gym. Everyone's eyes landed on him as he shamefully picked up his equipment.

Hanji crossed their arms, smirking amusedly at Eren. "Alright, off to the side. Twenty tosses. If you drop it doesn't count."

Eren huffed out and agitated sigh and stalked off to the corner. Dropping his flag wasn't going to get him anywhere with Levi. As the rest of the team kept practicing, Eren tossed his flag over and over again, becoming more furious as time went on and as he dropped more times than caught. He stole a couple glances at his friends and saw how uncomfortable they seemed. Eren started feeling guilty, he'd brought them, thinking that it would be fun, but instead he was acting like a child.

Eventually, the constant clanging noises were too distracting for the team to continue and Levi walked over to Eren. "This is getting ridiculous, let me help you."

"I'm fine, I can do it." Eren hissed back defiantly.

Levi cocked an eyebrow at him, folding his arms in disbelief. "Is that so?" Eren nodded. "Then do it. You're obviously not doing something right if you keep dropping."

This was getting to be embarrassing for Eren. He meant to impress Levi, but now he needed assistance. What a poor start. Still, he was going to try to do something worthy of Levi's attention. Eren readied himself and used all his strength to toss his flag. Unfortunately, he used too much strength and even Levi had to move out of the way as it made contact with the ground.

"Okay, I see what you're doing-" Levi started.

"I can get it!" Eren argued, sending the flag to its same fate as the previous toss. He scrambled to pick it up and prepared for another attempt.

Levi stopped him by grabbing his wrist. "Listen to me," he said firmly. "You can't keep doing the same thing and think it's going to work eventually. Now you need to-"

"No." Eren glared at him, yanking his arm out of his grasp.

Levi's eyebrows shot up. "No?" He stood up straight and narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean 'no'?"
Eren started to sweat. He knew he should've started cooperating but he couldn't seem to convince himself to do that. "I don't need your help." He said reluctantly quieter, but with the same determined eyes.

"I disagree." Levi said with a venomous tone. "Out of the, what, twelve tries you've had now? You've only caught two. And even then, you haven't caught them correctly."

"I just need some time. I can do this."

"I know, but I'm trying to help you here. Just listen to-"

"I can do it!" Eren shouted, attracting the stares of everyone. The guard had stopped to watch the argument. Mikasa was being calmed by Armin, as she appeared to be enraged by Levi provoking Eren. Even the stranger started staring. Eren avoided Levi's gaze, but stood his ground.

Levi sighed. His eyes softened when he saw how worked up Eren was getting. "I know you can." He said in a more tame voice, surprising Eren. "I've seen you do it before. I never said you couldn't. But you need some assistance and there's nothing wrong with that."

Eren tilted his head down, embarrassed. Levi was right, there was no need for him to be so hostile and resistant when being offered help. "... Sorry."

"It's okay." Levi replied calmly. "Will you let me show you?"

Eren nodded and relaxed. The guard became refocused and with that, Eren's friends and the stranger stopped staring.

Levi stepped closer to him, shrinking their distance. "You're too tense and you're using too much force. Get into position." Eren put his hands on the correct spots and readied himself, releasing a heavy breath. Levi set his hands over Eren's, causing him to inhale sharply. "You're being too aggressive." He said in a hushed tone, squeezing Eren's hands as he explained himself. "Don't hold on too tightly or you'll lose control or you'll get hurt." He then lightened up his grip so that they were barely touching. "Don't be too loose or nothing will happen." Levi tightened his grip again to a more acceptable pressure. "Just be calm and follow the steps." He guided Eren's hands, letting the movements flow as they executed the procedures. He helped Eren go through the steps a few more times, never letting go of his hands.

Levi eventually released them, much to Eren's dismay and stood back. "Breathe. Take your time and don't get too worked up. Enough time has been waisted, so complete five correct tosses and join us." Levi nodded at him and returned to the group.

The warmth of Levi's hands lingered even in his absence. Eren felt foolish for letting everything get to him. He realized that the best way to impress Levi was to focus on his work and try his hardest, not do everything he could just to get his attention.

~

It was time for their lunch break and everyone was very enthusiastic to put the exercise to a halt. Eren had succeeded in doing five perfect tosses and was happy to join the group. Hanji's solo work looked very complex and was quite entertaining. They used a red and a blue flag, working with both at the same time. They gracefully weaved between the two sides, down the center and even
briefly performed at the front.

Now, it was time to relax. But first, Eren had an important question to ask Hanji. He waited until they were by themselves to approach them. This was going to be an awkward conversation. Eren still wasn't certain about whether or not he was going to come off as jealous so he started with a smile. "Hey, Hanji. Could I ask you something?"

"Yeah, of course!" Hanji said, fixing their glasses.

"Um, I didn't want to be rude and ask him myself, so I was wondering if you knew who that guy over there was." Eren gestured to the tall blond.

"Oh him! That's a friend of mine and Levi's, his name is Erwin." Hanji filled in.

"I've never seen him before, does he go here?"

"He used to." Hanji nodded. "He graduated last year. Erwin was actually an instructor during his senior year! He's here now because he made some set pieces for us and he needs to show me how to set them up."

Eren looked over at him and noticed him standing by Levi again. Levi covered his mouth and "itched" his face in an attempt to hide his laughter. Eren furrowed his brows at how Erwin made him laugh. He smoothed out his brows again and faced Hanji. "They seem really close... are they dating?"

Hanji started cackling uncontrollably. Eren retreated slightly, afraid that he had given himself away. "Goodness no! They're just good friends, they go way back. Yeah, but Erwin isn't looking to be in a relationship right now and Erwin's not exactly Levi's type."

Relief washed over Eren as he heard that. He knew he was pushing his luck, but he had to know one more thing. "Why isn't he his type?" He tried too hard to sound uninterested. Luckily, Hanji didn't pick up on this.

"Well, Erwin is kind of reserved. Not nearly as reserved as Levi might I mind you, but reserved nonetheless. Levi likes people that are more... fiery, you know? People who are more outgoing and unpredictable."

Eren nodded. He was glad to hear that Levi's standards weren't beyond his limits. "Okay... thanks Hanji." He began walking away.

"No problem. And Eren?" Eren stopped. "This effort that you're putting in today is exactly what we need! Good job, keep it up!" They gave him a thumbs up.

That compliment made Eren feel really appreciated. He had thrown what could be considered a hissy fit and they still thought he was doing very well. He had to think of a way to compliment Hanji back to show his gratitude. Before he thought that he was out of ideas, he remembered something that Levi had told him that would always make them happy. "Thanks... Triple A."

Hanji gasped, raising their shoulders and let their lips split into a massive grin. "You're welcome, Jaeger-bomb!" They playfully slapped Eren's arm, accidentally being a little rough.

Eren smiled regardless, walking off to go get his lunch.

Eren sat against the wall, prying open his bag of lunch, separating Armin and Mikasa's lunch for when they arrived. The two showed up soon enough, sitting to Eren's side on the ground next to
him. He gave them their food and they both regarded him wearing bright smiles.

"I'll be honest, that was so much cooler than I thought it'd be!" Mikasa beamed at Eren. "I expected it to be more like what we see in a marching band, but this is like some kind of dramatic theater show."

"Yeah, it's so much more involved and you're already so good!" Armin agreed, taking out an apple.

Eren rolled his eyes, but didn't stop the smile that crept onto his own features. "Well, I don't know about that. I'm not that great."

"No, they're right. You're very advanced for a beginner." A different voice came from Eren's other side and sent chills down his spine. He looked up to see Levi leaning against the wall, sliding down to sit by his side.

Eren couldn't imagine why Levi would want to be near him, so he raised a brow in question. "Why are you sitting here?"

Levi huffed out an amused breath. "What? Can I not sit with you?"

Eren shrugged and hoped that his cheeks weren't growing red, due to their close proximity. "I mean... you can, but wouldn't you want to sit with someone else?"

"Like who?" Levi asked, taking a sip of his water.

"I don't know... like Isabel and Farlan?" Eren suggested.

Levi considered his answer for a moment. "You're right." Eren sighed in relief. He didn't mind sitting with Levi, (he loved being with him) but he was worried that he'd make himself look like a fool again. Levi turned his head, facing away from the three. "Farlan, Isabel, come sit with us."

Levi internally groaned. That wasn't what he meant.

The two underclassmen walked over and sat beside Armin and Mikasa, forming a half circle around Eren. Farlan and Isabel greeted him with a wave and started eating their own lunches.

"It's come to my attention that we were never properly introduced." Levi eyed Mikasa and Armin. "I know we've met, but I think we got off on the wrong foot."

Armin was the first to give him a friendly greeting. "My name's Armin, I'm Eren's friend." He stuck out his hand for Levi to shake it.

Levi eyed his hand a bit confused, thinking it was too formal, but took it anyway. "Levi." He said curtly. He turned to face Mikasa and waited for her introduction.

Mikasa looked at him with emotionless eyes, not certain if it was safe to be open with him. "... I'm Mikasa, Eren's sister."

Levi nodded in acknowledgment. "This is my little brother and sister." He gestured towards his siblings.

"I'm Isabel! It's nice to meet my new best friend's best friends." Isabel announced excitedly. Levi frowned at her statement, still not liking that Eren had supposedly taken his place as Isabel's best friend. Mikasa, Armin and Eren however, were very amused at her enthusiasm.

"I'm Farlan, nice to meet you both." Farlan said much more composedly than his sister.
Armin struck up a conversation with the two as Mikasa kept more to herself like she normally did around strangers and Eren and Levi were left with an uncomfortable silence. It was more comfortable for Levi, as he didn't mind silence.

Eren did what he could to think of something he could do to make up for his fit. "Sorry for earlier." He muttered to Levi.

"Like I said, it's okay." Levi shrugged. "But if you're fine with me asking, what was the issue?"

Any believable and dignified answer eluded Eren. "Uh... I just got a little frustrated is all.

Levi seemed to understand this, but he took an extra moment to study Eren when he started smiling uncomfortably. "Is that it? It looks like there's something you want to tell me."

Eren flinched at how easily Levi could read him. "Nope." He cringed when his voice cracked.

Levi's eyes narrowed and he looked at him up and down. After a moment, as Eren swallowed thickly, Levi's eyes softened and he wore the faintest smirk, so faint that Eren wasn't sure if he was seeing him right. "Alright, if you say so." He relaxed his shoulders and not so subtlety leaned over onto Eren's side.

Eren sat there and took his weight, sweating profusely. Levi sat and pretended like nothing was happening, which drove Eren mad. Eren distracted himself by stuffing his face with food.

"Careful, you'll choke." Levi mumbled.

Eren almost did choke, strictly because of that comment.

~

Lunch had been surprisingly pleasant. Eren quickly got used to Levi's warmth on his side. His friends were getting along with Levi's siblings very well and he liked watching them converse. At one point, Petra had stopped over and offered him a metal water bottle, taking his plastic one to recycle it. She told him that this was a better option because it was reusable and made less waste. Eren thanked her with a friendly smile, appreciating the gesture.

After lunch, the team was told that they could work on whatever they wanted while Hanji and Erwin set up six large, black panels. They were meant to be a background for their show and also doubled as a place to keep equipment until it was needed in the performance.

Everyone else started doing random work. Marco did his usual counting of consecutives, Nanaba tried doing a nine toss with her rifle and Christa did drop spins while laying on her back. Petra was off to the side, doing consecutives as well, but when she miscalculated her hand placements, she ended up hitting the lower portion of her thumb in a painful spot. She hissed out in pain then set down her rifle, observing the injury.

She squinted her eyes for a moment then her expression turned into one of excitement. "Guys! Come check this out! You can see the blood leaving the vein!"

Almost the entire guard dropped their equipment and rushed over to huddle around Petra. Even Eren wanted to see.
They all leaned in and noticed that one could indeed see the blue spreading beneath the skin, forming a bruise.

"Wow, I've only seen the body part get swollen, I've never actually seen the beginning of a bruise!" Isabel chimed in.

Eren was concerned to say the least, but he had to admit that he thought it was cool. "Are you okay, though?" He asked.

"Oh yeah, I'm fine." Petra confirmed, smiling sweetly.

That was all Eren really cared about. The bruise was starting to get rather large, but if Petra said she was fine, then he was content. Eren's inner monologue reminded him that this wasn't considered normal to get excited over an injury, so he nonchalantly walked away. He could see his friends in the bleachers looking at the group funny.

~

Practice ended all too soon. The guard had added more to their beginning routine where they started out with Hanji doing solo work as the rest of the team hid behind the black panels. The side with blue flags emerged with perfect posture, synchronized steps and cool composesures. The side with red flags came out banging their flag poles on the ground with their heads tilted down, their eyes staring forward and their chests heaving dramatically. The way it was mapped out, it looked as though Hanji was summoning both sides. The show was coming together very nicely.

Eren put his equipment away in his flag bag as Armin and Mikasa approached him. "So what do you guys think? Did you have fun?" Eren asked.

They both nodded in affirmation. "Yeah, I can't wait to see what the routine looks like when it's finished! It looks so cool so far." Armin said.

"Mhm," Mikasa agreed. "Can we come to more practices?"

"Of course! That'll make it less stressful for me if I have you guys there." Eren lifted his bag slung the strap over his shoulder. They started to exit the gym when they were interrupted.

"Hey." They heard a deep rumble from behind them. Eren turned and froze when he saw Erwin striding over to him with a professional smile.

Eren immediately tensed up, fearing what was to come.

"You're Eren, right?" Erwin asked. "Levi's new friend?"

Eren's eyes widened comically. "Uhh... friend?"

Mikasa leaned in to whisper to Eren. "We'll wait for you outside." She said, leading Armin away to give them privacy.

"Okay." Eren said, turning back to Erwin. "You think I'm his friend?"

Erwin shrugged vaguely. "Well, yes. The way he was talking about you made it sound like you two are close."
Eren's face heated up. "... Oh. Um, I guess we are friends."

"I'm a little shocked to be honest. From what he's told me, you haven't known him for long. But he's already so comfortable around you, leaning on you and joking with you and whatnot. He barely does that with Hanji and he's known them since they were little. You must be a real nice guy." Erwin looked at him in astonishment.

"Uh, thanks. I hear you're good friends with him too." Eren added awkwardly.

"Ah, yeah. We've known each other for a while now. We still talk and hang out a lot. Hey, I have to run, but it was nice talking with you. And you did great today!" Erwin rushed past Eren in a hurry.

"Nice to talk with you too!" Eren called back. He could feel his cheeks growing warmer and a grin snuck it's way onto his face. Levi talked about him like a friend. Levi was comfortable with him. Perhaps his luck was beginning to change. He felt bad for ever having thought negative things about Erwin.

It wasn't long before he noticed Levi rushing towards him with a skeptical stare. Eren stumbled back a bit when Levi set a rough hand on his shoulder. "What did he tell you?" He questioned, watching him carefully, waiting for his response.

"Oh, uhh... he just told me that I did really well. He introduced himself too." Eren unconsciously leaned into Levi's touch.

Levi didn't seem to be convinced for a few seconds. After a minute he let go of Eren's shoulder and mumbled, "hmph." Levi strutted around Eren, exiting the gym. "See you Monday. Don't forget your equipment."

Eren couldn't help but watch him go, studying every movement. He tried and failed to ignore the butterflies in his stomach.

Chapter End Notes

#StopMakingErwinTheEvilEx2k16

*stares wistfully into space on my rocking chair, blowing a bubble pipe* Back in my day, watching people's bruises form under the skin was a delight. Kids these days wouldn't understand, wearing their protective gear and whatnot. I mean don't get me wrong, hitting the meat of your thumb hurts like a bitch but the joy of watching that baby bruise come to life takes some of that pain away. Sorry for the long wait, my finals are over tomorrow so now I'll have more free time to write, yay! And sorry if this chapter wasn't too great. Stuff is going to start happening in the next few chapters. Finally! Sorry for any errors, I don't edit. If you'd like updates on my fic writing process or if you'd like to see my art, check out my tumblr: dr-s--art. Thank you so much for reading!!!
"Eren, quit acting like a lump on a log." Mikasa frowned at her love struck brother. "It's your turn, stupid."

Eren remained perfectly still, with his head resting flat on the table. The game of scrabble in front of him wasn't nearly as attention grabbing as his memories of Levi that he hadn't stopped rerunning in his head since the day before. "I can't think of a word." He lied.

"Do you want my help?" Armin offered.

Eren sighed, resting his chin on the table rather than his entire face. "Sure." He let Armin reach over to take his letters away. He wasn't interested in rearranging his letters to find the highest scoring word. He would rather busy his hands with holding Levi's, as sappy as it sounded. He wasn't concerned with tripling his points on his turn. He wanted Levi to lean into him like he had the day prior. He didn't care about winning the game, he just wanted to be with Levi. Eren was positively head over heels for the guy and he didn't know how to deal with it at all.

Armin started placing letters on the board shaking his head. "I'm disappointed in you Eren. You could've easily found some place to lay down 'coward.'"

Coward. What a perfect word to describe his current state. Eren mentally scorned himself for not being brave enough to take the next step with Levi. "Huh, didn't see it."

Mikasa tallied up the points and slammed her pen down on the table. "Stop helping him! He's ahead of me now! I just want one goddamn game where we can all think for ourselves."

"Mikasa, language." Carla halfheartedly scolded, passing through the kitchen.

"Sorry, mom." Mikasa said back. "That's it, no more helping each other. From here on in, you're on your own." She glared at Eren.

Eren collected his new letters and sunk in his chair, not really paying attention to his sister. He couldn't focus on anything other than how much he liked Levi and how bad he felt for himself,
knowing he couldn't have him. Levi would never ask him out or even have interest in him.

Armin peered over at Eren while he was deciding his next move. "Is everything alright? You seem kind of out of it. You did all yesterday too."

Eren slumped his shoulders. "I just keep overthinking things, I guess."

"Is it anything I can help with?"

"I can answer that for you." Mikasa interrupted. "If you're overthinking your next move, no, Armin can't help you."

"It's not that." Eren feigned annoyance. He thought over what his options were. He could always take the initiative and ask Levi out. 'No, I can't.' He thought to himself. 'That's too risky.' But then, he remembered Hanji saying how Levi liked outgoing people. Perhaps Levi wanted the other person to ask him out. "Actually, I think you can help me. But, please don't pry, I just need advice with this one thing."

"Of course, what do you need?" Armin replied, laying down his tiles.

Eren fidgeted in his chair. "What do you do... if you like someone?" He looked down at his lap.

"Are you five? You should know this kind of stuff." Mikasa said, slamming down her letters and tallying up the scores impatiently.

"Mikasa." Armin warned her. "He needs our help and that's a little more than condescending."

Mikasa knitted her eyebrows together, widening her eyes at Armin. "If he needs help, he should've asked after the game or before it started. This is cut-throat competition here."

Armin sent her an unimpressed side glance. "Even so," He turned back to Eren. "Why do you ask? Is there someone you like?"

"No... I'm asking for a friend." Eren avoided his gaze, pretending to be more involved in the game. Armin smiled knowingly. "You wouldn't be acting like this if it was for a friend."

"Then why'd you ask?" Eren spat.

"I wanted to hear you admit it. Now come on, who is it? I could be your wingman. And Mikasa could be your... wing-woman."

"I asked you not to pry." Eren trusted his friends, he really did. But he was scared and he was far from being ready to come out of the closet. "I'm just really lost. I don't know how to ask someone out, or even if that's a good idea. What do you do when you like somebody, but you don't know if they like you back and you don't want to make a fool of yourself?"

"Well here's what you don't do." Mikasa interjected. "You don't take forever to make your move. It's your turn Eren."

"Mikasa, I'm serious!" Eren huffed. "I've been really stressed out about this lately and I don't know what to do."

Mikasa backed down. "I'm sorry. Armin, any ideas?"

Armin tapped his chin in deep thought. "Hmm... I would suggest getting to know them better and
work on being friends first. That way when you ask them out, you wouldn't be a stranger to them and maybe they'll give you a shot."

This was actually helpful to Eren. Now that he thought about it, he knew very little about Levi and Levi didn't know much about him either. "That's a good idea." Eren mused. "I think I'll try that, thanks."

"And if you need us for anything else concerning this subject, let us know. We'll help you out... and we expect to be introduced to this mystery crush of yours." Mikasa teased.

Eren smiled gratefully at her. "I will, one day. And thank you."

"No problem." Mikasa reciprocated his smile. "Now for the love of god, put down a word."

~

"What are you doing in my closet?" Levi grunted as he flipped through his CDs, trying to find a specific one.

"Looking for date clothes." Hanji replied, throwing aside some of Levi's shirts, much to his annoyance. They continued to paw through his clothing, pondering over certain pieces every now and then. "It's like you never get all fancied up to go someplace nice, I can't find anything."

Levi furrowed his brows at them. "You're ace, you're aro and you have no interest in being in any kind of relationship. Why the fuck do you need date clothes?"

"Not for me, Levi!" Hanji cocked their head at him. "For you! Besides, none of your clothes fit me. Everything's somehow too short and really baggy at the same time. Heck I could take one of your t-shirts and make it a lazy looking crop top."

Levi couldn't imagine them wearing his clothes to begin with. Their style was too eccentric. Now they were wearing a mustard colored turtleneck, bright pink, knee length shorts and a denim jacket that reached the floor that adorned colorful patches all over it.

"Why are you looking for that kind of stuff? I'm single, remember?" Levi mumbled, finally finding his desired CD.

"Now, now, Levi. We have to remain optimistic!" Hanji said, inspecting a studded jacket. "You've been too stressed for months and months, you need to find someone and fast. I was thinking maybe I could help get you back out there and maybe-"

"Enough." Levi placed the disc in the CD player. "You of all people should know that people don't need to be in a relationship to be happy. I don't need you setting me up with somebody."

"But Levi, you were the happiest you've ever been when you were with-"

"Don't even fucking say her name." Levi warned with his voice wavering. "Just... don't. It's bad enough I have to see her at work every goddamn day and have her acting so smug about everything." Silence hung between them, only broken by the music that was faintly playing in the background. The low chords and hesitant rhythm seemed to punctuate his pessimistic thoughts.
Hanji quieted down. They didn't mean to remind Levi of past pain, they'd only meant to cheer him up. "I'm sorry... I just thought if we found you somebody worth your time, you would be that happy again."

Levi felt bad for putting Hanji in an awkward spot. "Don't be sorry. I appreciate the gesture." Hanji smiled at him and Levi felt less guilty. "But still, I don't need your help to find a date."

"Oh, trust me, I know you don't." Hanji winked, causing Levi to roll his eyes. Hanji turned back to the closet, finding the type of outfit they had been searching for at long last. They laid it out on the bed and walked behind Levi, pushing on his back to walk him over to the mirror on his dresser. They took the black suit jacket that they had laid out, along with a blood red tie, reaching their arms around Levi from behind to hold the garments in front of him. They looked at him through the mirror. "See? Any guy or gal would be lucky to go out with you. Look how handsome you are!"

Levi briefly looked himself over in the mirror before flicking his gaze away. He didn't address Hanji's comment, but they didn't expect him to. Instead he changed the direction of the conversation. "Even if I did find somebody, I don't have time for a relationship. I only have one free day a week, every week and speaking of which, you're waisting it. I wouldn't be able to spare a night for taking them on a date or whatever."

"First of all, I'm not waisting your day off. You love me." They turned around to set the clothes back on the bed. Levi snorted, but that didn't deter Hanji in the slightest. "Second, it's not like you'll have to take them out to dinner and a movie every week. You'll just have someone to make your everyday routine less lonely and when you're not busy, you can relax with them. Or get a little busy, your choice." They wiggled their eyebrows at him, unfazed by his scowl. "Why am I telling you this? You've been in a few relationships before, you know how it goes."

Levi dropped himself onto his bed, staring up at the ceiling blankly. Hanji didn't need him to voice his thoughts in order to know that he was thinking about his last relationship and not in a fond manner. It wasn't often that the two discussed this topic, knowing how torn Levi still felt. (Not that he'd ever admit that it bothered him so much.) Hanji took a seat next to him. "Hey, forget her. She didn't deserve a guy as great as you!" They said, grinning with encouragement. When they didn't receive a response, they went for a different approach. "You know, I'm pretty sure half of the school has a crush on you. You're bound to find somebody you like back!" Levi only breathed out a tired sigh. Hanji regretted ever bringing up the topic, but they knew that if he was with someone special, he'd be a lot happier like before. "I'll tell you what. If you get your lazy butt off the bed, I'll make you some tea. Sound good?"

Yes. In fact, it sounded great to him.

~

Downstairs, Hanji started heating a kettle of water as Levi sat at the kitchen table, rubbing his eyes. "Tired?" Hanji prompted, setting out tea cups and saucers.

Levi gave a noncommittal shrug. Hanji continued to set out other needed materials, such as tea bags, spoons and sugar. The sugar was more for them than for Levi.
"Where is everybody?" Hanji asked.

"Isabel and Farlan have a lesson with Mr. Bozado and my mom is out grocery shopping." Levi rested his chin on his palm, leaning on the table.

Hanji hummed in acknowledgment. They sat across from Levi, letting the silence overtake the two of them. Hanji wanted to take his mind off of the unfriendly subject they had previously discussed, so they tried to think of an unrelated topic. "Don't you think Eren did really well yesterday?" They questioned.

"I guess, if you call throwing a temper tantrum 'doing really well.'" Levi mumbled.

"He wasn't throwing a tantrum! He just got frustrated." Hanji defended. "And I mean besides that. All throughout practice, he was putting in so much energy and effort. I don't usually expect that from rookies. He tried so hard."

"Yeah, he did. I suppose he did good, I wish half of the team worked like him. We need more of that. I admire his drive."

"You admire it?" Hanji raised a brow and adorned a teasing grin. The kettle whistle and they got up to retrieve it, still pestering Levi. "Wow, you must really think a lot of him. I've never heard you say you admire somebody before."

Levi frowned. "... I misspoke, what I meant to say was-"

"Misspoke my ass!" Hanji interrupted, pouring the water in their cups. "You think he's talented."

"I never said that." Levi narrowed his eyes at them.

"You didn't have to, it was implied." They sniggered as they put the mesh tea bags in their cups, handing Levi his. "Now that I think of it, you seem to be very fond of him. You always stand so close to him and you're calm when you're with him... and don't think I didn't see you laugh with him at the football game." Levi tried to remain impassive. "And it wasn't your normal laugh, like when you're talking to me or Erwin." Levi hoped that Hanji didn't catch him stiffening. "It was that same laugh you used to have when you were with-" Hanji realized their error too late, but tried to fix it anyway. "... You know who."

"So what?" Levi said. Hanji was grateful that he didn't react much to their comment. "I laughed differently. Big deal. It doesn't mean anything." He cautiously sipped at his steaming tea.

"Ooo, now we're getting somewhere!" They squealed, adding some sugar to their tea. "By saying 'it doesn't mean anything,' I know it means something! So, out with it. What's going on with him?"

"Nothing is 'going on with him.' He's just... tolerable." Levi avoided their stare.

"Well, it's obvious that he's more than tolerable. Face it, you have fun with him. So what makes him worthy of your time, huh? What makes him special?" Hanji set their head in their hands with their elbows on the table, watching Levi expectantly.

Levi wanted to protest. He wanted to say that he didn't have fun with him and say he wasn't special, but saying such things would hurt Levi. Eren was special to him and they did have fun. Levi couldn't understand why he was getting so defensive over himself and Eren. Of course he liked Eren, but in the same way one would like an acquaintance. Even though he was sometimes a pain in the neck, he always made up for it. He was a good kid and that was the end of it, wasn't it? "I don't know. He's just... different."
"Different, eh?" Hanji squinted at him calculatingly. "How so?"

Levi couldn't possibly keep up with questions that he himself didn't know the answer to. He took another sip of his tea to delay his answer. Pondering over the question for minute, he came to the conclusion that he couldn't pick out a specific reason. "I don't know, he just is."

Levi could see the gears turning in Hanji's head as their face became less tense and more pensive. Then it quickly changed from thoughtful to shock, then shock to excitement. They slammed their hands on the table and gawked at him, lips turning upward. "Oh. My. God!" They shouted, bobbing their head after every word. "Oh my god! This is perfect!"

"Wait- what is? What the fuck are you thinking?" Levi tried to comprehend what their epiphany had been.

"You like Eren!" They practically hollered, clapping their hands together. "Oh, this is marvelous! I mean, I can see why. He's cute, he's energetic, has a nice body, fun to mess with, has a good sense of humor from what I've gathered-"

"I don't like him, that's absurd." Levi rolled his eyes, taking a sip of his tea. He couldn't like him. That couldn't be the answer to why he felt like this, right? He decided that it was definitely not. "He's immature and impulsive."

"But you love it." Hanji whispered, bouncing in their seat. "And I don't think that you honestly see him as immature and impulsive. I think you see him as innocent and carefree. You're just trying to lie to yourself, so you won't have to admit to anything."

"I'm not going to admit to something that isn't true." The more he thought about Hanji's theory, the more everything clicked. He got enjoyment out of teasing Eren, but up until now, he didn't know why it was so fun. Touching him sent sparks down his spine. Everything the guy did was so amusing to him and he was always eager to see what surprises he'd bring next. Seeing how he could be shy at times made Levi want to keep pushing his buttons. Watching his antics of walking into practice on his hands gave Levi a sense of affection. Observing the fire in Eren's eyes when he wanted to prove himself made something stir inside Levi. Everything he did grabbed his attention in a steel lock. Coming to terms with how he felt at such an inopportune time annoyed Levi, but he was grateful that it was happening. He almost didn't catch Hanji's words, as he was too deep in thought.

"Damn," they sounded far more deflated compared to before. "It's a shame he's straight, though. I could've been your wing-buddy and helped you get with him."

"Yeah," Levi said absentmindedly. "That's too bad." He agreed with them to keep Eren's secret, but simultaneously did himself in.

"Aha! I knew it!" Hanji exclaimed.

"I didn't even admit to anything." Levi looked at them exasperatedly.

"Again, you didn't need to. Exhibit A, by saying it's too bad that he's straight tells me that you wish he wasn't and Exhibit B, you have a little blush!" They teased in a singsong voice.

Levi saw no sense in denying it to them anymore. "Tell anyone and you're dead."

"Don't worry, your secret is safe with me!" Hanji made a lock and key motion over their lips. "But I am sorry though. It's rotten luck that the guy you like is straight. They said sympathetically.
"It's okay." Levi smirked to himself. "I'll get over it."

Hanji caught his smug composure and smiled triumphantly. "That's the spirit, keep moving forward!"

"Oh, trust me. I will." Levi hid his mischievous grin behind his cup.

~

Eren made his way downstairs to watch some television for awhile. A couple hours after Armin, Mikasa and him finished their game of scrabble, (Mikasa won, but Armin didn't have the heart to tell her he let her win) Eren spent most of the day in his room, contemplating how he was going to get to know Levi. At this moment, he needed a break and a distraction. It was nearly eight o'clock at night and he strode into the living room and was greeted by his mother sitting in her usual spot, frowning at her knitting needles with her arms crossed. Her nostrils were flaring and she seemed to be too scornful towards her yarn to pay attention to the television.

"Hey, mom. Can I change the channel?" Eren sat next on the couch, next to her chair.

She was snapped out of her mood. "Hm? Oh, go right ahead."

Eren took the remote, flipping through channels before he settled on watching some ghost hunting show. "Having trouble knitting again?" He asked casually.

"Yeah," Carla exhaled, rubbing her temples. "I used to love doing it when I was young, now it's just hard. I don't know what happened."

"Why do you keep doing it if you don't like it anymore?"

"I can't think of anything else that's creative that I can do in my free time." She mumbled. "It's the only crafty thing I know how to do."

Eren hummed, not overly engaged in their conversation. He turned his attention back to the television, as did his mother. He liked spending time with his mother, not actually doing anything. Her presence was so comforting to him and she was just fun to be around overall.

Despite coming down for a distraction, Eren couldn't focus on the show. The only thing that he knew for sure was happening was that the star of the show was in an abandoned school, looking for signs of paranormal activity. Eren wasn't staying for the show. He simply needed a different space to be in other than his bedroom and have some background noise to go with. His mother eventually broke the silence by clearing her throat. Eren turned his head to face her.

"So... who is she?" Carla asked, smirking.

Eren quirked an eyebrow. "Who's who?"

Carla rolled her eyes, still smiling. "The girl you have a crush on, of course. I'm not that old, I still have my hearing. You were talking about asking her out earlier."

"Oh... right." Eren tilted his head down, bouncing his leg in nervousness. "I don't want to tell you."

"Come on, Eren." She gently swatted his hand. "It'll be our little secret! You've never told me if
you've liked someone before. This could be your first crush for all I know and I want to know everything about her! I promise I won't tell anybody about her."

Eren would've loved nothing more than to tell his mom all about Levi without having fear of her reaction. He knew she would keep her word about not telling anyone, but she could still judge him and not having her support would break his heart. He wanted to maintain a good relationship with his mother, so he treaded carefully. "I don't want to tell you who she is. I'm still nervous about this whole thing." Eren absolutely hated even changing the pronouns.

"That's alright. You don't have to say her name, but what's she like? I want to know all about my little boy's first crushy wushy!" Carla practically squealed.

"Ma, stop talking like that." Eren whined. "I'm not a baby."

"You'll always be my baby boy." She argued. "Now spill the beans, is she pretty?" Carla looked at him with impatient excitement.

Eren thought about Levi's alluring, stormy eyes, surrounded by his eyeliner. He pictured Levi's skillfully trimmed, shining, ebony hair. He envisioned every sharp angle of his features, his lovely pale skin, his glorious, protruding muscles and every inch of him was perfection in his eyes. "Yeah..." Eren replied breathily. "She's beautiful." An understatement, Eren noted. Levi was drop dead gorgeous. He giggled at the thought of Levi's reaction to being called that.

Carla saw how happy Eren was just talking about him. "Ooo, and is she nice?" She asked, scooting closer and leaning over her chair's arm.

"Well... she's very blunt and swears a lot... but she's very nice, yes. She likes to help people out when she can." Eren smiled to himself. He loved being able to talk to someone about Levi, especially his mother. Even if she didn't know that Levi was a boy, it was still nice.

"What does she like?" Carla questioned, hiding her toothy grin behind her hands.

Eren thought back to when Levi was telling him about all the guard members, and more specifically, himself. "She really likes this old band... I can't remember the name of it. And she likes to learn languages."

"Wow," Carla hummed. "She sounds interesting. One day, after she says yes to going out with you, because I know she will, you'll have to bring her here so I can meet her."

Eren laughed a little at his mother's certainty. "You don't know she'll say yes... I honestly don't know if she'd ever like me back."

"Don't be foolish, Eren." Carla tutted. "Any girl would be crazy for you! I bet you could have any girl you wanted if you asked."

Eren wasn't convinced, he knew she was probably only saying that because a mother's love could distort the way they view their children. But he appreciated the compliment. "Thanks, but even if that was true, I don't know if I could do the asking part."

"Well, it is true and don't stress over it. Just be polite and be yourself."

It sounded almost too simple. Eren knew it was going to be much more stressful than that when it came time. "How did dad ask you out?" Maybe if he had an example to follow, it would be easier.

Carla sat back, remembering the situation fondly. "We were both very young and as I recall, he
didn't ask me exactly. We were lighting candles at church and he accidentally caught my dress on fire." She chuckled at the ridiculousness of it all. "After it was put out, he took me to get ice cream as an apology. After that, we kept going every Sunday, then we mutually agreed that we were together. But I don't suggest that you set fire to this girl, that was a one in a million shot. Your father was lucky it was only a little fire."

Eren laughed trying to imagine his father, a surgeon, being so careless and clumsy. "I can't believe you never told me that before."

Carla shrugged. "I'm not sure why I haven't told you either. It's a good story."

The two fell into silence and continued watching the ghost hunting show until it was over. After that, Eren decided that he wanted to be secluded in his room, so he could go to bed early.

"I'm going to bed, good night." Eren said, getting up from the couch.

"Good night, sweetie." Carla replied, putting away her knitting materials.

Eren stopped before he reached the stairs. "Mom?" He waited until she looked at him to continue. "Promise not to tell anyone about me liking someone?" He knew that his wording sounded childish, but he didn't know how else to say it.

"Promise." She confirmed with an amused grin. "My lips are sealed."

"Thanks mom." Eren hurried up the stairs, happy to have trustworthy people in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone is a wingman.

I'm honestly scared that this story will have a million chapters, please god no. I have this whole thing planned out from start to finish and so much is gonna go down and I want it to be perfect but the build up is just UGH. THAT BUILD UP WILL GET ME.

If someone could tell me how to make a work part of a series and how to change your icon on mobile, that would be great.

Sorry about any errors, I don't edit. My tumblr is dr-s--art. Please leave a kudos or comment if you liked this, that would be awesome! Thank you for reading!!!
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Eren’s kindness earns him a few rewards later on during practice.

Chapter Notes

DISCLAIMER: I had to ask someone what it feels like to have dyslexia. I asked them what their thought process was and they were nice enough to educate me. I can only hope that I didn't do a horrible job at portraying it. I sincerely apologize if this is not an accurate representation.

Also, you might notice how this chapter is all over the place. I'm trying to make it as realistic as possible and I'm trying to show how their daily lives go, but it might come across as scattered. (Plus I wrote the second half of this half asleep. Again. I'm sensing a pattern with my preferred writing schedule) Anywho, I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren walked into math class the next morning and was greeted with a sight he never thought he'd see. Christa seemed to be in hysterics and Ymir was turned around in her seat, holding her hands and telling her to breathe. Eren rushed to his seat and faced her. "Christa, are you okay?"

She breathed through her mouth the same way one would breathe in a paper bag. She shook her head. "No, I'm not."

"Christa, babe, it's going to be okay. It'll be over faster than you think." Ymir spoke softly and reassuringly.

"What's going on?" Eren furrowed his brows together.

"That test is today." Christa shook in her chair. "I'm not ready. I'm so not ready."

Eren glanced around. She had to be joking. "But... the test is on proofs and angles. We've been studying those subjects for the past two weeks."

"I know... but you don't understand. I'm still not ready. I studied everything we learned all weekend and I still don't get it. None of this made sense to me to begin with and even after studying I don't know what I'm supposed to do! I just look at the page and it's a jumble of nonsense. I can't tell what I'm looking at and it gives me a migraine. I don't get it!" She shook her head again.

"Listen," Ymir said. "Tell Mr. Shadis and he'll give you more time. He always does."

"No!" Christa looked at her with desperate eyes. "I'm not going to be able to do that in the real world, there won't always be chances to have more time. I need to face the music and get used to it now."
Everything clicked all at once. Eren remembered Levi telling him about Christa's dyslexia. He had a basic concept of what it was but he never imagined that it could effect somebody so badly, especially the girl before him who was always so cheerful and positive. He thought that he could at least try to offer some help. "Christa?" Eren said softly, trying to keep her calm. "I might not be aware of every part of the situation, but I'd suggest that you ask for more time anyways. If you need it and it's available, why not take advantage of that?" Eren feared that he may have been crossing a line or said the wrong thing.

Christa looked at him, evaluating his words. She took several moments to breathe and figure out what exactly she was going to do. She closed her eyes and nodded. "Okay... you're right. I need to do this." She stood on shaky legs and walked to the front of the room to speak with their teacher.

Ymir faced Eren as Christa left. She leaned in and appeared to be unsure of her upcoming words. "Eren." He looked to her. "Thank you."

Eren was taken aback by her gratefulness, but showed respect nonetheless. "You're welcome."

Christa returned, slightly more composed and sat down. The two waited impatiently for the news. She took a breath to steady herself. "He said I can take the test on Friday and I can use this class to study." She allowed herself to show a brief smile.

"That's good, right?" Eren prompted.

"Well... it's at least better." Christa said.

~

Throughout the class, while taking the test, Eren would occasionally look over at Christa to see how she was doing. Every time he glanced over, it was the same thing. She kept her gaze glued to her notes and the textbook, with wide, confused eyes. At certain times, she looked to be as if she was in physical pain while studying. Her hands dug into her hair, her eyebrows were scrunched up and she didn't seem to understand a thing on the pages. Eren felt horrible.

When the bell rang, Christa slumped her shoulders and packed away her things. While walking out the door, Eren stopped her by grabbing her wrist. "Hey, uh, I know I might not be the best in this class but I have a good basic understanding of the material. So, if you need my help, I'll do what I can." It didn't even occurred to him until today how much he disliked seeing people struggle.

She smiled brightly at him for the first time that day. "Thank you so much, Eren." She beamed. "I don't want you to be offended but I need things explained to me in a specific way and Hanji is the only one who knows how to do that. I appreciate the offer though, honestly." She barely hesitated before she brought him into a tight hug. "Thanks again, Eren."

Eren was caught off guard, but hugged her back regardless. "No problem."

~
Science class was fairly normal compared to all the other days. Even long after Hanji’s glasses were fixed, they sat next to him and chose him as their partner for labs. They waved hello to him as he took his seat and he smiled in return.

Class started, as usual, and like every other time, Hanji answered all the questions that were asked. If Eren was having a bad day, he would get a little irked if they answered everything. But on an average day such as this one, it was almost fascinating to observe their ability to handle any question thrown their way. He envied Hanji’s intelligence.

Hanji didn’t even require time to think over their answers, they simply relayed the correct responses without hesitation. Halfway through the review portion of the class, Eren thought that he’d heard someone behind them snickering. Though, he couldn’t be sure that he had actually heard it. He looked to Hanji and saw how their posture had worsened and their face had fallen. Eren was now certain that people had been laughing, but he tried to give them the benefit of the doubt and told himself that they weren’t laughing at Hanji. It wasn’t that he didn’t think that they were laughing at Hanji, he just hoped that they weren’t.

The teacher announced that the class would have to look up definitions for the next section in their books for homework. The teacher then left the room to pick something up in the main office.

Eren opened his textbook and got out his notes that had the list of words he had to define. For a few minutes be struggled to find any definitions, so he looked to Hanji, who had been scribbling down notes rapidly. “Hanji? Could you help me?” He asked tentatively.

“Of course!” Hanji scooted their chair over so they could assist Eren.

Upon doing this, the laughter from before started up again. Eren saw that it bothered Hanji, but they tried to ignore it. Hanji focused their attention on finding the words for Eren. "Okay, so the first word is near the bottom of page 104..."

"What a nerd." The person from behind them chuckled, drawing out more laughter from their friend. "I bet they study for fun, they must have a really pathetic life."

Hanji flinched, but kept their eyes trained on the book. Eren could see the hurt in their eyes and he didn't understand why they just took it and didn't say anything. Eren didn't want to start trouble so he wrote down the definition in his notes. Soon, the jeers continued.

"They spend all their time drooling over science that they can't pick out decent clothes." Another one mocked. More laughter followed their remark.

Hanji still hadn't done anything to let them know that they heard them. "The second one is on the next page, near the center." They said in a more hushed voice.

"They're such a loser." The first one said.

That was it. As much as Eren didn't want to start trouble, he couldn't let them make fun of Hanji anymore. He couldn't let Hanji just accept the abuse, so if they wouldn't do anything, he would. Eren turned around in his seat and glared daggers at the group of three people from behind him who were laughing. The three noticed his attention was on them so they faced Eren, still chuckling lightly. "Shut the fuck up." The three quieted down, losing their mirth when they heard the venom in his voice and wore confused expressions. A few weeks ago, Eren would’ve laughed along with them, but he knew better now. They were never funny or clever to begin with. He would’ve laughed with them because they were the mass, not because he agreed with them, but now he was concerned with what was the right thing to do. "You're just jealous because you guys can't pass this
class to save your life and Hanji actually knows what they're doing. So shut up, and leave them alone." Eren caught their shocked expressions as he turned around in his seat. He also saw glances of impressed students that had watched his confrontation.

Hanji also looked at him with their jaw barely dropped and eyes wide. Eren hadn't noticed, so he kept writing down definitions in his notebook. Before he knew was was happening, Hanji attacked him with a tight hug, grinning from ear to ear. He struggled for a moment, purely out of surprise, but he eventually calmed down. "Um... can I help you?" He asked with an amused lift to his voice.

"Thank you, Eren!" They whispered. "That means a lot to me, what you just did."

Eren hadn't particularly thought about what his actions would mean to Hanji. His only thoughts were about how treating someone like that wasn't right, how Hanji must've felt horrible and how Hanji needed somebody to stand up for them. It hadn't crossed his mind that they would look at this as such a big thing, but he was glad to have helped. "It was nothing. It wasn't fair that they were doing that to you and weren't getting in trouble."

"It wasn't nothing, though." Hanji sat back. "No one ever does that kind of thing for me in this class, so it was nice that you did something about it."

It hurt Eren to know that nobody helped out Hanji when they needed it, so he was going to make sure that he'd defend them when times called for it. "I think it's shitty that no one helps you, so from now on, I'll stand up for you." He promised.

That earned him another bone crushing hug.

~

Eren sat down at lunch with Mikasa and Armin. For once, Levi was already there, sitting at his table. Eren's breath hitched with anticipation. This was his chance to get to know him, just as Armin had suggested. Eren excused himself from his table, telling his friends that he needed to discuss something with Levi about practice. He cautiously walked over to Levi's table with his palms sweating.

Petra noticed his approach and looked up at him, smiling and simultaneously drawing the attention of Sasha, Connie and Levi. Sasha and Connie said their hellos, whereas Levi cocked his pierced brow at him and bared a slight lift in the corner of his mouth. "Um, can I sit here?" Eren asked sheepishly.

Levi gave a nod for his response while the other three offered their verbal consent. Eren dared to sit close to Levi. He knew that going out with him was a long shot, but he had to try and he needed to start somewhere.

"So, what brings you over here?" Petra asked, leaning over the table.

Eren hadn't thought over what he was going to do or how he'd explain why he'd joined them, which in hindsight probably would've been a good idea. "Well... I just wanted to... spend more time with you guys. We're friends now, right?"

Sasha nodded enthusiastically, chewing a piece of bread. "Yup! You're welcome to sit here anytime."
"Thanks..." Eren fell silent after that. He really should've planned out a conversation starter. Luckily for him, Sasha provided him with one.

"So..." She started, now eating potato chips. "Are you excited to find out what our song for color guard is?"

"Um, I guess? I don't know what kind of music we use so..."

"It's different every year." Petra explained. "It can be any song, as long as the lyrics are appropriate. Some groups have old orchestra pieces or something without lyrics but there's a monologue playing. Last year we had this really upbeat, pop song. I don't know if you've heard this song before, but the year before that, we had the song 'Everlong' by The Foo Fighters. The juniors usually have an old song from the eighties, though I'm not sure why. But the varsity can have any type of music."

"Don't remind me of the music from junior guard." Levi groaned.

Petra laughed and Eren was lost. He thought Levi liked eighties music.

"I thought you liked old songs." Eren said quietly.

Levi rubbed his temples. "I do, but the juniors are always left with an overplayed song that gets stuck in your head all the time. It was a nightmare."

Petra kept giggling in her seat at the memories.

"What songs did you have?" Eren asked.

"One year, we had 'Funky Town' and Levi got so mad." Petra snickered. "You should've seen him, he'd frown every time the song would start. He was only like... ten years old I think, and he looked so grumpy. His mom took so many pictures." Petra paused after each sentence to regain her breath.

"The fucking cowbell from that song still haunts me." Levi muttered, closing his eyes. A smile peaked through when Eren attempted to stifle his laughter.

"And there was another year," Petra continued. "When Levi and Hanji were the only ones on the team who weren't girls and our song was 'Girls Just Want To Have Fun.' Those two were so embarrassed! We must've been around six years old. It was so cute seeing how angry they were."

"It wasn't cute and it wasn't funny. It was inconsiderate." Levi argued. Eren's shoulders started to shake as he hid his laughter. Levi turned to Eren. "Be grateful you don't have to go through that bullshit."

Eren nodded. It would've been so much more embarrassing for him to have joined this sport against his will and have to perform to one of those songs.

"Sasha told me you walked into practice on your hands." Connie chimed in.

"Oh... right." Eren scratched the back of his head. "I forgot about that."

"That's so cool! You know, I can do stuff like that too." Connie crossed his arms with a smug expression.

"No, you can't." Sasha argued.
"Yes I can!" Connie frowned. "I can do a cartwheel."

"Okay, first, putting your hands on the ground and jumping to the right is not a cartwheel. Second, that's not like what Eren does." Sasha took the french fries off of Connie's tray and started eating them.

Eren looked at her lunch. It consisted of a piece of bread, Connie's fries, potato chips, Petra's tater tots and a baked potato. Eren chuckled to himself.

Sasha looked up at him, self conscious. "What?"

"Oh, it's nothing." He waved her off. "It's just that almost everything you're eating has potatoes in it and I thought that was funny."

Sasha sighed, relieved that he wasn't judging her meal choices. "Oh, that. Yeah, potatoes are my favorite food. Whenever these guys have something with potatoes in it that they don't want, they give it to me."

"Oh, nice." Eren replied.

The group seized talking after that. Eren felt awkward, he should've brought a lunch so it wouldn't be as uncomfortable to sit without speaking.

Fortunately, Levi noticed him becoming nervous, so he saved him from himself. "Do you have your equipment for today's practice?"

Eren sat up straight. "Y-yes. I have everything in the gym."

"Make sure you get your things before its time to go. I don't want to have to spend more time backtracking. And today I'm going to teach you how to do consecutives. Just a warning, you'll need a lot of patience for learning them." Levi said.

That didn't sound too difficult for Eren. Patience seemed to be something he was practicing quite often, lately. "Okay, are they hard?"

Levi hummed, thinking over his answer. "Not necessarily hard, but they take awhile to learn."

"Alright." Eren tried to think of a way to give off the impression of preparedness. "I can't wait to get started." He added.

The other three guard members gave him a funny look. Levi's smirk made Eren suppress a whimper. "Can't wait, huh? When did you get so enthusiastic for practicing? Is something going on with you?"

Eren fidgeted in his seat, glancing in all directions and regretting answering the way he did. "I-I'm not enthusiastic. I'm just... not dreading it... for once."

Levi narrowed his eyes and started nodding. "Oh, right." He mused sarcastically.

Eren lifted an eyebrow in question. "What? I'm not."

"Face it Eren, you like color guard. You think it's fun, don't you?" Sasha accused him.

Eren waved his hands dismissively. "No, no. I don't actually like it, but it's not horrible. That's what I meant to say."
Connie rolled his eyes. "Yeah, suuure."

"We believe you." Petra joined in, unconvinced.

Eren shrunk into himself, fearing that he had given himself away.

"Just keep that excited attitude during practice today." Levi advised.

~

Eren retrieved his flag bag from the gym and walked to the main entrance, ready to leave with Levi. Soon enough, he was greeted with Isabel running up to him and squeezing him with Farlan and Levi trailing behind in a more calm manner.

"Are you ready to go?" Isabel asked impatiently.

"Mhm." Eren replied, not being able to force away his genuine smile. He was always happy to see Isabel. She never had anything against him and she was so pure with her intentions. It was hard to not be happy around her. She grabbed his hand and started dragging him across the parking lot, not wanting to waist a second.

Levi glared at him as he fell into step with Eren. Eren assumed it was because he was still jealous that he was Isabel's new friend. From what he gathered, Levi and Isabel were just as close as he was to Mikasa. He supposed that he would be upset too if someone stole Mikasa from him, so he didn't blame Levi one bit.

The car ride was filled with music, just as the last one was. Another CD of Isabel's and Farlan's was playing and Eren sort of recognized the songs. It had been a "Queen: Greatist Hits" album and Eren was very familiar with the song "Crazy Little Thing Called Love." Again, Isabel harmonized perfectly and Farlan kept the beat, tapping on the seat and window. After that song was finished, Isabel changed it to her personal favorite, "Killer Queen." Eren didn't know as much of the words as the previous song, but he had heard it before and enjoyed it. During the entire ride, Levi tapped one finger against the steering wheel ever so lightly. Eren assumed it was because he also liked the music playing.

Eren found himself feeling a little disappointed when the car ride ended. The four exited the car and made their way from the driveway to the front door. Before they actually reached it, Farlan and Isabel stopped in their tracks, almost making Eren slip. "Hey, Oluo!" Farlan yelled, waving his hand.

Eren turned to look at who he was talking to and saw his music teacher, Mr. Bozado, entering the neighboring house. He had stopped and vaguely waved back, smiling. "Hey, you three!" He hollered to the siblings, not noticing Eren's presence.

Levi unlocked the front door and pushed it open, letting everyone follow him inside.

"Is Mr. Bozado your neighbor?" Eren asked, closing the door behind him.

"Yup," Isabel answered. "He moved there when we were really little. We came over almost everyday and Farlan and I begged him to teach us how to read sheet music. After that, he taught me how to sing and he taught Farlan to play instruments. He still coaches us all the time."
Everything seemed to make sense to Eren now. "That explains a lot." He mused more to himself. A familiar friend brushed up against his leg, causing him to look down. "Hi Buster." Eren bent over to pet the welcoming feline. "Did you miss me?"

Levi frowned at the sight and swiped up Buster, setting him on his shoulder. "No, he didn't." Buster climbed over Levi's back to lay himself over both his shoulders and Levi payed him no mind, setting off to prepare snacks for everyone.

Eren chuckled at how Levi had been pouting so adorably and how cute it was to see him acting like a lazy cat wasn't just sprawled across his back as he made food. Eren turned back to Isabel, whispering, "How's Renée doing?"

She skipped over to him and whispered back in his ear. "She'll be ready to leave in a week or two."
"I know you two are talking about that fucking bird." Levi said, not even sparing them a glance. "I don't know what you're talking about." Isabel feigned innocence and tiptoed off into another room. She became annoyed with herself as she had forgotten to ask something from Levi. "Big bro, do you know where the VHS tapes are?"

"In the attic." He muttered, chopping up cucumbers.

"Thanks!" Isabel gave him a mock salute and ran upstairs.

"I'm gonna go to a lesson with Oluo." Farlan said. "See you in a few hours."

Levi hummed his acknowledgement and Eren said goodbye, moving out of the way and away from the door so he could leave. Eren and Levi were left by themselves, as Levi placed assorted vegetables on a plate along with other small snacks. Levi looked comical as he turned around so casually with Buster still on his shoulders, now purring and clawing on Levi. "Call your parents and let them know you'll be an hour later or so."

Eren cocked an eyebrow at him. "Why?"

"Because now that we have set pieces involved in the routine, I have to mark where they'll be and that'll take awhile. Then I'll make dinner for everyone later because I don't like the idea of starving you."

Levi walked into the living room with the plate of food, motioning for Eren to follow. Eren pulled out his phone and texted his mother that he'd be late, not paying attention to where he was going. Isabel nearly crashed into Eren as she bolted down the stairs and past him and over to the television in their living room.

Levi placed down the plate on the coffee table and set down Buster. "You can wait here while I get everything set up." He said.

Eren nodded and sat on the couch. He looked around at his surroundings and was still in awe about how clean and elegant everything appeared. He vaguely noticed Kitty, sleeping in her pen. He looked at the walls behind him and saw framed photos of Levi, Farlan and Isabel. Some of them were from when they were younger and Eren smiled at how even years ago as a child, Levi wore a constant, stoic yet irritated look on his face. Eren decided that his favorite one of him as a kid was the one with him seeming to be three or four years old, clutching onto a dark blue, stuffed bat. He looked to another and saw an old picture of Isabel getting ready to blow out candles on her birthday cake. Her features barely changed. In another photo, Farlan sat at a piano with his fingers randomly splayed over the keys, he seemed to be around five or six years old. Some photos showed the three
siblings at previous color guard performances. Eren marveled at all the different colors and styles used. Two in particular stood out. One looked to be very recent and Levi had been in the middle of a toss, wearing a silver uniform that had two red stripes over the chest and hip. The other happened to be another one when Levi was young. He seemed around five years old and had a plain, green flag and a blue shirt, both of which were too big for him. Eren adored these pictures. One, that was too far away for him to make out any distinct details, was a picture of who Eren assumed to be Levi's mother. He could just barely make out long black hair, pale skin, and a light blue dress. He couldn't exactly see what the face looked like.

As Eren was gazing around, Isabel was busy putting in an old VHS tape. She turned around to see Eren sitting on the couch. "Are you gonna watch tv with me?" She asked excitedly.

"Uh, sure. I'll watch it with you until Levi says I have to practice."

"Awesome!" She beamed, walking over to the couch.

"So what are we watching?" Eren tilted his head at her.

"My favorite show from when I was a kid, Thundercats!" She exclaimed excitedly, practically jumping in her spot. After a moment of seeing Eren's confused face, she settled down. "Or I can put on something else if you don't want to watch a kid show." She said sheepishly.

Eren shrugged his shoulders. "I'm fine with it. I mean, I've never seen it before, but I'll watch it. It sounds cool."

Isabel's grin returned. "Really?"

"Yeah, why not?"

"Great!" She walked up to the television and sped up the tape to where the show began and she sat back down. "It's a really old show, but I think you might like it." She assured Eren.

The show started and Eren could easily recognize the animation as an eighties cartoon. Even though Eren had never watched the show, the choppy movements and color schemes reminded him of shows he used to watch as a child. He glanced over at Isabel when the theme song started, entertained by how she quietly hummed along, smiling all the while.

"This is the very first episode too," Isabel informed him. "So you're not missing out on anything." She picked up the plate and started picking pieces of food, offering some to Eren before setting it back down.

Eren discovered that despite the poor usage of animation and childish comedy relief, he actually enjoyed the show. It was very different from the super hero shows he used to watch. One particular character caught his attention. "That one reminds me of you." He told Isabel.

"Hm? Which one?" She furrowed her brows.

Eren waited until the one he had mentioned was on the screen and he pointed. "That one. You both have red hair and you kind of have the same personality. You're both ... energetic and you have the same attitude."

"That's Wilykit!" She she explained. "You think I'm like Wilykit?" She faced him, looking flattered.

"Mhm." Eren nodded.
"She's my favorite! That's so cool, I should tell Levi when he's finished." She hugged her knees to her chest and fidgeted with joy at the compliment.

The two resumed watching the show, both enjoying it for different reasons.

Shortly after the first episode was over, Levi reentered the living room and faced Eren. "Everything's set up, let's go."

"Levi!" Isabel jumped in her seat. "Eren said I'm like Wilykit, isn't that cool?"

Levi looked at her pensively before nodding. "I see the resemblance." Isabel sat back in her victory. Levi turned back to Eren, crossing his arms. "Get your equipment, get changed and we'll get started."

~

Eren entered the practice room, observing many tape markings across the floor. Based on their placement, he assumed they showed where the floor, panels and wheels went. They seemed to be perfectly measured out, which is probably why it took Levi so long to get it all set up. Taking his mind off the floor, Eren reminded himself that this was alone time with Levi, which meant he could get closer to him and get to know him better. He took a deep breath, preparing himself.

Levi regarded Eren as he noticed the tape he'd laid down. Levi thought it was cute how Eren was so observant and always studied his surroundings. This was his chance to start dropping subtle hints to Eren and maybe even flirt a bit.

Eren couldn't help but take an extra moment to eye Levi's outfit. This one was particularly revealing near the torso, as Levi's shirt was merely a muscle t-shirt with long slits in the side. The front was so faded that Eren could barely make out the words that read 'Sisters Of Mercy.' Another band that Levi liked, Eren figured. Though, Eren wasn't concerned with the front, he was more interested in the fact that Levi's pale, sculpted sides were on full show, allowing him to see just enough to notice his carved abdominal muscles and strong pectorals. Eren was going to faint at some point, he was sure of it. If that wasn't bad enough, Levi's long pants had the word 'sinner' running down the side of his left leg, providing him with many invasive thoughts.

Levi pretended to check the tape to see if it was secure so he could have an excuse to walk behind Eren and take in the view. And what a glorious view it was. Eren had been generous enough to choose clothes that showed off his lean figure. Eren's ratty, old, gray tank top clung to his frame in just the right way so Levi could see how his body curved from Eren's relaxed posture. His pants matched his own in length and displayed Eren's round backside oh so nicely. Levi was an ass-man and proud of it. Levi cursed whatever force he considered the existence of for letting Eren turn around. He cleared his throat, tearing his eyes away. "Everything's in place. Let's get started with stretches."

Levi stood parallel to Eren and started to count them off for touching their toes. Levi stood back up and observed Eren's position. His first and most important job was to make sure that Eren was stretching properly, but that didn't mean he couldn't have some fun while doing it.

Levi strode over so he was directly behind Eren. "I know you can go further than that." He said in a voice deeper than his normal one. He pressed a hand to the small of Eren's back, earning a
surprised flinch from him and slowly traced his hand up Eren's spine, pressing gently all the while. The brunet had found a position that fit Levi's liking, so Levi let go and joined him in stretching.

They moved on to the next stretching position. "This is a new one, it's called the straddle. Sit down." Levi and Eren lowered themselves onto the ground. "Alright, first you need to spread your legs."

Eren snapped his eyes up at him. "I need to what?"

"Spread your legs." Levi repeated nonchalantly. When Eren only opened his legs so that his knees were a foot apart, Levi huffed and sat behind him, chest pressed against his back. Levi grabbed the inside of Eren's thighs and tugged them backwards. Eren slapped a hand over his mouth after accidentally releasing a squeak. "Keep them open like this." Levi murmured. He sat back to his side and continued. "First part of this stretch is to lean to your right as far as you can go, raising your left arm over your head and tucking your right arm under your stomach. You hold that for eight counts with your toes pointed, then have your toes at a ninety degree angle for eight counts. When they're at ninety degrees, we call that flexing." Levi provided him with an example and waited for him to do the same.

Eren did as instructed, but luckily for Levi, wasn't good enough. Levi came to help as usual. Levi grabbed just above Eren's left shoulder and the right side of his waist and applied pressure to each end. Eren hoped to god that he wasn't shaking and if he was, he prayed that Levi didn't notice.

"Much better." Levi said. "Now point." Eren pointed his toes as Levi began counting in a voice that was barely audible. "Flex." Eren bent his feet upwards and felt a muscle tugging in his leg. He definitely preferred pointing as this was a tad more uncomfortable. Levi reached eight and pushed down on Eren. "Bend as far as you can and grab your foot. Point." Eren was grateful that Levi was behind him and couldn't see the heat rising underneath his cheeks.

Levi kept counting and raked his eyes over Eren's contorted form. "Flex." He felt the younger teenager's body stiffen under his fingers with the change in footing. He loved being able to sense every muscle clenching, loosening, rising and falling as he breathed and moved. "Now for the center, just bend and reach as far as you can."

Eren did as told, letting out a sharp breath through his mouth, not enjoying how vulnerable and tense he was. Levi pushed down in between his shoulder blades. "Come on, you can get lower." He tutted. "Point." Eren's legs started migrating closer to each other to help soothe the pain, but Levi was quick to grab the inner portions of his legs again and pulled back once more. "Keep these open. Flex."

Eren chirped at the contact, remaining obedient.

"Very good. Now do the same thing to your left foot and point." Eren repeated everything he did on his right side, Levi guiding him the entire time like the good instructor he was.

"Okay next stretch." Levi announced. "This one is called the 90/90 hamstring. Lay on your back."

As expected, Eren immediately followed Levi's instructions.

"You're going to take one of your legs, doesn't matter which to start, and grab behind your thigh, pulling it upwards." Just like every other time, Eren's position was flawed. Levi took it upon himself to sit between Eren's legs, making the brunet shudder and avoid eye contact. Levi took one hand and pressed it to Eren's raised calf and pushed back. "This needs to be straighter." Levi used his opposite hand to push down Eren's other leg, grabbing dangerously close to the hip. "This leg
needs to be flat."

Eren's breath became labored and harsh. For a split second, he glanced back at Levi only to see his
gaze baring down on him intensely. He instantly looked away, not ready to meet his eyes. He
could feel himself starting to sweat and his muscles constrict under Levi's stare. He could see out of
his peripheral vision that Levi was still observing him, seemingly with interest.

"Other leg." Levi adjusted to let Eren switch his position, but otherwise did not move or back away.
He knew exactly how he was affecting the one beneath him. Levi was playing him like a finely
tuned instrument and Eren's soft breaths and hushed whines were sweet music to his ears.

Levi's hand that held Eren's leg down scooted up half an inch and had Eren jerking out of Levi's
hold and into a sitting position. His heart started racing and his breathing picked up to five times
it's rate. Levi watched him, concerned and hesitant. "Do you... um, do you think we could take a
break, maybe?" Eren asked.

Levi's brows knitted together. "We just started. We haven't even gotten to work yet."

"I know, it's just, uh... I need some water. My throats really dry." He laughed uncomfortably to
hide his apprehension.

"Sure then, I could take some water too, now that you mention it." He smirked, more to himself
than to Eren and got up to walk out of the room. "We'll have a quick break, then we need to finish
stretching."

As Levi exited through the door, Eren flung his head back, groaning at the ceiling. He tried to will
away unfortunate situation that was making an appearance between his legs. This guy was going to
give him a heart attack.

~

Eren drank half of his water from the bottle that Petra had given him. It was still cold and it was
refreshing and he was thankful for that. Maybe he just needed a cooling drink to be able to keep his
focus off Levi. That theory was immediately eradicated when Levi strutted through the door,
pulling up the bottom of his shirt up to wipe off the extra water that surrounded his mouth. This
provided Eren with a perfect view of Levi's abs that were expectedly as pale as the rest of him and
moved in such a hypnotizing way as he walked over to him. The brunet had to physically restrain
himself from moving his gaze even lower. The sight was too much for Eren. The heat had spread to
every part of his body and his pants became rather constricting. So, as a defensive reflex, Eren left
his water bottle open and jerked it up to splash the cold water on his face in an attempt to knock
himself out of his reverie and cool himself down.

It did its job of distracting him, but did so by going up his nose and being too cold for his eyes to
bare. He leaned over, shaking his head, holding his bottle away from him, as he scrunched up his
eyes and brought his hand up to his nose, trying to blow out the water. If he was trying to keep
himself from looking like an idiot in front of Levi, he was doing very poorly.

Levi stared at him incredulously. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah." Eren said quickly, with his eyes still closed and still shaking off the water.
"Why the fuck did you do that?"

"I honestly don't know. Let's just get back to work." Eren dared to open his eyes, making ridiculous faces as his vision readjusted.

"... Alright." Levi passed him with a skeptical stare.

Eren mentally kicked himself, but was now ready to resume stretching. He believed he was far too embarrassed to get hot and bothered now.

~

Fortunately, the remaining stretches were a lot less inviting to Levi and the warm up run wasn't too awfully tiring. The two went through several run throughs of the routine and it was now time to teach Eren how to do consecutives.

Levi faced Eren with his rifle. "Consecutives are fairly simple, but they take awhile to get used to. So, don't get frustrated if you don't get it right away. What you need to do is keep your left hand flat against your side, turn your right hand fast enough so the rifle can pick up the momentum, release and catch. Then you'd keep going, but let's try one for now." Levi led by example then gestured to Eren, to tell him that it was now his turn.

This didn't seem too hard. Eren stood up straight, took a deep breath and did as Levi told him. Almost. He had released too early and sent the rifle flying to his right. Both of their gazes followed it when it landed and Levi tried to stifle his laughter.

"Okay, one more time." Levi said.

Eren picked up his rifle and tried again. This time, he released at the right time, but didn't build up enough speed, promptly dropping his rifle on his foot. Eren yanked back his foot and inspected the damage, balancing himself on the other.

Levi leaned in to see the injury. "Are you bleeding?"

"No, I don't think-"

"Pick up your rifle. One more time, you're fine."

Eren glowered at him. 'I am not fine.' He thought. 'My foot hurts, you ass. You unfairly attractive ass. You unfairly attractive, heaven sent ass- stop that and focus.'

Eren tried one more time with more momentum, keeping an eye out for his release point and caught his rifle. He beamed. "I did it!"

Levi didn't have the heart to tell him that he looked absolutely ridiculous, his arms weren't in the right places and his facial expressions made him look like he was going to shit his pants. But, it was progress, and for that he let Eren think he did a great job. "Very good, but don't get cocky. Now let's move on. When you do consecutives, make sure the arm that's handling the rifle is also flat against your side."

Eren scoffed. In his mind, he was a pro now. Keeping his arm to his side? Easy. He confidently
took another shot, keeping Levi's words in mind and dropped the rifle, jumping out of the way before it struck his foot again.

Levi studied him with his arms crossed. "I have an idea." He turned around and walked over to his own flag bag and fished out the same white tape he'd used to mark the floor. He returned to Eren and started unraveling it. "Put your arms at your sides." Eren seemed nervous but lowered his arms anyway. "This is how I was taught." Levi began going around Eren, taping his arms down in place.

"This seems a bit excessive." Eren commented.

"This is conditioning. This is how you get rid of chicken arm." Levi said, ripping off the end of the tape.

"Chicken arm?"

"When people first learn how to do consecutives, they flap their arm to gain leverage that they don't need. You need to keep both arms flat." Levi stood back and handed him his rifle. "Okay, go ahead."

"You can't be serious." Eren jutted out his head. When all he got was a fixed stare, he sighed and attempted to do it again. He had the same outcome as his first attempt. Even with the tape, his arm instinctively budged.

Levi gave him pointers here and there, helping him to the best of his ability. Eventually, Eren successfully did one. "Good, now let's work on your monster claw."

"What the hell is that?"

"Your left hand." Levi pointed. "When doing consecutives, it's a natural reflex for your hand to twist into this weird claw shape, because you're anticipating that you'll drop and that's how your mind prepares you to catch it. We call it the monster claw. It's best to try to stop that habit as soon as possible, because it looks like your trying to scratch your dick, but your arm is too short."

Eren coughed a bit, choking on his own spit from Levi's comment.

"Grab your pants if you have to, anything looks better than the claw." Ignoring Eren's coughing fit, Levi waved his hand, telling him to start.

Clutching onto the fabric of his pants, Eren went for another try. Several drops and many rifle projectiles later, Eren finally did one, perfect consecutive. He inhaled sharply, smiling at his hands like an elated child.

Levi couldn't help but fall for that dopey grin. Eren's smile was so contagious and it lit up the whole room. The way his blue-green eyes dazzled with flecks of gold when he got excited warmed Levi's heart. "Congratulations. That was really good. Let's go for two."

Eren discovered that he loved being praised by him. Levi's compliment only fueled his desire to conquer this task.

~
A little over half an hour later, Eren had reached five consecutives. Granted, he completed this while still using the tape, but it was a big step. Usually, consecutives took longer to learn and he'd succeeded in impressing Levi.

Levi pealed off the tape from Eren, being careful around the arms so he didn't pull out any hairs. "You did very well, better than most actually." Levi remarked.

"Thanks." Eren's heart fluttered hearing Levi compliment him.

"You should sit down and stretch a bit. Your arms probably hurt from being in the same spot for so long."

Eren kneeled to the ground, as did Levi. Eren cocked an eyebrow at him.

"I'm going to start to make dinner for everybody in a few minutes, but I'm gonna relax first." Levi huffed out an amused breath. "Teaching you is a pain."

"Hey!" Eren chuckled. "I'm not that bad."

"Yeah, you're right." Levi rolled his eyes. Levi subtly inched over to sit side by side with Eren. "Not bad at all." His voice dropped an octave.

A shiver went down Eren's spine. He sucked in a breath and straightened up, looking away from Levi. Levi grabbed the part of Eren's arm that hand been taped down and rubbed soothing circles into it with his thumb. "Does it hurt here?"

"Nope." Eren answered, shaking his head. He expected Levi to stop after he answered, and faced him when he didn't. Levi seemed to be caught up in the smoothness of Eren's skin. He scooted back a bit and traced his hand over to his shoulder.

"What about your shoulders? Do they hurt?" Levi squeezed down gently.

Eren stiffened to his touch. "N-no, they're fine." Levi was killing him, he didn't think he could take much more. Every second his hands lingered, Eren became more and more lightheaded.

Levi had to take it a step further of course. He laid both his hands on either side of Eren, on the spaces between his neck and shoulders, softly massaging the area. "And your neck? That's not aching, is it?"

Eren closed his eyes, subconsciously leaning into Levi's hands. All he could think about was how it would be a tragedy if Levi stopped his movements. 'God, just fuck me already.' He thought to himself.

Eren slowly opened his eyes when the hands stilled, but remained on him. Eren turned around, wondering why Levi had halted, furrowing his eyebrows together in confusion. Levi's jaw lightly dropped when he saw Levi's predatory smirk. His eyes widened and his face reddened deeply when he realized that his thoughts may not have been uttered strictly in his mind, but also through his mouth.

"Well... " Levi began. "Since you asked so nicely..."
Heh, color guard bondage.

and OOO CLIFF HANGER! WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? I hope that ending wasn't too abrupt or awkwardly placed. Sorry that this chapter was so late, I had a long, stressful, shitty week. The future chapters might also be very sporadic, as I'm in the stage crew for my school's musical and that takes up a lot of my time. It starts later this week. But I promise, I will update as much as humanly possible.

If you liked this chapter, please leave a comment or a kudos, those really motivate me to keep writing and they make me really happy. My tumblr is dr-s--art in case you were wondering. Thank you so much for reading!!! <3
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The one thing that Eren had hoped for but never expected to come true, finally happened. The road ahead might not be easy, but it's worth the effort.

Chapter Notes

Crew started, so I might be inconsistent with updating this month, just a warning! I've gotten feedback on the chapters where I'm over exhausted when I write, saying that they love those chapters. So, I wrote this entire chapter through various nights. So if this chapter is trash, you have no one to blame but yourselves. Kidding, I should probably stop doing that. Translations are in the end notes, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Well... since you asked so nicely..."

"No, no, no!" Eren shouted. This couldn't be happening, his luck couldn't be this bad. "Th-that's not what I meant! I... I meant that... god, I don't know!" He lowered his head into his hands.

Levi put his arm around Eren's shoulders. "Calm down. Just tell me what you wanted to say." The bastard kept wearing that smug smile that was driving Eren insane.

"I don't know what I wanted to say, but it wasn't that!" He said into his hands. He peaked up at Levi through his fingers.

"Aw." Levi mock pouted, sticking out his bottom lip. His lip ring attracted Eren's eye. "You didn't mean it?" When all Eren did was stare back dumbly, Levi's face broke out into an entertained grin. "Your face is so red, I love it."

Eren sat back, trying to wrap his brain around the situation. Levi wasn't disgusted or offended by Eren's slip of words, in fact, he was rather inviting of Eren's desperate suggestions. Now he was saying that he loved how red his face was. Eren didn't quite understand what was going on, but his main focus was on the fact that Levi hadn't rejected him and he seemed interested. This was what Eren wanted but it didn't happen the way he expected. "W-wait. Why are you not offended? Why are you acting like this?"

A laugh from Levi reverberated through his chest, sending vibrations to Eren's shoulder and making him feel intoxicated by that beautiful noise. "You can't put two and two together?"

Eren gulped, still not comprehending that his feelings were reciprocated. "I-is it because... you're getting back at me for something?"

Levi laughed heartily. "No. Think about it, why else would I tease you so much?"
Eren's eyes darted in all directions. This couldn't be happening, his luck couldn't be this good. "Does this mean you...?"

Levi tightened his grip around Eren and lowered his voice. "That I think you're cute? That I like to mess with you just to get you flustered? That I'd like to go out with you and be your boyfriend? Yes to all of those."

All the air left Eren's lungs as he accidentally let out a soft, high pitched noise and his face heated up more than it already had. Levi was so close and telling him all the things he wanted to hear, he couldn't believe it. "But I thought there was no way you'd like me back. I thought I annoyed you."

"Eren, I've told you before. It's not like I hate you. You can say some really ignorant things sometimes, but that's not your fault. And... you have a lot more pros than cons, I believe."

That caused Eren to release a short, awkward laugh and adorn a goofy smile.

Levi quirked up that pierced brow of his. "Everything okay? You seem a little uncomfortable."

"I'm fine, I'm fine, it's just..." Eren looked down at his fiddling hands, trying and failing to force away his smile. "I'm just in shock, I guess. I didn't think you'd like me in a million years and I don't know what to do now."

Levi figured that this wouldn't be the time to tell him how adorable he looked being all modest.

All too soon, Eren's face fell and he looked to be more apprehensive. "Even after hearing you say those things, I don't think you'd want to be with me, though." He muttered, continuing before Levi could protest. "I can't have my parents knowing I'm gay. You're still the only person who knows. I wouldn't be able to go on dates with you or show you off in public. If we did get together, it'd have to be a secret and I don't think you'd like having to hide that you're in a relationship."

Levi started stroking the brunet's hair, making him stiffen before relaxing. "So be it." Eren snapped his head up to face him with hopeful eyes. "I'm not going to waste time not being in a relationship with you, just because I can't tell people. I won't let that stop me. And maybe one day, you'll feel comfortable enough to come out. But until then, regardless of whether or not we're together, I promise I won't tell anybody anything you don't want me to."

"Really? You would be with someone that you can't tell anyone about?"

"Yeah, it beats not being with them at all."

Eren's smile returned despite himself.

"So, what do you say?" Levi nudged Eren's cheek, eliciting a giggle from him. "Would you like to be my boyfriend?"

Eren bit his lip and nodded. "Mhm. I really would."

"Okay then, it's official." Levi agreed. "Now, can I take you up on your earlier offer?" He wiggled his eyebrows at Eren.

"U-uh, let's wait a bit to do that. I'm still trying to fathom that this is actually happening." Eren replied shyly. He would love for Levi to take him up on that offer, but not right that second.

"Alright, if you say so." Levi gave him a quick squeeze on the shoulder before he stood up. "I have to go to work sometime tonight, so I should probably get to making that dinner so I can take you
home on time." He offered a hand to help Eren stand up.

"Okay." Eren's head was spinning. Everything was going perfectly.

~

The two reentered the living room to see that Isabel was still watching Thundercats. She waved at them as they crossed into her field of vision. "Hey, guys! How was practice?"

They glanced at each other with a knowing looks. Levi was the one to answer. "Better than expected."

"That's good. Eren, come sit with me!" Isabel patted the couch cushion next to her and scooted over.

"I will, after I change." Eren headed off to the bathroom where he normally changed in and out of his practice clothes, purposefully looking away from Levi's hungry, wandering eyes. He knew if he looked, he'd get more flustered.

He walked into the bathroom, shutting the door and slipping off his tank top. After he was fully changed. He looked into the mirror and smiled. He had gotten so worked up over his crush that he panicked when Levi displayed mutual feelings. But everything was heading in the right direction now. All those years of hiding himself from his loved ones and now he found someone who he could be honest with and he was head over heels for him. What a crazy day.

He reached for the doorknob, but paused after hearing the front door open and an unfamiliar voice following. He could've sworn he heard Levi saying "mama" in a strange accent. Eren pressed his ear up against the door to listen in. He felt too awkward to intrude on the person's entrance. If it was Levi's mother, he wasn't sure she knew he was there, considering he'd never met her before.

Eren could hear the voices quite well, but failed to understand them.

"Comment ça va?" Eren was certain that Levi was the one speaking.

"Assez bien." Came an exhausted female voice. The voices sounded as if they were getting closer. Eren heard the woman say something muffled before Levi interrupted.


"Ne t'inquiètes pas, mon fils. Je peux le faire."


"Ne t'inquiètes pas, mon fils. Je peux le faire."

Eren heard a couple rushed foot steps before Levi spoke again. "Non, il faut que tu dormes avant tu parts encore. Tu es trop fatigué."

The woman sighed with reluctance. "D'accord, tu as raison."

Footsteps followed the end of their conversation, getting closer to the bathroom. Eren heard a faint jingling of a bell and persistent meowing from Buster. "Ah, bonjour mon précieux." The jingling continued and Buster sounded elevated. Eren guessed that the woman had picked him up. More footsteps ensued before they stopped again and Eren heard the rustling of coins. "Isabel, I found these today. For the rabbit you want." Her voice surprisingly sounded as if she was both a native
English speaker and a native French speaker, depending on the language she used. Eren couldn't tell which was her first language.

"Thanks mom!" Isabel chirped. Now Eren could confirm that it was their mother that had showed up. The footsteps continued to get closer to the bathroom before they had passed it completely. Eren heard the opening and closing of a door that was further down the hallway and the sigh of Levi as he walked past the bathroom again.

Once Eren believed that it was an acceptable time to come out, he opened the door, peaking his head out before exiting. He sat down next to Isabel on the couch, as promised. "Who just came in?" He already knew the answer to the question, but he didn't want them to know he was listening in.

"Our mom." She answered. "She just got home from work." She turned back to the television.

Eren nodded. "Is she alright? She sounded pretty tired."

"Yeah," Isabel said more somberly this time. "She's fine, she just works all day and is away all night."

As much as Eren liked sitting and chatting with Isabel, he would've preferred to go check up on Levi. He sounded distressed earlier and not only that, but they had just recently agreed that they were going out. That was a huge deal to Eren. As his new boyfriend, he wanted to comfort Levi. "Will you excuse me for a minute? I just need to ask Levi something real quick."

"Okay." Isabel waved him off.

Eren hopped off the couch and wandered into the kitchen. Levi was putting something in the oven and setting a timer, huffing exasperatedly. He then turned to a cutting board and started chopping up lettuce. "Levi?"

Levi looked over his shoulder, eyes softening when he caught sight of Eren. "Yeah?"

"Is everything alright?"

Levi closed his eyes for a moment, nodding. "Yeah, everything's fine."

Eren made his way over to stand next to him. "Isabel told me your mom got home just now. I heard you guys talking, but I couldn't understand you. Did something happen?"

Levi directed his attention back to the food he was preparing, putting the lettuce into a large bowl and grabbing some cabbage to cut up. "Nothing happened. She just overworks herself and she doesn't even notice. She'll keep taking on more and more things and it takes so much out of her. Like just now, she's been working all day and as soon as she walked in the door, she tried pulling out pots and pans to get dinner started. She worries about us more than herself and it makes me frustrated sometimes. But everything's fine, I promise."

That wasn't good enough for Eren. Even if everything was fine, the situation was still bothering Levi. He contemplated what he could do to comfort Levi, but he didn't know what he should do or what kind of boundaries Levi had. 'Based on how he helped me stretch, he probably doesn't have any boundaries.' Eren thought. He thought about giving him a side hug, but Levi hadn't changed out of his workout clothes and Eren fully believed that if he put his hand on Levi's bare side, he would faint. Eren took a deep breath, setting his hand on Levi's shoulder and rested his head on Levi's. "I'm sorry." He whispered.
Eren didn't know what kind of reaction he expected from Levi, but it wasn't laughter. Levi's body shook as he peered up at Eren with mirth written all over his face. "You're funny."

Eren furrowed his brows. "What are you talking about?"

"You're being so careful right now." Eren cocked his head in confusion and Levi rolled his eyes, turning around to fully face Eren. "You're not sinning yet, the bible doesn't say shit about hugging." He wrapped his arms around the taller teen's waist, resting his head in the crook of his neck.

Eren hesitantly laid his arms around Levi's neck. The action felt foreign, but not unwelcome. In fact, it was more than welcomed, as it made Eren's heart skip a beat. "I wasn't sure if I was allowed to do this." He admitted.

Levi's chuckle resonated through Eren before he parted, keeping his hands threaded behind Eren's back. "You don't need ask permission for anything with me. But I know how you are, so I'll do that for you."

Eren let himself smile. He liked the thought of being able to do anything he wanted with Levi. That second, the front door swung open revealing Farlan. "Sup guys?"

Eren jumped out of Levi's arms, pushing him towards the counter, almost making him falter and started looking around as if nothing had happened. Luckily for him, Farlan hadn't seen a thing. Levi huffed in annoyance. "Nothing much." He flicked his eyes over to Eren, who had started whistling in an effort to look casual, but instead made himself look conspicuous. "How was your lesson?"

"Good, as usual." Farlan took off his jacket and hung it up before walking into the living room.

Eren gazed apologetically at Levi. "Sorry, I panicked." He scratched the back of his head. "Are you sure you want to have to keep doing that?"

Levi crossed his arms, smirking. "It's worth it. And if you plan on making people less suspicious, you'll have to learn how to act."

~

Shortly thereafter, Levi called Isabel, Farlan and Eren from the living room, announcing that dinner was ready.

Eren sat next to Isabel and she sat next to Farlan. Levi set out the plates and utensils before bringing out the soup and salad. "Farlan, I'll be gone by the time dessert is ready, so take it out if the oven when you hear the timer."

"Gotta." Farlan nodded. "Wait, that means Eren won't get any."

Levi bit his lip, thinking over his response. "Don't worry. Eren will get dessert another time." He cast a look to Eren that only he could understand.

Eren fidgeted in his seat, avoiding eye contact out of fear that the color of his cheeks would betray him.
After everyone was served, Levi sat down next to Eren and Farlan. Eren instinctively set his napkin on his lap and rested his elbows on the table, tilting his head down and shutting his eyes. He waited for a few moments and was met only with silence. He peaked one eye open and saw three very amusedly perplexed faces staring at him. He knitted his brows together. "Who's starting?"

"Who's starting what?" Isabel asked.

"What are you doing?" Farlan joined in.

Eren looked around and saw that the siblings had already started eating their food. Then it hit him that he wasn't at home anymore. "Oh... right, sorry. Every other night at my house we say grace. I guess I forgot you guys don't do that."

Levi snickered but otherwise didn't make fun of him for it.

"Well, we can do that." Farlan said. "If that'll make you more comfortable. How does it go? You just thank god, right?"

Eren giggled. "You don't have to. I don't know why you'd say grace if you're not religious."

"Nonsense, it'll be fun!" Farlan grinned. Levi just sat back and observed the whole thing. Eren was simply confused, he hated saying grace and they were excited. He couldn't fathom what had gotten into them.

"Oh oh! I wanna do it! Can I try?" Isabel bounced in her chair.

"Okay go!" Farlan mimicked Eren's earlier actions, as did Isabel.

Isabel scrunched her eyes shut, then peaked one open, looking at Eren and Levi. "Guys!" She hissed. "Get into position!" They humored her and put their heads down as well. She closed her eye again and cleared her throat. "So, Jesus," Eren had to hold back his laughter. "It's me, Isabel. Thanks for the food that our mom paid for and Levi cooked. I know you had nothing to do with us getting the food, but I think that you created it or something...? I don't know how that works, but yeah. That's cool. Oh and one last thing. Please help me get my new bunny soon. Kay thanks, bye. Oh, and you're the man. Okay, amen." She opened her eyes, watching Eren expectantly. "How'd I do?"

Eren almost failed at containing himself, but seeing her genuine curiosity forced him to act impressed. "I can honestly say... that it was better than listening to my parents say grace. You're a natural."

She beamed and sat back, so proud of herself. Farlan leaned over and whispered to her. "That was really good!"

"Thanks, I've never done it before." She muttered back excitedly.

"Could've fooled me." Farlan nodded.

Eren covered his mouth to hide his laughing fit. It was nice to have something that wasn't so serious or a downer preceding his meal. He glanced over to Levi, who was also smiling in amusement. He wanted all of his meals to be like this.

Eren started eating his food and discovered that it was much more subtly seasoned and flavored than what he ate at home and he actually preferred it that way. The salad had a very light dressing...
and the soup wasn't exactly flavorless, but it had just enough contrast within the ingredients to have an interesting taste. "I wish my mom would make dinner like this." He mused.

"What does your mom make?" Levi asked.

Eren shrugged. " Weird German food most of the time. She never makes it right, though."

"Why German food?" Farlan asked.

"Because we're German and she wants to celebrate our roots or something like that. She gets so into our heritage. I'm surprised she hasn't forced me to wear lederhosen yet."

The siblings sniggered at his last comment.

"That's kind of like our mom with our French background." Isabel said. "She compares everything to France and she speaks French around the house."

"Oh right. I thought I heard someone speaking French earlier. Do you all speak French?"

Farlan and Isabel looked at each other with iffy expressions. "Sorta?" Farlan said. "Isabel and I aren't fluent but we know enough to the point where we could survive... a day in France. Okay, maybe not France, maybe Canada. But Levi's fluent."

Eren looked to Levi. He already knew this of course, but he wanted him to weigh in on the subject. Levi sat up straight, preparing an explanation. "These guys would be fluent if they were home when they were little," Eren cocked his head, not fully understanding him. "When Mr. Bozado first moved in, they spent all their time with him learning about music. Plus he babysat for them a lot. I always stayed home with my mom and she always spoke French and a bit of English at home. So, I learned French from her and English from reading, watching television and talking with our neighbors. They learned a bit of French when they were home and English everywhere else."

"I wish I could learn French." Eren said absentmindedly, taking another bite of his salad.

Levi picked up his glass, smirking as he hid his mouth behind it. "I can teach you some French things."

Eren nearly choked on his food. This guy was going to be the death of him.

~

Dinner went on with minimal innuendos from Levi. The food had been delicious and the atmosphere was so warm and friendly. Eren was sad when it ended and Levi had to take him home so he could go to work. Levi changed into work clothes, which consisted of a white button up shirt and black skinny jeans. He found his keys and waited for Eren to gather his things.

"Does Eren have to go?" Isabel whined.

"Yes, I'm the only one who can take him home and I have to leave anyway." Levi said, waiting by the doorway. Eren walked up to him with his bags in hand. "Ready to go?"

"Mhm." Eren turned to Isabel. "Bye, Izzy."
"Bye, Eren. See you tomorrow!" She waved at him, leaving to go back to watching television.

Levi opened the door for him, following after and shutting it. As Eren fumbled with his bags, Levi took them from him, opening the trunk to put them inside. Before Eren could walk around him, Levi dashed to the passenger seat and opened the door for him as well. Eren smiled at him. "What a gentleman." He commented sarcastically.

Levi rolled his eyes. "Just get in the car." Eren did so without arguing and just as he thought that Levi wouldn't go any further, said man leaned into the car and buckled him up.

"Are you kidding?" Eren chortled. "I could've done that myself."

Levi stood up straight. "Yeah, well I'd like to take proper care of my boyfriend." That sentence made Eren's heart flutter. He shut the door and walked over to the drivers side. He flicked his gaze back to Eren as he started up the car. "You'll tell me if I'm doing something that makes you uncomfortable, right?"

"Of course." Eren nodded.

"And... will you tell me if I'm... not doing enough?" Levi asked, seeming uncharacteristically insecure.

Eren tilted his head, not quite understanding what Levi was saying. "What do you mean?"

Levi bit his lip, trying to read Eren for a moment before he shook his head, putting the car in drive. "Nothing." He pulled out of the driveway and headed off to Eren's house, leaving the subject forgotten.


Eren took in a shaky breath, feeling his cheeks heat up. "I'm still kind of shocked. I don't really know what to think or what I should be thinking. I just know that I'm nervous, but I'm excited even more. I'm really happy too. I'd like to tell somebody about us, like one of my friends... or even my mom. But I can't." He casted his eyes downward.

That hurt Levi to hear. "Well... you can. If your friends are really your friends, they won't mind. I don't know about your parents, but like I've said before, there's always the guard. And... there's my family. Your secret's safe with them."

Eren peered at him from the side. "Does your family know? That you're bisexual?"

Levi nodded. "Yeah. I've had both a boyfriend and a girlfriend before. They all know."

Eren thought about it in depth. Was it fair that he was making Levi keep a secret from his family? He knew he could trust them, but should he allow Levi to tell them? "Is your mom okay with it?"

"Definitely. She doesn't care."

"Alright." Eren said. "You can tell your mom, but please, no one else. And you have to tell her it's a secret."

Levi's face lit up with the information. "Don't worry, she won't tell anyone if I ask her not to. And are you sure? I promise I won't tell anybody unless you're completely comfortable with it."
Eren sharply inhaled, closing his eyes. "I'm sure. It's kind of killing me having no one know." He admitted.

Those words were a dagger in Levi's chest. He set his right hand on top of Eren's knee, gently squeezing it for reassurance. "One day, you'll feel safe enough for everyone to know. And it'll feel so good when they do. It'll be worth the wait, trust me."

"... Thank you." Eren set his hand on top of Levi's.

"

"Do you need help carrying everything in?" Levi asked, pulling into Eren's driveway.

"No, I can get it all. Thanks though." Eren unbuckled himself. "I still can't believe this is happening." He grinned widely.

Levi returned his facial expression. "We're going to have to figure out a time to go out and do something together."

"Absolutely." Eren agreed. He put his hand on the door, but he needed one moment more to take in Levi's features before he left. Levi never wore anything this professional and it suited him quite well. Though, he still had in all his piercings and his eyes were still surrounded with black eyeliner. It was a good look for him. "Goodbye... I'll see you tomorrow."

"See ya, gorgeous." Levi smirked at him.

Eren accidentally let out a quiet whimper, hearing the name. He didn't need to look in a mirror to tell that his face was on fire. "I... uh..." Eren's thinking capacity vanished into thin air. "Bye!" He left the car, retrieved his things and got inside as fast as he could, too flustered to function.

Levi couldn't stop the smile the crept onto his face as he watched Eren leave. He was going to be a handful.

"

Levi's smile followed him all the way to work, which was something that didn't happen too often for him. Usually, he dreaded work more than any part of his day, but he was too happy to remember that at the moment. He walked inside the diner with a spring in his step, feeling as high as a cloud now that he and Eren were together.

He tried not to let his mood deflate when he saw the one person he could ever admit to hating as soon as he walked in the door. She stood with menus in her arm, waiting to greet a customer, should one walk in. Her dark hair was held back into a high ponytail, revealing her misleadingly welcoming features. As soon as she caught sight of Levi, she smirked wickedly, holding herself up straighter. "Hello, Levi." She called.

"Fuck off, Lynne." Levi rushed past her, not wanting her to put a damper on his mood.
"Aw, you feeling especially bitter tonight? Poor baby." She mocked.

"Don't you have a stranger's dick to suck or something?" He spat at her. He prided himself when she glared back at him. She turned away, silenced. Levi loathed having to work along side her. Lynne was a constant reminder of how badly he'd been hurt and also his own faults that he may or may not have actually had. She was a reminder that he had to be careful in future relationships. Levi attempted to push those thoughts away and fill his mind with images of Eren instead.

A half an hour passed before Lynne had to start tormenting him again. It was now Levi's turn to wait to greet customers. Business had been rather slow, so Lynne took a few minutes to stand by Levi and pester him, knowing he couldn't leave. "What's got you in such a bad mood?" She asked, fully aware of the answer.

Levi sent her a disgusted side glance, grimacing. "I was having a good day, then it was ruined when I was confronted with your disaster of a face."

She huffed in response. "Just remember, you once dated this 'disaster of a face.'"

"And I'm not anymore, surely that should rest my case."

Lynne ran out of clever retorts, so she tried to find another weak spot. "You're just mad because you're not getting laid."

Levi couldn't hold it in. He knew it wasn't exactly the best way to react, but his excitement over the subject mixed with his desire to prove her wrong forced the words out of his mouth. "That won't be the case for long." He muttered under her breath, so she'd have to struggle to listen.

She snapped her gaze towards him. "What?" She furrowed her brows at him. Realizing that she'd shown too much interest, she retreated and shrugged it off. "You're lying."

"I'm actually not. I've got a cute new boyfriend now." Levi stated with pride and joy.

"Oh... couldn't find a girl as good as me so you settled for a guy?" She asked, confidence faltering.

"Actually, women were ruined for me for good after you. You were just so horrible that I wanted to diverge as far as possible from people that are similar to you." He exaggerated. "This guy is perfect. Your polar opposite."

"I'd say that you wouldn't enjoy being in bed with him as much as me, but you wouldn't know. After all, you never got there with me." Lynne raised a brow, giving off the impression that she had just won the argument.

Levi shut that down quickly when he looked her up and down with a disgusted expression. "Trust me, that's strictly from my lack of trying."

She gawked at him, ready to spit back an insult but held her tongue as customer walked in.

Levi showed them to their table happily, sending Lynne his victorious looks every so often. Levi refrained from saying anything more, as they both knew it was time to do their job and be professional. He tended to them, along with other customers before he returned to his station. "I have to take care of that family over there," Levi told Lynne, pointing in their direction. "You can ask that old man over there if he needs the check. And Lynne?"

"Yeah?"
"I saw he had a wedding ring. Do what you do best and ruin a happy relationship. Ride him for a bit to earn your tip." Levi patted her shoulder and slipped away before she could do anything in retaliation. Levi left her fuming and reluctantly walking in the direction of the customer. He gave himself a mental pat on the back for his quick wit. Now he could freely occupy his thoughts with his job and of course, Eren.

~

The next day, practice arrived later than Eren or Levi wished. Since they were keeping their relationship under wraps, neither of the two had conversed with the other at lunch, but they made up for it by sending each other meaningful looks. They couldn't wait to be near each other that day.

As soon as Levi entered the gymnasium. He scanned around for Eren, who was talking with Marco at the time. He strutted up to him, vaguely trying to hide his intentions and suppressing his inner excitement. "Hey guys."

"Hi, Levi." Marco beamed politely.

"Hey." Eren said, shying away with a soft smile.

"Do you mind if I talk to Eren for a sec?" Levi asked.

"Not at all." Marco left, leaving the two to their thoughts.

"How is everything?" Levi asked, hoping Eren would understand what he was inferring.

"Good. Really good." Eren said, biting his lip, absentmindedly swaying and failing to stop grinning like a fool.

"Eren," Levi whispered. "If you're trying to look like you're not a lovesick teenager, you're not doing a good job."

Eren immediately straightened up, remembering their situation. "God, I'm an idiot." He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"No you're not," Levi laughed. "I just don't want you accidentally 'revealing yourself' when you're not ready."

"Right..." Eren nodded.

"Just hope that you'll never meet someone that can read you as well as I do." Levi turned on his heel and walked to the front of the gym, standing beside Hanji.

"Alright everyone!" Hanji clapped their hands. "Gather round, it's time for the moment you've all been waiting for! We have this year's song."

A collective gasp filled the room as the entire guard ran up to surround the two instructors. Eren worked his way over to the group, less enthusiastic but anxious nonetheless. Hanji brought out an old CD player and set it next to their feet, putting in a disc. They took their time getting it ready to add dramatic effect.

"Drum roll, please." They said. The team patted the ground and leaned forward, not being able to
bare the anticipation. "This year's song is... The Phoenix." Several members squealed as Hanji pressed play.

Many of the team members showed their excitement when the song started, (particularly Isabel and Farlan) while others showed their curious elation. The thrum of the violins hit Eren like a wave. He could feel the beat in his bones. Once the singer's voice came in, his entire mood changed, he felt as if he was ready to get active and it was now hard to sit still.

The pounding drum, the rough vocals, the overall intense tone of the song was so influential on Eren. Just listening to the song was a release. He had never heard this type of music in his life and he wanted more. Lyrics aside, the song sounded the way he felt.

The chorus kicked in and Eren decided that this was definitely the most interesting song he'd ever heard. Eren had only ever listened to the most popular songs on the radio that everyone knew and whatever his parents had let them listen to. This music was a breakthrough for him.

The song alternated between slow build ups and strong verses. It had to end all too soon. Hanji stopped the CD player and looked to the group. "What do you think? Did we do good?" They asked impatiently.

Several people shouted their approval while others, who had been unfamiliar with the song, nodded and hummed their agreement.

"Wonderful! Levi and I tried to pick a song that everyone would like, and based on your reactions, I think we succeeded."

~

Eren thanked god that Levi had restrained himself from getting handsy during stretching. Practice was very productive, as they put their existing routines to the song. The very first routine they made was placed near the beginning and the portion involving the spinning wheels was somewhere near the end. It amazed Eren how the routine lined up perfectly with the music, so he assumed that Hanji and Levi had known what the song was going to be before they began. Either that, or it was an amazing coincidence. He doubted the latter. Eren couldn't get over how the beats of the drum matched when his side of the team pounded the ground during their floor work.

There were only a few mistakes here and there, but for the most part, the routine flowed beautifully. Putting all the set pieces and the floor away didn't take as long, for that too became part of the routine.

Once it was time to go home, Levi approached Eren, trying to look as casual as he could. "Oi." He called for his attention. Eren faced him before walking out the door. "So, I don't know if you remembered, but this week is homecoming."

Butterflies settled in Eren's stomach, was Levi going to ask him what he thought he was? "I remember."

"And will you be free at the end of the week?" Levi asked, lifting his brow in a hopeful question.

"Mhm." Eren nodded. Things were moving very quickly between them in Eren's opinion. Homecoming meant there'd be a dance. And a dance meant there'd be opportunities for dates.
Levi let out a relieved sigh. "Good. I was going to tell you to cancel your plans if you had any."

"I would've done that, too." Eren grinned uncontrollably.

"Well, I just wanted to remind you that we have to do the concession stand for the homecoming game on Friday. Same time as the last one."

Eren's shoulders sank. Of course, Levi knew better than to ask him to the dance. That would give them away. "Right... thanks for telling me."


Eren had to admit that he set himself up for that one. But then he reminded himself that Hanji said Levi liked outgoing people. So maybe, he thought, if they didn't act like they were a couple, he could take the initiative and ask Levi out. That would be a nice first step.

~

At home, Levi immediately dropped himself onto the couch, ready to take a nap, slinging his arm over his eyes. Farlan went into the practice room and Isabel was left standing in front of Levi. She nervously inched closer to him. Levi noticed the change of light, caused by her shadow and moved his arm so he could see her.

"Um, Levi?" She mumbled.

Levi sat up straight. It wasn't often that Isabel acted so timid. "Yeah?"

"I need some advice."

Levi moved out of the way and patted the spot next to him. He was always prepared to help his little sister when she needed it. "Sure, what about?"

She sat down, scratching her arm. A nervous habit that Levi easily recognized. "Please don't make fun of me for this, I'm not really sure about it right now."

"Izzy, I'd never make fun of you. You can trust me." Since their mother was gone for the majority of the day, for years, Levi was the one who talked her through life's changes and challenges. He was nearly a second parent figure for Isabel. And since she was so close to her brother and regarded him so highly, she had faith in whatever he had to say.

"There's this guy and he's really nice and I feel weird when I'm around him and I don't know what that means." She explained hesitantly.

Levi smiled down at her. "Do you have a crush?"

She smiled back sheepishly, shrugging up her shoulders as if to hide herself. "...Maybe."

Levi loved how she felt comfortable enough to talk about such things with him. "Oo, who is the lucky guy?" He asked.

Isabel's face reddened slightly. "I don't know if you'd be okay with it."
"Izzy, I can't control who you like anymore than I can control who I like. If you don't want to tell me that's fine, but if you do, then I'm all ears." Levi leaned into the back of the couch, waiting patiently.

"Alright, I'll tell you." She adjusted her position so that she was fully facing her brother. "I... I think I have a crush on Eren."

Levi's heart stopped. He wasn't sure that he'd heard correctly. When he confirmed that he had, there wasn't much he could think of to respond with. "Well..." Levi stared with an unreadable, expressionless, calm gaze. "It seems that we're at a conundrum."

Chapter End Notes

Plot twists for days.

The song "The Phoenix" is by Fall Out Boy. If you've never heard it before, you should check it out, it's a great song. Every time I hear it, I feel like doing extreme parkour.

If you don't know who Lynne is, she was in the SNK manga. I needed a character that nobody, including myself, was too attached to. There's no way in hell I was making Petra his shitty ex, no thank you. Lynne wasn't a bitch in the manga as I recall, but somebody had to be the bitch.

Sorry if the French part didn't flow well! I keep forgetting that not everyone speaks French and it's not like I can unlearn it, so I can't tell if it would flow very well for someone who doesn't speak French.

Translations: Comment ça va? - How are you?
Assez bien. - Well enough
Non, non, maman. Je vais faire le dîner. Vas au lit. - No, no, mom. I'll make dinner. Go to bed.
Ne t'inquiètes pas, mon fils. Je peux le faire. - Don't worry, son. I can do it.
Non, il faut que tu dormes avant tu parts encore. Tu es trop fatigué. - No, you need to sleep before you leave again. You're too tired.
D'accord, tu as raison. - Okay, you're right.
Ah, bonjour mon précieux. - Ah, hello my precious.

And don't worry, questions that you may have after reading this chapter will all be answered later.

If you liked this, please leave a comment or kudos! (You guys are so sweet in the comments!!!(I didn't edit, so I'm sorry if there are any errors. My tumblr is dr-s--art. Thanks for reading! <3
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

It's homecoming weekend and things don't go as planned for Levi and Eren, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a load of cheese, my apologies. It's so dorky and typical, but I have no self control so yeah. I couldn't help it. Ugh, this chapter is a mess, but I still hope you guys like it! Translations are in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren woke up to his phone buzzing near his ear. He turned onto his side with a grumble, reaching for his phone and cursing that he had to be woken up at such a ridiculous hour. He looked at his alarm clock seeing that it was only eleven at night, which wasn't too bad, but he was still angry.

The caller I.D. was a number that Eren didn't recognize, but he answered it anyway. "What?" He said, voice riddled with attitude.

"Well, hello to you too, sunshine." Levi's smooth voice carried over.

"Levi?" Eren rubbed his eyes. "Sorry, I didn't know it was you. Why are you calling so late?"

That's right, Isabel had given him his phone number.

"I needed to tell you something before you go to school tomorrow... to warn you."

"Is it serious?" Eren sat up straight, picking up the uncertainty in Levi's voice.

"Nothing horrible," Levi drawled out. "But I think you should be told in case a conflict arises."

"Okay, what's the problem?"

"So," Levi sighed. "After I got home from guard practice, Isabel said she had something she needed advice with. Then... fuck, I can't beat around the bush. Isabel has a crush on you."

Eren barked out his laughter. "Oh my god, that's too funny."

"Why the hell are you laughing?" Levi asked exasperatedly.

"Because it's ironic." Eren replied. "Think about it. It's like it runs in the family or something. Like, Ackermans have a thing for me. I think that's funny."

Eren could hear the scowl on Levi's face. "Holy shit, don't say that. The next thing I know, you're turning my brother gay. I don't need that in my life."
"What's wrong with your brother being gay?" Eren retorted teasingly.

"Nothing, but I can't have him crushing on you too. You're mine." Levi huffed.

Levi's declaration of claiming Eren sent his head spinning. He didn't realize he was still chuckling.

"Eren, this is hardly the time for laughing. I've had a long day. I got home from guard practice to find out my baby sister has a crush on my boyfriend, I had to go to my shit job and work with insufferable people and I came home to have a conversation that lasted hours with aforementioned sister about why she can't go out with my boyfriend."

"Sorry, sorry." Eren said quickly. Though, he hardly sounded genuine with his apologies. "What exactly did you tell her?"

"Well, I couldn't tell her the two things that would immediately put you off limits. The fact that you're gay and in a relationship wasn't an available excuse, so I tried to tell her that you're a bad influence and I wouldn't allow it."

Eren rubbed his temples in mild amusement and also agitation. "Why do you keep trying to tell her I'm a horrible person?"

"I'm not saying you're a horrible person. I said that you do things that I don't want her to pick up on. I panicked, okay? If it makes you feel better, I didn't ban her from hanging out with you. Just dating."

Eren leaned on his knees, prepared for an extended explanation. "How did she take it?"

"Well... she kind of hates me right now, so I'd say she didn't take it nicely at all. I'm hoping that you'll let her down gently within these next few days, so she understands that she can't go out with you."

Eren wore a devious grin, aware that Levi couldn't see it. "Hmm, if I did go out with her, that would play to our advantage of keeping my secr-"

"Eren!" Levi shouted. "Don't say shit like that."

"I was just joking, Levi." Eren snickered.

"... Oh, right." Levi fell silent. The way Levi broke off sounded like he was regretful. "Sorry."

"It's okay. I thought it was cute how you got all defensive."

"Call me cute one more time and I'll kick your ass." Levi grumbled, eliciting another laugh from Eren. "... It's late. You should go to sleep. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Okay, bye Levi."

"Bye."

Eren hung up and collapsed back on the bed, holding his phone to his chest. Of course, he was a little distressed about his boyfriend's sister having a crush on him, but in that moment, all he could think about was how Levi was defensive over him and Levi was all his. As he entered Levi's number into his contacts, he pondered over Levi's small outburst. He sounded borderline panicked.

Eren shrugged it off, choosing to believe that it was because Levi didn't want him joking about dating his sister. He set his phone on his desk and tried to will himself to get to sleep. It was a
forced task as he was too giddy to get tired again.

~

Eren didn't see Isabel Wednesday, or most of Thursday at school, so he decided to confront her during practice. Eren hadn't met up with Levi either. During lunch, they sent each other vague glances. All of which had a more obvious effect on Eren, making him blush and get all fidgety. Eren called Levi Wednesday night just to have a casual conversation and found that Levi never seized to make him laugh. Eren couldn't see his face, but Levi had a smile from the second he answered to when they hung up an hour later. The call reminded Eren that he wanted to ask Levi to the homecoming dance, so he readied himself to ask him during practice on Thursday.

Practice came rather quickly and the fact that Eren wasn't ready to talk to either Ackerman hit him like a bus. He realized that he hadn't planned out an excuse to tell Isabel that would let her know that they couldn't go out. It also became apparent that Levi could turn him down. He needed to sit down for awhile.

Such luck never presented itself to him, as he had no time rest before everyone had to pull out the floor and set pieces for practice. Stretching was an uncomfortable time since Eren had to tear his eyes away whenever he stared at Levi's contorted body for too long. He kept mentally shouting at himself to 'get his head out of the gutter.'

The first portion of practice consisted of the team going through their routines with the song playing. The routine was all lot more fluid and less mechanic when put against the music. After seven run throughs or so, Hanji and Levi showed the team new parts that would be added on and everyone practiced what they were taught until it was time for a water break.

Eren sat by Nanaba, trying to avoid the three siblings. The two watched Marco, who refused to take a break and continued to do tosses with his rifle. "Show off." Nanaba muttered. "Hey, Marco!" She called for him. "Don't start whining and crying later when you're too dehydrated to go on!"

"I don't need water right now!" He hollered back. "I just have to get this right once and then I'll join you!"

"Yeah, yeah." She waved him off.

"What's he trying to do?" Eren asked Nanaba.

"Marco? He's trying to get a three toss. He can do two, he can do four and he can even get more than that. But whenever he tries to do a three toss, he catches it on a half. So he always gets a two and a half. Never a three, which is funny." She took a swig of her water then shouted back to Marco. "Forget it! You're not going to get a three!"

"Yes I will!" Marco used more force than necessary out of frustration and achieved more than three.

"That was a five, nimrod." Annie said from the other side of the room.

"Annie, I don't need your sass. I can count." Marco continued his attempts to get three.

"Then use those counting skills and get a three, freckles!" Nanaba shouted, laughing at her own
joke and also getting Eren to crack a smile. She shook her head, standing up. "I gotta help him. He needs water and he won't get a three without assistance."

Eren watched her go and realized that he was unguarded only when it was too late, as he felt Isabel slam into his side. "Hey, Eren!"

"H-hey, Isabel." Eren refrained from using her nickname so he could distance himself from her. As guilty as he felt, it needed to be done.

Eren wouldn't have guessed that she was mad at Levi. She seemed as chipper as ever. "I have something to ask you."

"Go ahead." He already knew what it was, but he had to play it off like he didn't.

"So, I know this is kind of coming out of nowhere, but I was wondering if you'd want to go out sometime?" She didn't give Eren much time to reply before she continued. "I know we haven't known each other for long, but I think you're funny and nice. And just a warning," she dropped her voice to a whisper. "If you say yes, we can't tell Levi. I tried talking to him about it and he was a real jerk. He said he 'wouldn't allow it,' but I think you should make the decision of whether or not you'll go out with me, not him."

Eren nodded slowly, trying to take everything in and think over his answer. "I see... uh, well, first I'm very flattered." Isabel grinned and sat up eagerly. "But, I'm going to have to say no. I see you as my own sister, I don't think I could ever see you as being my girlfriend." Isabel pouted and slumped her shoulders. "But that doesn't mean that other guys won't like you that way! You're really pretty and you're fun to be around... any guy would be lucky to have you as his girlfriend!"

Smooth.

"Really?" Her lip quirked up in hopefulness.

"Yeah. You just have to find someone who feels that way about you."

Isabel's quirked lip turned into a full smile. "Thanks Eren. And... sorry if I made things awkward. Can we still hang out and stuff?"

"Of course." Eren smiled back. "I still like you. And you didn't make anything awkward. Oh, and you shouldn't be mad at Levi. He's just looking out for you."

Isabel nodded. "Yeah, you're right. I'm gonna go get some more water. Thanks for the talk."

"No problem." Eren gave a small wave as she left. He looked back to see if Marco had made any progress. Now there were about four people helping him, but to no avail. Eren had been so caught up in his tosses that he almost didn't notice Levi coming over to sit next to him. How unfortunately convenient.

"How did it go?" Levi mumbled.

"It went well." Eren replied. "She knows we can't go out, but she's not too upset. I think I even got her to stop being mad at you too."

Levi raised his eyebrows in silent surprise. "Nice."

The conversation broke off and Eren could feel the pressure building up. Now was the most opportune time to ask Levi to the dance. He felt so childish, getting worked up over something so simple, but he couldn't help it. He wanted to let Levi have enough time to get things in order if
need be in case he actually said yes, so he didn't want to postpone asking him any further. Eren shut his eyes for a brief moment and took in a deep breath. "So..." He waited until Levi faced him. "Would you... are you going to the homecoming dance?" Eren mentally kicked himself for being a coward and not asking him directly.

Levi shrugged. "Probably not. I don't have a real reason to go. I would go, so I could drop off Isabel and Farlan, but they already have a ride."

"Oh..." Eren swallowed thickly. "I-I was planning on going." He became more and more annoyed with himself as his voice kept giving away his nerves.

"Mn." Levi hummed in acknowledgement.

'Come on, Eren.' He thought to himself. 'He's your boyfriend, you should be able to ask him.' Eren pinched his leg and forced himself to spit it out. "Do you wanna go with me?"

Levi raised one eyebrow. It had to be the one that was pierced and drove Eren crazy, didn't it? "To the homecoming dance?"

"Yeah." Eren bit his lip.

"You want me to go with you?"

"Uh huh." Eren gulped. He dropped his voice a few levels lower so no one else could hear. "I know we wouldn't be able to dance together or... hold hands or do any couple stuff, but... it's our senior year. It's our last chance and you're my boyfriend, so I want to go with you. It could be fun."

Levi wore a devious smirk. "You're adorable when you act all awkward." He continued, ignoring Eren's cheeks reddening. "I'll go with you."

"Wait, seriously?" Eren beamed.

"Yeah." Levi chortled at Eren's enthusiasm. "You're my boyfriend, I would've gone even if you hadn't said your little spiel."

Eren grinned to himself, not noticing that Levi had stood up. Levi reached out a hand to help up Eren. "So, I'll meet you there at the dance?" He asked as he lifted Eren.

"Uh, actually I was hoping to pick you up so we could go together. If that's okay with you." Eren stammered.

Levi sent Eren an endearing look. "Trying to be the gentleman, are you?" Eren spluttered out something unintelligible so Levi bit back a laugh and continued. "I love it when you get all nervous." Levi glanced around quickly to confirm that no one was watching and leaned up to Eren's ear. "Of course you can pick me up, babe." He lightly slapped Eren's ass and walked away before his babbling mess of a boyfriend could retaliate.

~

The homecoming game came quicker than expected. Much like the previous one, Eren arrived with Armin and Mikasa and it was agreed that they would meet up during his breaks. Eren stepped
inside the white hut, looking for Hanji, as they would be the one to tell him what his first station would be. And he was going to get a specific spot if he could convince them to allow it.

As he went through the door, he nearly bumped into Rico, who was bringing out hot dog rolls and plates. "Whoa, slow down there Jaeger." She warned him.

"Sorry." Eren said. "Do you know where Hanji is?"

"Yeah, they're fixing the coffee machine." Rico answered, walking back to the grill.

Eren nodded his thanks and stepped inside to see Hanji fiddling with the lever that poured the coffee. "Hanji?"

They snapped their head up and greeted him with an excited smile. "Eren! You're here! What's up?"

"Nothing." He stepped forward so he could speak with them more easily. "Does Levi still have a permanent spot at the window?"

"Yup! We always need someone to bait and lure the hormonal teenagers into buying stuff. His face just has that effect on people."

Eren wanted to say that he was definitely baited and lured in, but this was hardly the time. "Do you think I could have a permanent spot at the window too?"

"I don't see why not." They replied scratching their chin. "Actually, that could work out to our advantage." They mused to themselves. "Levi may ooze sex appeal, but you're as cute as a button. That could appeal to twice as many people! Alright Eren, you're at the window, congratulations!"

Eren fought back his blush and also tried to wrap his head around their words. "Thanks... wait, if you're asexual then how come you think people are attractive?" That thought had been gnawing at his mind since the last game.

Hanji lowered their glasses and stared at him amusedly. "Eren, I'm ace, not blind. Well, a little blind without my glasses, but that doesn't matter. I may not have a thing for anyone, but I can still tell if someone is good looking. I'm sure you'd understand. Even though you're into women, you probably can tell if men are good looking, even though you don't want to get with them." Eren tried to seem understanding and not give himself away. "Besides, studies have shown." They dug a small notepad out of their pocket and flipped to a certain page. They showed it to Eren and it seemed to be a chart of some sort. "This is the amount of sales for each person who has worked at the window." Eren could plainly see that Levi surpassed every other person in sales. "The reason why you have so little is because you only worked there for one game. Actually, one half of a game. But your numbers will go up tonight. I can't wait to see which of you two will get more! This'll be a fun little experiment."

As if on cue, the Ackerman siblings walked into the hut. "Eren!" Isabel lunged for him, tackling him in a tight hug. "Are you in the hut with us?"

"Yeah." He laughed. "I'm working at the window the whole night."

"Cool, just like Levi." Farlan thought aloud.

"Oh! That reminded me." Hanji said. "Levi, dearest? Can I talk to you in private for a minute?"

Levi scoffed at the name but left the hut with them regardless. Hanji lowered their voice to keep their conversation unheard. "Obviously you just heard that Eren will be working with you. So, I
just wanted to remind you to restrain yourself. Keep your little friend down there in check."

Levi glared at them. "I'll try to resist the temptation." He drawled out sarcastically.

~

During halftime, everyone working at the two windows were swamped with customers. After all, it was the most opportune time to get food without missing the game. Eren recognized many faces as people who had graduated already and came to support their home team. Both football teams had some members who stopped to get something quick to eat as well.

Afterwards, the crowd died down and no one seemed to be in need of any more food. Hanji quickly walked over to each register, estimating the amounts. They patted Eren on the back. "Racking up the sales, good job!"

"Thanks." Eren said

Everyone else in the hut left to go talk with old friends that were dispersed in the audience at the bleachers. Homecoming was such a busy time.

Since the two were alone, Levi inched a bit closer to Eren. He nudged his arm, gaining his attention. "I have to warn you about my mom for tomorrow. I told her about us."

Eren gulped. "Warn me? Is she not okay with us going out?"

Levi huffed out a small chuckle, shaking his head. "It's the exact opposite. She's very excited to meet you. Almost too excited. My mom gets a little overwhelming whenever she meets my friends or whoever I'm dating for the first time. She likes to get involved in our lives as much as she can, so she'll probably talk your ear off as soon as you walk in the door."

Hearing that Levi's mother was excited to meet him warmed his heart. He didn't know much about the woman, other than she worked too hard, she spoke French and she was very important to Levi. "I can't wait to meet her."

"Can't wait to meet who?" Hanji walked into the hut with their hands on their hips.

"My mom." Levi replied calmly.

Hanji rolled their eyes. "Of course, you're talking about your mom. Again."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Levi spat.

Hanji ignored him and faced Eren. "In case it isn't obvious yet, Levi is a complete mama's boy. Proceed with caution."

"I am not a mama's boy." Levi muttered.

"Oh, be honest Levi." Hanji stepped up to him, grinning. "If someone asked you who your favorite person in the whole wide world was, who would you say?" Levi refused to meet either pair of eyes. "You would say your mother and you know it."

"Shut the fuck up." Levi mumbled, crossing his arms.
Eren was too entertained to help Levi in this situation. He bit his lip to keep himself from laughing, earning a glare from Levi.

Fortunately for Levi, Petra ran inside to save him from his embarrassment. "Levi, Hanji! Guess who's here!"

"Who?" Hanji asked, or rather shouted.

"Erd and Gunther! They came back from university, let's go see them!"

Hanji and Petra ran out. Levi almost broke into a sprint like the other two, but didn't, not wanting to leave Eren so suddenly. "I gotta go, they're old friends of ours." Eren nodded, letting him leave. Levi almost made it out the door before he stopped. "And Eren? Just so we're clear, I'm really not a mama's boy." He mumbled.

Eren rolled his eyes. "Yeah, sure. Go see your friends."

Levi hesitated, not certain if Eren took him seriously, but bolted out the door anyway.

Eren leaned back on the ledge of the window. The new information of how important Levi's mother was to him made him nervous about meeting her. He had to make a good impression and wasn't sure of how hard that would be, considering he didn't know her or what her standards were. Regardless, he was still looking forward to meeting her. His mood immediately dropped when he noticed his least favorite, self centered asshole walking over to the hut.

"Jaeger?" Jean scoffed. "You're the only one working here?"

"Yeah, I am." Eren grunted. "What do you want?"

"Aren't you supposed to be polite to your customers? I could complain to someone about you mistreating me."

Eren glared at him without actually replying, hoping that he'd get the message and just order.

"Wait... color guard usually runs this shack." Jean thought out loud, before barking out a laugh. "Holy shit, you're in color guard? That's just sad."

Eren's blood started boiling. He couldn't let Jean walk all over him and he didn't know how else to defend himself, so he lied. "I'm not in color guard."

Jean frowned. "Hey, I'm a very generous person."

"If you're so generous, then why don't you give me that five bucks you stole from me?"

"Let it go! We were ten!" Jean yelled.

"Yeah, well I'm still mad and still five dollars poorer!" Eren shouted back.

"It's five dollars! What's the matter with you, you psycho?"
Eren fists clenched tightly. "Why don't you fucking fight me?"

"Jean!" A more cheerful voice came from behind Eren. They both faced the person and saw that it was Marco walking into the hut. "What's up?" He asked smiling.

Jean glared at Eren. "This prick isn't getting me my food, that's what's up."

"You didn't even order anything!" Eren shouted.

"Jean, don't call him a prick." Marco halfheartedly chastised his friend. "Come over to the other window and I'll get you your food, okay?" Jean huffed in irritation but rounded the corner nonetheless.

Eren released a long, heavy breath, trying to cool off and calm down. He couldn't understand why a saint like Marco was friends with a guy like Jean. He heard them chatting casually after Jean was given his food, but Eren didn't care enough to listen in.

Eren's attention was peaked when he heard a soft patter on the roof. He brushed it off and stared out the window, bored. A minute later, Eren saw a few drops of rain hit the grass. A wide grin worked its way onto his face before he could help it.

~

Levi returned soon after Jean had left, seeking refuge from the light drizzle of rain. He was greeted with the sight of Eren's ass sticking out while the rest of him was hanging out the window. "In all honesty, I didn't expect to come back to this." Levi told Eren flatly. When he didn't respond, Levi stepped up to him, grabbed him by the collar and pulled him back in. When Eren stood up, the top half of him was soaking wet and he still had a goofy smile. "You look like a wet dog."

"Thank you." Eren hummed. "I like rain."

Levi snorted. "I figured as much. Hanji says we can go watch the rest of the game when our replacements come in, because we worked so hard during halftime."

Eren's eyes lit up like those of a child who had just been given a bucket of candy. "That means we can sit in the rain!"

Levi frowned. "Yeah, the cold as balls rain."

"I'll keep you warm." Eren whispered, swaying back and forth dopily.

Levi stared at him, doing everything he could to remain impassive, but the small smirk he'd been fighting off showed itself, making Eren giggle stupidly. "Fucking god, it's like you react to the rain like it's catnip. You're being ridiculous."

"But you love it." Eren pushed his luck, leaning on Levi.

Levi couldn't exactly deny it.

~
Annie and Farlan came in the hut to let Eren and Levi take their break. Eren wanted to grab Levi's hand and run out into the rain, but refrained from doing so.

The two walked out into the rain, one more enthusiastic than the other, and made their way over to the bleachers. They weaved their way between people to reach their destination. Eren found Mikasa and Armin sharing an umbrella near the top of the bleachers. Levi was fairly hesitant to sit with them, mindful of the last time it happened, but he followed Eren anyway.

Eren sat next to Armin, patting the spot next to him for Levi to sit down.

"I brought an extra umbrella, do you want it?" Armin offered Eren.

"Nope, I'm good." Eren said

"Of course you are." Armin sighed, knowing that this was all too typical for his friend. He leaned over to address Levi. "Would you like an umbrella?"

Levi pondered over it for a minute, glancing at Eren and taking notice of how happy he looked. "No thank you."

"Suit yourself." Armin sat back.

The three friends sat and watched silently as the game restarted, but Levi’s attention was stuck on his drenched boyfriend. Eren looked a little comical, soaking wet from head to toe, but something about how he looked so happy to be out in the elements made him seem almost pure.

Eren turned to look at Levi for a brief moment and burst out in a fit of laughter as soon as he laid eyes on him.

Levi knitted his brows together. "What?"

Eren tried to get out his words in between gulps of air. "Your... your makeup. It's running really bad."

Levi dug out his phone from his pocket. He used one hand to shield it from the rain and looked at his reflection. It was apparent that his eyeliner had ran all the way down to his chin, due to the rain.

"You look like you just finished watching Bridge To Terabithia." Eren snickered.

Levi huffed out a breathy laugh. "Guess I need to invest in some waterproof shit."

They both resumed watching the game and Levi could honestly say that Eren's presence gave him a sense of comfort. He couldn't think of many people that did that. Levi decided that this was going to be one of his better nights.

~

The game ended with their team winning. Both schools were scoring evenly for the majority of the night, so it was that much more satisfying of a victory. The color guard team celebrated by going to Scouts again, and Rico ordered Bertolt and Reiner a special dessert as a congratulations. As
expected, everyone took part in teasing Levi about his makeup, but he couldn't find it in himself to care.

Levi and Eren said their goodbyes at the restaurant so they wouldn't draw attention to themselves if they were to say goodbye in the van. Eren couldn't hold in his excitement about taking Levi to the dance the next day. Levi seemed excited too, but he hid most of his eagerness. They parted with the knowledge that they would see each other the next day.

~

"Are you taking that young lady you have a crush on?" Carla asked while combing his hair, trying to make it look as neat as possible.

"No, I'm taking a friend on mine. He doesn't have a ride, so I told him I'd take him." Eren lied, sitting in the kitchen chair.

"How nice of you." Carla hummed. She wetted the comb in the sink and went back to flatten a few loose strands of hair. "Are you dropping him off after the dance, or are you staying the night at his house? Or is he staying the night here?"

Eren's eyebrows shot up. "I can stay the night?"

"Of course, Eren. When have we ever said no to you staying at a friend's house?"

"Never, I guess." Eren reminded himself that his mother didn't know he was going out with Levi, so she didn't have to worry about them doing anything she wouldn't approve of.

"Which friend is it?" Carla asked.

"Levi." Eren answered. "He's on the color guard team, you haven't met him."

"Hmm, guess we'll have to change that." She patted Eren's shoulder. She held up a small mirror to show him his hair. "Maybe one of these days, we can get together and I could meet his parents too."

Eren looked in the mirror, content with how his hair turned out. "Would dad be there to meet his mom too?" He muttered.

Carla sighed. "Eren, he's a busy man. You know that. I can't guarantee anything because of his job."

"I know..." Eren broke off. He may have not always agreed with the man, but he was still his father. He still wanted to include him in some parts of his life, he wanted him to care.

Carla never liked how her son's face fell when he became disappointed with his father not always being around. She tried to change the subject. "Can I get a picture of you all dressed up?"

"Sure." He hopped off the chair, and walked over to a blank wall, where his mother always made him stand for photos. From that spot, he could see Armin and Mikasa playing video games in the living room. "You guys are sure you don't want to come?"

They barely tore their eyes away from the screen. "Nope, we're good." Mikasa said.
"You have fun." Armin said back.

Eren chuckled at how invested they were in a game they've played what he thought to be hundreds of times. His mother came back with the camera, holding it up expectantly. Eren adjusted his deep blue tie and rolled up the sleeves of his forest green shirt, nodding at his mother to show his preparedness.

"Smile!" She said, barely giving him time to do so, before snapping the picture. She looked back at it and smiled. "You look terrific."

"Thanks." Eren grinned. "Can I go now?"

Carla gave him a hug and a pat on the back. "Have fun, honey. Be careful on the roads."

"I will, love you." Eren opened the door, grabbing the keys.

"Love you too." Carla waved goodbye.

~

Eren let out a shaky breath as he turned off the engine, parked in the Ackerman's driveway. He looked in the rearview mirror one last time to confirm that he was still presentable. 'There's no time like the present.' He thought to himself.

He exited the car and walked up to the door. He wondered if he should knock for a brief moment before his eyes landed on a doorbell. Eren never had to use it before, so he never noticed it. He pressed it and waited anxiously for Levi to open the door.

Not much later, the door cracked open slowly to reveal a petite woman. She was definitely shorter than Levi. She was rather scrawny and had very pale skin. Her clothes consisted of a knee length, white skirt, low, black heels and a sky blue button up shirt with sleeves that almost reached the elbows. Her face lit up like a Christmas tree as soon as she looked up at Eren, and what a familiar face it was. She had thin, delicate eyebrows that sat above thin, stormy eyes, which were widened with joy from seeing Eren. The features of her face were small, yet defined and even though she looked wide awake with surprise, she had heavy, dark under eye circles. Long, ebony hair framed the edges of her face with bangs on one side. Eren couldn't help but stare in mild shock, because it hit him that Levi was the spitting image of his mother.

"Are you Eren?" The woman asked in a small voice, beaming.

"Yeah, that's me." Eren replied nervously. This was the person who meant everything to Levi, he had to be on his best behavior.

She gasped with delight. "Welcome! My goodness, you're just as handsome as Levi said you'd be and- oh my, come in, come in! It's probably freezing out there." She stepped out of the way to let Eren in from the cool, October breeze.

Eren's heart fluttered when he heard that Levi called him handsome. He looked around for said person.

Levi's mother stepped to the base of the stairs and hollered up them. "Levi, Eren est ici!" The
familiar French flowed off her tongue as she called for her son.

"Attendez, je ne suis pas prêt!" Levi yelled back.

His mother turned back to Eren. "He's not ready yet. I think he's doing his eye makeup." She took Eren's hand and led him into the living room. "Why don't you sit on the couch and I'll get you some tea while you wait."

Eren did as suggested and sighed in relief. It seemed to him that he didn't need to impress the woman, since he was pretty sure that she liked him already. She returned shortly with a tray that had cups, a kettle and a few utensils on it. She started talking as she prepared the tea. "I've heard so much about you, you sound like such a sweet boy. I'm so happy my Levi found someone he likes as much as you." She handed Eren his cup.

"Thank you, uh... Levi's talked about me?" Eren's heart skipped a beat at her words.

"Oh, all the time. You must be really special to get him like that. And I have to thank you for getting him to go to this dance. He's never been to one and I don't want him to miss out. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that, of course. He likes to keep to himself and that's perfectly fine by me, but I don't want him to regret not doing things that he might like. But I don't want to force him into anything. He's my perfect little boy, so he can do whatever he wants, but I'm glad someone got him to do something outside of his comfort zone. I think you two will have fun." She took a sip of her tea, being careful not to burn her tongue.

Eren smiled to himself. He could tell that she loved talking about her children whenever she had the chance. "Wait, Levi's never been to a dance?"

She shook her head. "Never. He says he doesn't like them, but I don't know how he would know because he's never gone to one. But if he wants to stay home, then he can stay home. I even went out and helped him pick out a new outfit for the occasion."

"So, he doesn't stay home because he gets in trouble for doing something bad?" Eren joked.

She placed her hand over her heart. "Oh, never! My children can do no wrong in my eyes. They're all such good kids. That's why I let them do whatever they please."

Eren chuckled to himself. He now knew what Levi meant when he said she puts her children before her. The woman loved and cared for her children so much. So far she barely spoke a word about herself. Regardless of what they talked about, Eren knew that he liked talking to her.

Eren lowered his gaze and saw that she held her cup the same odd way Levi did. "Miss Ackerman?"

"Oh, please, call me Kutchel." She said with a polite smile.

"Right, Kutchel. Does Levi get that from you? The way you hold your cup?" Eren pointed to her hands.

She looked down confused, and nodded in understanding when she saw what he meant. "No, I actually got that from him. Isn't that funny? He started holding his cups that way when he was eight, then he told me to try it. We both just find it easier. In reality, I pick up more things from my children than they pick up from me."

Eren tilted his head. "What do you mean?"
"Well..." Kutchel began. "For example, Farlan likes to dress very sophisticated on a day to day basis, so I started dressing very professional, even when I'm not working. Ever since Isabel was a little girl, she has had this strong bond with animals. So, watching how much she loved them, I become an animal lover myself, and I adopted Buster over there." She pointed to Buster sleeping on the floor. "And as I'm sure you know, Levi is very unique and dresses very differently, so... I'm not sure if I should tell you this, I might look like a bad parent." Kutchel shrunk into herself, smiling sheepishly.

"What is it?" Eren's interest was too peaked for him to let her drop the subject. "Tell me."

"Well, alright." She relented. "But don't tell your parents, they might think I'm irresponsible. Levi convinced me to go outside the box and do something a little edgy, so..." She pulled back her hair to show her right ear. "I went a little crazy and got three ear piercings on each ear."

Eren bit his lip, trying to hold back his laughter. He thought it was adorable how she thought earrings were edgy. She was such a sweet lady and the fact that she felt like a rebel for getting earrings was too cute. "They look nice." Was all Eren could think to say.

"Why thank you. I like to include myself in my children's interests, so they don't feel isolated." Kutchel said.

They kind of fell into silence after that. Eren took a sip of his tea, thinking of what he could say to keep things from getting awkward. Luckily for him, Kutchel beat him to it.

"Would you like to see pictures of Levi when he was little?"

~

"And this is him with his stuffed bat, Jenkins. He never left the house without it." Kutchel pointed to pictures on a page that had colors that matched Levi's bat. Kutchel, as Eren found out, loved to scrapbook and it was made perfectly obvious that her favorite subject was her children. She was very talented with all the decorations she put on the pages.

Eren recognized the bat from the picture on the wall. He adored the pictures of Levi with his chubby cheeks and pudgy fingers grabbing onto the fur of his stuffed bat. His eyes were big and bright in the one where he stared back into the camera. Something that changed when he grew out of childhood. "How old is he here?"

Kutchel hummed in uncertainty. "I'm not sure." She opened a pocket on the page and took out a small card. She read the card aloud. "Levi, age three, playing with Jenkins." The card also had the date, but she didn't feel the need to read it off, so she put it back in the pocket.

Eren marveled at the skillfully cut paper, the drawn on details and most of all the beautifully framed pictures of little Levi. He could see that the neighboring page was centered around Farlan and Isabel playing with squirt guns at a young age.

Kutchel flipped through various pages, looking for another one of Levi. She found one that was much more brightly colored with bright greens and light yellows. "This is Levi and Hanji when they were six." Kutchel informed him. It looked to be outside in the summer and it didn't surprise Eren that despite how warm it appeared, Levi was in all black. Hanji still had their glasses and wore oversized orange shorts and a white tee shirt.
"They've known each other for that long?" Eren questioned.

"Mhm." Kutchel flipped to another page. She gasped when she found a white and light blue colored page. She whipped her head to Eren. "Baby pictures."

~

Levi adjusted his tie one last time, observing himself in the mirror. He chose a black tie, a black vest and matching dress pants along with a dark red dress shirt. He hoped he looked good enough for Eren, though he wouldn't show how self consciousness he was when he went downstairs.

He left his room and made his way downstairs. "Sorry I took so long, I had trouble with-"

He stopped when he got to the living room, mentally groaning when he saw the scrapbook open on his mother's lap. "Let me guess, you reached the baby photos." He said through clenched teeth.

"Yeah," Eren said still smiling down at the page. "You were so cute." Eren looked up at Levi and his expression turned from one of amusement to one of amazement. "You look... you look great." He said breathlessly.

Levi's face softened at the complement. "Thanks, you don't look too bad yourself."

Kutchel closed her scrapbook and set it on the coffee table. "Oh Levi, you look spectacular! Let me get my camera." She stood up and trotted down a hallway to retrieve said item.

Eren walked over to Levi and looked him up and down. "Wow." He whispered. "That's a good look for you. N-not that everything else you wear isn't a good look for you, you always look amazing, I just-"

"I know what you meant." Levi interjected. He took Eren's hand in his. Levi stared deeply into those beautifully large eyes of Eren's. He nearly got lost in their brightness and intensity and he adored how they faded from blue near the rims to green close to the pupils and shined with subtle flecks of what Levi would say was gold. He stared so long that he was only interrupted when his mother returned.

"Okay, you two. Stand over hear so I can get some nice pictures." Kutchel said, practically jumping in her spot.

The two walked over to where she directed and Levi instinctively draped an arm around Eren's waist, leaning into him. Eren flinched in surprise, but otherwise made no protest. Instead he set his arm around Levi's shoulder, trying to fight back his blush.

"Aw," Kutchel looked through her camera lens at her son and his boyfriend. "You two are so cute together! Alright, nice big smiles." She took two pictures before changing the camera angle and stepping back, taking two more. "Okay, now one of each of you separately." Eren quirked up an eyebrow in confusion whereas Levi parted from him like he was told. Kutchel took several more pictures. "Now stand the way you were before, but angled more towards each other." They did as instructed as she took a few more pictures. She looked through her camera, reviewing every photo. "These are perfect." She said to herself. "Sorry to keep you two, go on and have fun."

Levi hugged his mother goodbye as she kissed his cheek. "I love you, maman. See you in a little
while."

"I might not be home by the time you get back, I need to drop off some papers at college. But you
two have a good time. I love you, mon fils, be safe."

"I will, goodbye." He walked off with Eren.

"Goodbye, Levi. Bye, Eren! It was so nice to meet you!" She waved.

"It was nice to meet you too." Eren waved back.

Levi and Eren left and Levi started walking in the opposite direction of Eren's car. "Wait, where
are you going?"

Levi tossed him his keys. "We're taking my car. I want to listen to good music on our way there."

~

Once in the car, Levi put a Siouxsie and the Banshees CD in and turned the volume to a low hum.
Eren had to adjust his seat, because his legs were too long at Levi's normal setting. Eren backed out
of the driveway and started for the school. He thought he'd engage in a casual conversation. "I
thought your mom worked at a diner."

Levi looked at him with furrowed brows. "...She does."

"Then why does she have to go to the college?"

"Because she's in college." Levi answered simply.

Eren's eyebrows shot up. "Really? What does she study?"

"She's taking general courses and a medical course, but she's majoring in French. She's trying to get
a job as an interpreter at this hospital nearby. She applied there a long time ago since she's fluent,
but they wouldn't hire her without a college degree. That job pays really well and it'll get us out of
debt with my uncle so she's working really hard to get her credits." Levi explained.

"Have you guys always been like that with your uncle?"

"Pretty much." Levi sighed. "She had me when she was really young and my uncle is really well
off, so he gave her whatever she needed so she could raise me. Then she had Farlan and Isabel and
he gave her our house. She works really hard so she can provide for us and whatever extra money
she gets from my uncle, she spends it on me and my siblings, even when she shouldn't. She's
always made sure we had more than we wanted."

Hearing about his mother's difficulties made Eren feel sorry for Levi. They were supposed to be
having a fun night, so he tried lightening the mood. "You said she's going to be an interpreter, isn't
that what you want to be?"

Levi smiled to himself, which relieved Eren. "Yeah, I'd like to work with her when I get out of
college. Even if I don't work with her, it'd be nice to have the same job."

Eren snorted. "Hanji was right. You are a mama's boy."
Levi would've smacked Eren if he wasn't driving.

~

They arrived at the school soon thereafter. Levi gripped Eren's hand tightly for reassurance. "If it gets to the point where you think we need to be separated to get rid of suspicion, just say so."

Eren shook his head. "I don't think I'll get that paranoid, but thanks."

"We can still have fun even if we don't do couple things." Levi ran his thumb across Eren's hand.

"I know we will." Eren nodded.

~

When inside, Levi immediately scrunched up his nose at the booming music and flashing lights. An old Backstreet Boys song was playing and he knew exactly who was to blame. He rushed over to the DJ booth with Eren following close behind. "Where are you going?" Eren shouted over the music.

"I'm having a little chat with the DJs." Levi replied. He went behind the wall of speakers to greet his siblings. "What the fuck is this shit?"

Farlan looked of from the computer at Levi's raised voice. "Levi! I didn't know you were coming! Hey Eren, what's up?"

"Don't you change the subject." Levi snapped. "You and Izzy have the best music taste, why is this playing?"

Farlan shrugged. "We cater to the crowd. And come on, it's not that bad."

"Tch." Levi rolled his eyes. "Where's Izzy?"

"She went to the bathroom. Should be back sometime soon." The song ended and Farlan clicked around on his computer, playing a fairly new rap song that was known to the vast majority. "If it makes you feel any better, you can request a song."

"I'll think about it." He muttered, crossing his arms. He turned around and led Eren away from the booth. Once they were out on the floor, Levi stopped and faced Eren. "So... what do you do at a dance?"

Eren giggled. "Um, you dance? I don't know, you just do whatever seems fun. Do you like to dance?"

"I don't necessarily like to dance, but I can slow dance. That's about it." Levi shrugged.

Eren tried to think of something they could both do together. Something that wouldn't be overwhelming. "Want to watch other people dance? It could be funny."
Levi smirked. "Yeah, why not?"

~

Eren and Levi stood up against a wall for awhile, laughing amongst themselves as they each pointed out people who were making a scene on the dance floor. Eren gestured to Connie who had tried doing the worm. Levi pointed to someone who was convulsing in the floor, asking Eren if they should tell a teacher because he was genuinely concerned for their health. As it turned out, they were just a bad dancer.

Throughout the night there was one person who actually seemed rather skilled. They danced to nearly every song and lead everyone else during songs that had a corresponding dance routine. Eventually a crowd gathered around them, cheering them on.

"Wow, that person is really good." Eren noted.

"Hm? Oh, that's Ymir." Levi said.

Eren stared at Levi incredulously. "That's Ymir?" He turned back to watch her. "I didn't know she could dance like that."

"Yeah, neither did we until freshman year at a party at Christa's house. Everyone in guard gave her the nickname 'dancing machine.'"

"I would've never guessed." Eren thought aloud.

The current song ended and a slow song started up. Eren looked around at all the couples seeking each other out and clinging together, swaying back and forth. Something turned in his stomach that made him feel sick. He could be doing that with Levi if he didn't have to keep them a secret. He could dance with Levi if people wouldn't stare or make fun of them. He could do that with Levi if no one had a problem with two men being together in the first place. It wasn't fair. Eren knew it was bitter of him to think this way, but he thought that it wasn't fair because some of these people were only together because they could be, and he actually liked Levi and that was frowned upon. He started frowning before he realized it.

Eren felt something nudging his arm and he looked towards it's source. Levi had been grabbing his arm to get his attention. "Are you okay?" He asked, genuinely worried.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Eren lied.

"You look upset." Levi set his hand on Eren's shoulder. "What are you thinking about?"

Eren relented, sighing heavily. "It's stupid."

"If it's bothering you, then it's not stupid."

What good deed did Eren do to deserve someone so caring? He decided that Levi deserved the truth. "I want to dance with you." Eren stared down at his shoes.

"But we can't?" Levi wanted to know how far Eren was willing to go.

"No... we can't." Eren mumbled.
Levi moved closer so he could discreetly hold Eren's hand. "But we will. Maybe not tonight, but we will. I promise." Eren looked to him with hopeful eyes. Levi wanted to see him smile again, that was all he was concerned about in that moment. "You wanna go breakdance during a slow song just to throw everyone off?" He asked in his most convincing tender voice.

Eren chuckled at Levi's offer. "No thanks, I'm fine staying here."

Levi squeezed his hand, happy to have helped.

~

They ended up having a very fun time. Isabel invited them to dance with her a few times and Eren was the only one to accept. Levi didn't mind, he was perfectly content watching them and even taking a few pictures on his phone. The night didn't go down the way Eren may have expected, but that wasn't a bad thing.

They left the building and walked to Levi's car, restraining themselves from looking too close. An idea popped into Levi's head and he faced Eren. "Can I have my keys back? I'd like to drive."

"Oh... sure." Eren fished the keys out of his pocket and tossed them to Levi. They got in the car and Levi turned up he music to an acceptable volume before they took off.

Levi started off driving in the direction of his house but turned early onto a different road.

"Um, Levi? Where are we going?" Eren gazed out the window, watching the scenery rush by.

"You'll see." Levi answered curtly. He turned onto a winding dirt road that was framed with the forest on either side. Eren didn't recognize their surroundings, but he was still intrigued. Aside from the high beams of the car, the moon and stars were the only things lighting the way. It was truly a beautiful night.

Levi used his turn signal, driving into a small opening off the side of the road into a large open area. The car was parked in a massive field that had grass that would reach their shins. As big as the area was, it was closed off with a border of trees, but the sky was completely visible, which Eren appreciated.

Eren stared at the marvelous sight before them. Levi reached over in front of Eren, pawing through the glove compartment. "What is this place?" Eren asked without removing his gaze from their environment.

Levi pulled back, putting a CD in and waiting to press play. "Somewhere no one can see us." Eren looked at Levi curiously. "Do you still want to dance?"

The way Eren's face twisted into pure joy and affection made Levi's heart melt. Eren nodded, bearing a huge, goofy grin. "Mhm, I'd like that."

"Alright, get out of the car and we'll do just that." Eren exited and Levi skipped through a few songs on his CD to find his desired one. He turned up the volume to a rather loud level and got out of the car, leaving his door open and reopening Eren's door as he approached him. The soft chiming noises filled the open air as Levi offered his hand to Eren. "I think this song'll beat anything you'd hear at a school dance anyway."
Eren accepted Levi's hand and Levi brought them close together, wrapping his arm around Eren's waist as the bass of the song came in. Eren recognized the rhythm, remembering the notes in such a nostalgic way. He couldn't place the name of the song, or who sang it, or when he had heard it, but he knew that he had been well acquainted with the song a long time ago, perhaps in his childhood. And now, the song was renewed and possessed a new warmth to his heart, because it hosted this private moment between him and Levi. And the words fit the situation perfectly.

Levi stared into Eren's sea colored orbs that were currently reflecting the moonlight in a glorious way.

~ There's such a sad love, deep in your eyes

~ A kind of pale jewl, open and closed within your eyes

~ I'll place the sky within your eyes

The two began swaying along with the sounds flooding out of the car. Levi held Eren so close, Eren was scared that he could hear his heart beating ridiculously fast. They didn't just step back and forth like the other couples they had observed at the dance. Levi actually led Eren, and he was a better dancer than Eren anticipated. "Thank you for doing this, Levi."

"You don't need to thank me. I wanted to dance too. And you shouldn't have to settle because of poor circumstances."

~ There's such a fooled heart, beating so fast

~ In search of new dreams, a love that will last within your heart

~ I'll place the moon within your heart

"It's not fair that you have to be scared to be with who you want." Levi murmured. "But I know that we don't live in an ideal world, so if there's something you want, I'll try to give it to you." He tightened his grip on Eren.

Eren wanted to tear up. Levi was right, it wasn't fair. But the fact that he'd tried making harsh, unchangeable realities a little less painful, made him fall for Levi harder and faster. He laid his head on Levi's shoulder, wanting to take everything in all at once.

~ As the pain sweeps through, makes no sense for you

~ Every thrill has gone, wasn't too much fun at all

~ But I'll be there for you as the world falls down

The dewy grass started to get the bottoms of their pants and socks wet, but neither of them could find it in them to care. As far as they were concerned, the atmosphere couldn't be better. Neither of them wanted it to end.

~ Falling

~ Falling down

~ Falling in love

Eren pictured their future days when he would be able to go out and flaunt Levi and show the world that Levi was his and only his. He thought about all the different ways that he could declare that he
also belonged to Levi and only Levi. In the beginning, his feelings for Levi were merely an agonizing crush, now he was certain that they were much more and he was in deep. He wanted to give Levi everything and show him that he was his world.

~ I'll paint you mornings of gold, I'll spin you Valentine evenings
~ Though we're strangers till now
~ We're choosing the path between the stars
~ I'll leave my love between the stars

As the chorus picked up again, Levi spun Eren faster, desperate to make the most of their time. Eren chortled with joy, putting a smile on Levi's face. Nothing could ruin their night.

~ Makes no sense at all, makes no sense to fall
~ Falling
~ As the world falls down
~ Falling, falling
~ Falling in love
~ As the world falls down (Down)

The song faded and Eren lifted his head to look at Levi. And Levi thought 'what the hell?' There wasn't ever going to be a better time. The perfect time was right then. And somehow, Eren was aware of that fact as well, because he closed his eyes and awaited patiently. He didn't have to wait for very long, for Levi wasted no time in closing their distance and connecting their lips in a gentle, loving kiss. Levi's lips were just as he imagined they'd be, roughly textured, but soft in their moments. Levi parted far too soon, but the look of endearment in his eyes was something Eren didn't want to miss.

No words were needed, no explanation was required. Everything was going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Was that expected or what? I headcanon that Levi is the worlds biggest mama's boy by the way.

The song is "As The World Falls Down" by David Bowie. It's from the film Labyrinth in case you were wondering. I didn't know what song I was going to use at first, then I reread them saying "It's not fair" every two sentences and it reminded me of Labyrinth. Then I got that song stuck in my head and I was like "HOLY SHIT I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO CHANGE THE STORY BECAUSE THE WORDS MATCH THE SITUATION THIS SONG IS PERFECT." So yeah, watch Labyrinth, it's on Netflix.

Translations: Eren est ici. - Eren is here.
Attendez, je ne suis pas prêt. - Wait, I'm not ready.

Well I'm a puddle of goop after this chapter. I'm such a sap for romance and cheesy shit like that, ugh, just hand that shit over. Yes please. I'll take ten.

If you liked this chapter let me know with a kudos or a comment, they are greatly
appreciated! My tumblr is dr-s--art. Please forgive any errors, I don't edit. Thank you so much for reading!!! <3
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Eren finds out why Levi is always so busy, and plans are in the making.

Chapter Notes

I'd like to make a formal apology. Netflix has made a liar out of me and it took off Labyrinth, so I'm sorry. I'm also sorry for taking so long for the update, this week was tech week. That's all that needs to be said. I'm a walking corpse. The musical is over on Saturday and strike is on Sunday so I'll be free after this week, yay! More frequent updates! Sorry if this chapter sucks, I've only written what I could in my free time. (I'm literally posting this during class, that's how little time I have.) Translations are at the bottom, I hope you guys like this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The drive back was spent in a comfortable silence. Neither Eren nor Levi felt the need to occupy their time with mindless chitchat. That night was absolutely perfect in every way and nothing could ruin it for them. Levi parked his car in his driveway, peaking Eren's interest. "Why are we at your house?"

"Don't you want to stay the night?" Levi questioned.

Eren blushed slightly. "Um, I don't have any extra clothes. And would your mom be okay with it?"

Levi rolled his eyes, turning off the engine. "Please, she loves you. She won't care. And don't worry, you can borrow some of my clothes." He left the car and walked to the front door, waiting for Eren to follow.

They entered Levi's home, flicking on the kitchen light to see where they were going. A flickering light from the living room poured in and Levi approached the source. Eren shadowed Levi as they wandered in the house, mind still not clear enough to be aware of what Levi was doing.

Levi sighed at the sight of the television being left on with his mother passed out on the couch. Levi flicked his gaze to Eren for a brief moment. "We'll go to bed in a minute," he whispered. "I just have to take care of this first." Eren nodded, choosing to wait by the stairs while Levi tended to his mother. Levi took the blanket laying on the back of the couch and draped it over his mother, then going to turn off the television.

Levi met Eren back at the base of the stairs and grabbed his hand. "Let's go." He smirked, starting up the stairs. Eren bit his lip, following Levi obediently.

Eren and Levi walked down a short hallway down to Levi's room. And Levi's room wasn't much different than he had expected, with the dark red walls, heavy curtains and black rug. The room was spotless of course, with all of Levi's small belongings spaced out evenly on his dresser and few
things other than color guard awards decorating his walls. Nothing was scattered on the floor, his closet was neatly arranged and there didn't seem to be a speck of dust anywhere. Eren left himself a mental reminder to clean his own room, should Levi ever visit.

"Let me find you some pajamas that'll fit," Levi said, opening his dresser drawer and rummaging through articles of clothing. Eren took the liberty of sitting down on Levi's bed, scanning his surroundings. "I think these'll do." Levi handed Eren a baggy band shirt and sweatpants.

"Thanks, um where do I...?" Eren wondered if there was an upstairs bathroom that he could change in. Much to his surprise, Levi began loosening his tie and unbuttoning his vest immediately.

"Hm?" Levi raised an eyebrow at him.

"Oh... I was wondering if there was a bathroom I could change in?" Eren mumbled.

"Yeah, right across the hall."

Eren breathed out a sigh of relief, exiting Levi's room to the bathroom. He wasn't comfortable showing his body at the moment, having not been informed of their current circumstances. Had he been aware that he'd spend the night, maybe he would've prepared himself mentally for undressing in Levi's presence.

~

He returned shortly after changing. The shirt fit just fine and the pants were comfortable, but slightly too short for him. He opened Levi's door to see him now lacking his footwear, his vest and he was now in pajama pants, but he struggled with his tie. Eren shut the door and chuckled at Levi's difficulties.

Levi feigned annoyance at Eren, huffing as he tugged at his tie. "Do you need help?" Eren snickered.


Eren had no problem undoing Levi's tie. "You were pulling the wrong way, pulling that way tightens it." He tutted. Once the tie was off he handed it to Levi, who snatched it away frustratedly.

"Thanks." Levi muttered.

Eren set his clothes on the floor near the foot of the bed, sitting down again and waiting for Levi to finish changing. Eren couldn't help his eyes wandering over to watch his boyfriend. Levi ridded himself of his dress shirt, pulling off his undershirt, revealing his torso in the process. Eren's eyes were first drawn to a reflecting light coming from Levi's ears. The act of removing his shirt had ruffled his hair enough to reveal industrial piercings at the top of each ear that Eren hadn't noticed before. He allowed his gaze to lower to take in the rest of the view before it disappeared when Levi threw on another shirt.

Levi smirked over at Eren. "Do they fit alright?" He gestured to the borrowed pajamas.

Eren nodded. "Mhm. Thanks for letting me borrow them."
"No problem." Levi rounded the corner of the bed. "Ready to go to bed?" He settled beneath the blankets, beckoning Eren over to lay next to him. Eren crawled up to sit parallel to Levi, grinning to himself all the while.

Something so simple as sleeping next to his boyfriend thrilled him. They weren't even going to be doing anything that would be considered taboo, just the knowledge that his parents would go crazy if they found out made him feel so rebellious. He tucked himself under the covers and propped himself up on his elbow to face Levi, still smiling like a fool.

"Did you have a good night?" Levi asked, wrapping his arm around Eren's waist.

Eren scooted closer. "I did. Did you?"

"Yeah."

Eren thought back to their dance. The environment was so beautiful and the scenery framed that special moment so perfectly. "How did you know about that place? That huge field?"

Levi started gently making circles with his thumb on Eren's back. "It used to be an old park. People stopped coming so they just closed it off and let it go."

Eren nodded. "It's so pretty there."

"I like it there too." Levi held Eren closer so that they were pressed against each other. He moved his hand up to start petting his hair. The small bit of moonlight that streamed in from the windows gleamed in Eren's eyes and Levi was absolutely infatuated with his natural beauty. He didn't know how to tell Eren his thoughts, but that didn't stop him from trying. "I love the way you look."

Eren furrowed his brows and giggled. "What do you mean?"

Levi shrugged. "Dunno. I like your eyes. You have nice hair."

Eren only laughed more, the vibrations from his chest migrated over to Levi. "Is that your way of saying I'm good looking?" He teased.

Levi blew an amused breath out of his nose. "Yeah, sorry I didn't know how to put it."


Levi rolled his eyes. "Get over here." He didn't bother explaining himself before he connected their lips for the second time that night, earning a small surprised noise from Eren. Eren didn't protest, he only smiled into the kiss, adoring the texture of Levi's lips and how they were only disrupted by the smooth metal surface of his lip ring. This kiss had a bit more movement than their first one, but remained sweet and innocent.

That didn't last very long. It was mutually agreed, though not verbally, that they both wanted to continue. Levi tugged a bit at Eren's locks, making his cheeks flush in the process. Eren mirrored his movements by running his fingers through Levi's hair and scratching ever so lightly at his undercut. As gentle as the action was, it drove Levi wild, causing him to let loose a low groan and start nipping at Eren's bottom lip. Eren experimented by scratching a little harder, immediately satisfied with the results when Levi began sucking on his lip. Eren made a mental note that Levi liked his undercut being scratched.

Eren opened his mouth a bit to take a breath when Levi took the initiative to slide in his tongue.
Eren enjoyed the new sensation, the heat of Levi's tongue mixing with his own was intoxicating. While they were caught up in the moment, Eren felt something metal and foreign inside his mouth and instinctively retreated, separating himself from Levi and wiping off the excess spit around his mouth. Levi looked at him, concerned. "Did I go too far?"

Eren shook his head, knitting his eyebrows together in confusion. "No, I just... tasted something weird." Levi cocked his head, sharing Eren's perplexity. "It tasted like metal."

A mischievous grin grew on Levi's face. Instead of answering him verbally, he stuck of his tongue to show him. A silver bar penetrating Levi's tongue made Eren's face go beet red.

"You... you have a tongue piercing?" Eren stammered. He felt stupid for never noticing it before. Especially since Eren's favorite pastime was watching Levi fiddle with his lip ring using his tongue.

Levi snickered at Eren's surprise. "That's not the only piercing I have that you don't know about yet, either." He wiggled his eyebrows for extra effect.

Eren slapped his hand over his mouth, cheeks getting redder by the minute. "Does your mother know about all them?" He hissed, shocked. He couldn't imagine how such a sweet woman would react to her son having an umpteen amount of body modifications. He also couldn't figure out how someone so young could have so many.

Levi was far too entertained by Eren's disbelief. "There's only one she doesn't know about, but she wouldn't care even if she did know. Though, it's not the type of piercing I'd tell her about." He smirked when Eren gawked at him. "I have a friend who'll do any piercing or tattoo on anyone. Same guy who does Hanji's tattoos."

Eren gulped. "I think I have an idea of where that piercing is." He said shakily, yet anxiously.

Levi brought them close together again and spoke against his lips. "Don't worry, you'll find out soon enough." He kissed Eren again, slipping his tongue back in, which was openly welcomed by Eren. He started rubbing circles into Eren's back, making him hum happily.

Eren wrapped his arms around Levi's neck, intent on keeping them close for as long as he could. He loved the feeling of Levi invading every inch of his mouth. He allowed him to do whatever he pleased. Eren trusted Levi with his safety and pleasure, and so far Levi hadn't done anything that he didn't approve of. He had longed to be able to love someone freely and be intimate with them without the fear of the consequences. Levi was perfect. Eren didn't feel like he was settling with him, he genuinely felt so close to him and wasn't interested in anyone else. This simple moment that most people were entitled to and took for granted was what he had been waiting for. Most people under any circumstances were allowed to kiss who they were attracted to without a raging family waiting to punish them. But now it was his turn to linger in the moment and enjoy himself. Levi made him so happy and even though he couldn't explain why or how he had fallen so fast, he wasn't about to let any paranoia of his ruin it.

Levi seemed to be just as happy and that relieved Eren. The arm that he had wrapped around Eren's waist slid down to the side of his knee, squeezing softly. He gave subtle, stimulating pinches up Eren's thigh, slowly moving closer and closer to his hip. It wasn't until he had actually reached his hip that his boyfriend had put a stop to his movements. Eren set a hand on top of Levi's hand keeping it from going any further. Eren shook his head as he disconnected their kiss. "Not tonight."

Levi sighed, frustrated with himself. "I'm sorry, I should've asked."
"It's okay." Eren shushed him. "I mean... I'm definitely not opposed to having sex. I'm ready and I'd like to sometime, but I need time to prepare, you know? I'm okay with it emotionally, but I have to get things ready... physically. I'll need a day or two to get everything in order in advance." Eren blushed.

Levi nodded. "I understand. Is that something you'd be willing to do anytime soon?"

"Yeah, but I want to plan it if that's okay. I want a day where we don't have to worry about anyone coming in or a day where we wouldn't have to rush or anything like that. Like, we have to figure out a time that's good for both of us and when we won't be disturbed."

"We'll find a good day. You could tell your parents you're spending the night at a friend's house and we can go someplace where no one would know where we were."

Eren smiled at how thoughtful and understanding Levi was being. That plan could actually work. The odds finally weren't against him. "That sounds nice."

Levi kissed his for head and interlinked their hands. "We can work something out tomorrow morning if you'd like."

Eren's splitting grin gave away his agreement before he himself was able to. "Okay, let's do that."

"For now, let's go to sleep." Levi yawned. He draped his arm around Eren's waist again and shifted closer. Eren tucked his head under Levi's chin and laid his hands on his chest. "Good night, babe."


"Nothing. I just like when you call me that. Good night." Eren snuggled closer to be wrapped up in Levi's body heat. It felt so surreal to have someone caring for him, giving him little pet names and treating him with love.

Levi took his free hand and started threading it through Eren's hair. "Good night."

~

Eren woke up to the sensation of small kisses being gently peppered over his face. He forced his eyes to open, vision focusing to see Levi covering him with little pecks. A beautiful sight that he never thought he'd see. His heart fluttered as he smiled up at Levi.

Levi saw his wakefulness and halted his actions. "Good morning, Eren."

"'Morning, Levi." Eren said. "Do I get a good morning kiss?" He batted his eye lashes in a teasing manner.

"You're so spoiled, you know that?" Levi cocked an eyebrow at Eren, who shrugged, feigning innocence. Regardless, Levi gave in to his request, softly kissing him and simultaneously earning a pleased whimper from Eren. Levi decided to take it a step further in retaliation for Eren being so demanding. He wormed his way into his mouth, resulting in Eren pulling back, giggling.

"I didn't expect you to kiss me like that." He said through his laughter, holding his hand to his mouth in defense.
"What? I told you this week that I'd be teaching you some French things." Levi smirked, making Eren glare at him halfheartedly. Levi soothed him by taking his hand away from his mouth and kissed him lightly. It seemed to work, since a vague blush appeared across Eren's visage. "Do you want some breakfast?"

"Mhm." Eren nodded excitedly. They both lifted themselves up off the bed and Levi led the way out of his room.

Levi turned and whispered. "If Izzy or Farlan ask, just say we've become really good friends and I invited you over."

"Alright." The harsh reality hit Eren like a bus. Their relationship was a secret and they couldn't tell the people close to them about them. That meant that Levi's own siblings couldn't know. The knowledge that he was the only thing making Levi keep a secret from them made him feel extremely guilty. He hid his melancholy as they reached the kitchen.

Levi pinched the bridge of his nose at the sight. "Maman, what are you doing?" He sighed.

The small woman turned to Levi smiling. She walked over to him with the same tired excitement that she had when she met Eren the day prior. "Levi, good morning! Eren, you stayed the night, that's wonderful!" They both noted the harsh under eye circles that she had. She brought Levi into a secure hug. "I'm making breakfast, of course. The cinnamon rolls are in the oven right now."

While watching the exchange, Eren pondered over how close they were. At his house, if he were to walk downstairs in the morning, his mother would smile and greet him simply. Levi's mother acted as if she hadn't seen her son in a day or two. Eren would've given a small acknowledging nod to his mother and greet her back. Levi was more than happy to return the hug his mother gave him with twice as much strength. It wasn't as though Eren doubted his closeness with his own mother, but Levi and his mother seemed to have a very special bond. Their small private conversations in their own tongue along with Levi's obedience and worry and his mother's trust and support were all pieces of evidence for their closeness. Eren knew his own mom loved him, but he had fear of her judgment distorting that. But Levi and his mother's love was unconditional. The thought made him jealous, but he was even more happy that Levi had that care and support from his parent in a way that he did not.

"Mom, you're exhausted. Let me take care of breakfast." He said, leaning back but not separating from her. He looked down at her as he spoke, something that didn't happen often considering his height. "I don't want you to overwork yourself."

"Oh, you worry yourself too much. I'll be okay." She kissed his cheek and left to start a timer for the cinnamon rolls.

After she set the timer down, Levi went behind his mother and pushed her out of the kitchen. "We'll take it from here, you rest on the couch for now."

Kutchel relented with a yawn. "Alright, just this once." She always said that, just to appease her son. "A young man shouldn't have to fend for himself until he moves out." She pouted as she sat down.

"And a mother shouldn't have to do everything around the house." Levi said back, returning to the kitchen.

Levi sat down at the kitchen table along with Eren. He rolled his eyes to show his exasperation and leaned on the table to face Eren. "So, it looks like we're having cinnamon rolls for breakfast."
Eren giggled at his dry humor. "It's a good thing that I like them."

"Why? Would you have broken up with me if you didn't like them?" Levi joked.

"No." Eren snorted.

Levi smiled and stood up to grab a kettle. "While I make the tea, do you want to discuss when you'd like to... you know?" Levi treaded carefully, aware that his mother was in the other room and his siblings must've been home by now.

"Sure. When were you thinking?" Eren asked.

"Well," Levi started filling the kettle with water and placed it on the stove. "I'm okay with anytime, really. A time when no one is home or when we can go somewhere private would be nice. Is there a specific day you'd like?"

Eren shook his head. "I don't mind when. As long as we have a lot of time and we don't have to worry about people finding out."

"I can't think of a time off the top of my head that my family will all be away, which would probably be the most convenient time. We'll figure it out though..."

Levi broke off when he heard footsteps coming down the stairs. The two looked over to see Isabel walking down and letting out a long yawn. She rubbed her eyes and wrinkled her nose, annoyed that she had to be awake. "I smell cinnamon..." She opened her eyes and broke out into a wide grin. "Eren! I didn't know you were here!" She seemed to have lost all remnants of fatigue as soon as she saw him. She sat next to Eren, rubbing at her eyes more to better her vision. "When did you get here?"

"I spent the night." Eren answered, becoming slightly rigid at the fact that she could ask a question he couldn't answer.

"How long are you staying?"

"I don't know," Eren looked to Levi. "As long as I'm allowed to stay."

Levi shrugged. "As long as you want." He opened the cabinets to find five mugs and placed them out on the table. "Where's Farlan?"

"Sleeping as always." Isabel rolled her eyes. "Excuse me, I need to go feed Kitty." She left to do just that.

Levi sat down in her place as he waited for the water to boil. "I might just have to force them out of the house." He whispered.

Eren went home in the later afternoon, having spent the day watching television with Isabel and Farlan while their mother went off to start scrapbook pages. Eren came in through the living room, falling onto the couch with his bag of clothes on the floor. As per usual, his mother sat in her chair struggling with knitting and barely noticed his entrance. "Whose clothes are those?" She asked.
Eren looked down at the black jeans and the Cure sweatshirt Levi had let him borrow. "They're Levi's. I forgot to bring a change of clothes." He answered tiredly. He didn't want to come home. He wanted to stay with his cuddly boyfriend, be clawed by that sweet cat, listen to Farlan practice his saxophone and be doted on by who he would consider his second mother. Coming back to a home that was lacking a father, had a less than attentive mother and a sister that usually kept to herself didn't seem like the preferred option. It scared him to think of his house as less of a home. At Levi's house, he guaranteed acceptance for who he was and he couldn't say the same for his home.

Carla glanced up from the mess of a shawl she was working on. "Are you alright? You seem tired."

"I'm fine, just a little worn out." Eren replied, staring up at the ceiling. "Had a lot of fun last night."

"That's good to hear." Carla smiled. She rummaged through her bag of materials that was laying next to her. "I finished that scarf last week, I forgot to give it to you."

Eren sat up, readying himself to put on an impressed act. Carla presented him with a mangled, dark blue scarf that was uneven in width. Eren took it and wrapped it around his neck, testing it out.

"Wow," he exaggerated. "I like it. It's really nice."

"I know, it's pathetic." Carla slumped back in her chair. "That scarf took me two goddamn months to make and it still turned out like shit." She crossed her arms and huffed agitatedly.

"Mom," Eren whined. "It's really not that bad, don't put yourself down." He tugged it upward and tightened it slightly. "It's really warm, who cares what it looks like?"

Carla grinned gently. "Thanks. I guess you're right. What's the point of having a pretty scarf if it doesn't do its job?"

"Exactly." Eren said. "I'll wear it everyday."

"No, no." She shook her head while chuckling. "You don't have to do that. I don't want you to get picked on at school."

"I won't get picked on. And even if I do, I don't care. You made it."

Carla smiled brightly and stood up, grabbing her things. "I'm so lucky to have such a good son." She kissed his forehead and began walking into the kitchen. "I'll be making dinner in a bit."

Eren grunted in acknowledgment. He stroked his new scarf, admiring the soft quality. He knew it looked horrid but he didn't have the heart to tell his mother. And he didn't really mind, she made it specifically for him and for that he'd wear it with pride.

He thought over his earlier words about how he wouldn't care if someone made fun of his scarf. Eren pondered if he would actually mind if someone said something rude. He decided he wouldn't. There was nothing wrong with it and he knew it. And then his train of thought broke off onto a tangent, and wondered if he should be offended if he were to be made fun of for being gay. Was it the same thing? He knew that there was nothing wrong with him, but would that stop him feeling like hell if people knew and hated him for it? The scarf may have been hideous, but it was made with love and did it's job of keeping him warm and being comfortable. He may not have been accepted in society, but he functioned like any other human being. Eren scoffed at himself for being so paranoid and fearful that he started comparing himself to an ugly scarf. Perhaps he should've taken a nap.
Monday went by fast. Eren's practice with Levi was much more productive than either one had anticipated. Though, they snuck in a few pecks and kisses during their breaks, loving being in each other's presence. Tuesday came just as fast and Eren was eager for practice.

Eren entered the gymnasium with his flag bag dangling not so gracefully off his shoulder. Off to the side he saw Hanji and Christa sitting against the wall, working on some math homework. Eren mentally reminded himself to ask her if she got her test back. He looked over to the bleachers and saw that Connie was chatting with Sasha while she taped up her rifle. Eren briefly wondered if that's something he should do. As he walked closer, he noticed that she didn't look overly happy and Connie was in fact trying to cheer her up. He thought it over for a minute before he decided that telling her something nice was the least he could do. Levi was always stressing how the team had to be like a family and even if that wasn't the issue, Eren wanted to be a better person.

Eren sat in front of the two friends on the row ahead of them. "Hey Sasha." He waved.

Sasha looked up from her rifle and sent him a weak smile. "Hi Eren. What's up?"

"Nothing." Eren shrugged. "I just wanted to tell you that you look really nice today. But I'm sure you already knew that."

Sasha blushed and tucked her head down, trying to hide her smile. "You're just saying that." She gushed.

Connie noticed her change in mood and joined in. "He's right, you're hot!" He shook her shoulder.

"Stop that!" She laughed as she slapped Connie's hand away. She looked back up to Eren with a genuine smile that replaced her forced one. "Thanks, Eren."

Eren nodded in acknowledgement. The rustling of a paper bag brought his attention to Connie who dug out a baked potato, offering it to Sasha. "A hot potato for a hot potato?" He nudged her with his elbow, making her giggle.

"You know we're not supposed to eat before practice. But save that for break." She advised him.

Eren grinned at the exchange, happy that he helped Sasha out of her funk and that she had a friend like Connie to be there for her. "Alright, everyone!" Eren instinctively turned around to Levi's voice. "In the center of the room!"

The team all gathered in the middle of the gym, sitting on the floor. Hanji stood beside Levi and made the next announcement. "So, today as we start practice, I'm going to pull people aside asking for sizes. I'm going to measure all of you for our uniforms, please contain your excitement." As if on cue, there was a hushed conversation sweeping through the team members. "And you'll also need to tell me your shirt size for our team shirts and jackets. The sizes run in unisex, so guess if you're unsure."

Eren turned to the person sitting closest to him, who happened to be Petra. "We get jackets?"

"Mhm." Petra nodded enthusiastically. "All the sports teams do. Ours are cooler though, because last year we started putting nicknames on the back instead of our last names."

"Alright, get your gloves and shoes on and we'll get started." Hanji said. "Oh, and Levi and I
having been talking things over, so instead of redoing whatever move you messed up on when you dropped, you have to take three laps around the gym." They said winking. "Okay, set up!"

With that being said, the team groaned and stood up to get everything ready. Eren found the shoes to be rather comfortable, unlike the gloves which made his hands feel almost stiff. The shoes made him feel ready to run for miles. He wondered how difficult it'd be having to perform with the gloves on.

Stretching was increasingly strenuous, as Eren found it harder and harder to stare at Levi as he did his stretches. He stretched poorly on purpose once, quickly realizing that he should never do it again. Eren was desperate for Levi's attention and due to his compromising position for the stretch he was doing, Levi's aid made him a little more than hot and bothered. Aware that this would be bad should he get too aroused in front of everyone, he performed to the best of his ability so that no help was required.

After their run, it was time to get started with their work, and members were being called by Hanji for fitting. Eren didn't bother to pay them any mind and focused entirely on the routine. Which in hindsight, wasn't a great idea, considering he was mirroring Levi and needed to grasp his hand, look into his eyes and stand at a close proximity with him, only to be torn away.

Soon, it was Eren's turn to get measured for his uniform. Hanji called him over and he reluctantly left the team to see them in the corner. Hanji readied their hand on a clip board. "Alrighty, Eren. What size do you think you'll need for your shirt and jacket?"

"Um... medium I guess?" He answered, unsure.

Hanji scanned him for a short minute. "I'd say so too. Now I'll have to measure you, so if you'd kindly spread out your arms..." They picked up some tools for measuring and Eren complied to everything they asked of him. The process was fairly quick and simple. "Perfect!" They exclaimed. "With any luck, the uniforms will be here within the next few weeks. You can head back now."

~

Levi counted off and everyone tossed their flags into the air. One poor, unfortunate soul hadn't been quick enough to catch, resulting in a loud clang of the metal pole. "Who dropped?" Levi whipped around, looking for the guilty party. Sasha was the unlucky offender who couldn't scramble for her flag fast enough to not be caught by Levi. "Sasha, three laps."

"Oh, come on!" She whined pitifully. "Connie was distracting me!"

"No excuses." Levi said. "You'll face worse distractions at competitions, three laps." Levi turned his attention back to Connie. "And you knock it off. Whatever it was that you were doing."

Sasha got off to the side to start running and Connie looked more than apologetic. Levi got back in his spot. "One more time!" He barked, earning complaints from every member of the guard.

"Ugh!"

"Please, god no."

"NO."
"Why does this happen to me? I'm a good person."

Eren searched around, wondering what the big deal was. He looked at Isabel. "What's wrong? He just said one more time, that's not too bad."

Isabel looked at him like she was about to lose her mind but held herself back for Eren's sake. "One more time... never means 'one more time.'" She explained.

"It means at least eight more times." Ymir grumbled from the other end. "It's never one more time. He just says that so he doesn't look like a jackass."

It wasn't long before Eren was complaining along with them.

~

After several run throughs and after everyone had been measured, their first break was had. Eren was glad to see that Sasha was a lot happier and laughing along with Connie. Knowing what she went through and how things affect her made Eren more concerned for her. But seeing Sasha have fun with her friend put him at ease.

Eren looked around lazily, noticing Marco attempting to get a three again, only to keep landing on a half. He saw Annie readjusting Bertolt's gloves so they'd be less loose. Eren enjoyed observing everybody's little interactions. It made him feel relaxed and calm.

That was taken away as soon as Levi slid down next to him. He ran his fingers through his sweaty hair, clearly doing it just to get a rise out of Eren. "Looking good out there, babe." Levi murmured so only Eren could hear.

"Thanks." Eren hid his mile long grin by tilting his head down. Personally, he didn't like that Levi had to whisper his words for the sake of their secret, but it had to be done. He let his pessimistic thoughts overrun his mind. All he wanted was to go someplace where they didn't have to worry or be careful. He wanted more time with Levi. Just the two of them. Almost every time they were together, they were in front of others and had to act as less than what they were, and that hurt Eren.

He wondered how badly it affected Levi. "Levi?" He whispered.

Levi stared at him sorrowfully and sighed. "Eren... I don't have the time. I'm busy all week, every week."

Eren's lip trembled. He was busy too, why couldn't Levi find the time? Maybe Levi just didn't want to go on a date with him. "You can't find a night in the whole week when you and I can go out? I'm busy all week too and I can think of plenty of times when we could have a date."

Eren regretted his words when he saw how much they stung. "Babe, listen. I have something going on everyday except Sunday. I literally have no time."
"What could you be doing every week that would take up so much of your schedule to the point where you can't take me out once?" Eren pouted. He knew he was being a little inconsiderate, but was one day really too much to ask for?

Levi narrowed his eyes and huffed at Eren. "You wanna know what takes up my spare time?"

~

He did want to know. Which was why he was sitting in Levi's car as he parked at the elementary school on Wednesday. They exited the car and Levi grabbed his flag bag out of the trunk of his car and began his trek into the school.

"Why are we here?" Eren asked, walking along side his boyfriend.

"You said you wanted to know why I'm so busy. Well, here is one of the reasons."

Eren wasn't exactly satisfied with that answer, but he didn't push it further. As he walked, he let out a pained hiss. His foot ached from the day before when he dropped his rifle on it.

"What's wrong?" Levi asked, hearing his noise of discomfort.

"My foot hurts a bit." Eren replied, being extra careful as he took steps.

"It's because you didn't stretch enough." Levi said curtly.

Eren sent him a funny look as they reached the building. "Um, no? It's because I dropped my rifle on it."

"No..." Levi shook his head without looking back at Eren. "It's because you didn't stretch enough."

Eren scoffed. "No it's n-"

"Yes it is."

Eren gawked at him. It seemed as though he said that every time he or any other members were hurt, regardless of the circumstances. He rolled his eyes and tried to brush it off, fully aware that he wouldn't get anywhere arguing with Levi.

They entered the gymnasium of the elementary school and Eren almost made a pleased noise at the adorable sight waiting for them. Around twelve or so little kids were aimlessly playing with smaller versions of their color guard equipment.

Levi muttered to Eren, "I have to teach these runts on Wednesday while Hanji teaches them on Friday."

"That's so cute!" Eren said at a louder volume, catching the attention of the tiny guard. They all snapped their gazes over to Eren and Levi and broke out into elated smiles.

"Levi!" They all yelled, running for him.

"Now you've done it." Levi groaned. Two children latched onto his leg and one on the other. It surprised Eren when one started climbing up him and Levi didn't budge an inch, he only frowned.
Another grabbed his left hand and started pulling him forward as he struggled to follow with the extra weight on him.

They lead him out to the center of the gym. Eren followed, giggling at how adorable the whole thing was. His strong, impassive Levi was being herded by small children and without any convincing to be done.

"Alright, you brats." Levi snapped, though lacking all venom. "Ride's over. Time to get off." The kids detached themselves from Levi, giggling and jumping around in all their excitement. "We have a guest who's going to sit out and watch for the day, so don't embarrass me." He muttered, gesturing to Eren. "This is Eren, be polite."

"Hi, Eren!" They all chimed. Eren had to restrain himself from gushing at how cute they were.

"Hello." Eren smiled and gave a small wave.

"Get in your places." Levi ordered gently. Every child skipped to their own designated spot and stood awaiting for instructions. "Let's try to touch our toes."

Eren scoffed. 'That was not very good' he thought to himself. Two of the kids were bending their knees and others just let their arms hang. Had it been Eren doing it, Levi would've thrown a fit.

Eren walked over to a wall and slid down to sit. He watched amusedly, aware that Levi wasn't going to attempt to talk in a high pitched voice that people usual used when speaking with children. He didn't talk down to them, only treated them like equals.

"Very good, now windmills with your arms." Levi lead by example.

After three more simplified stretches, Levi had them all run around the gym at any random pace they desired. Occasionally, some would say hi to Eren as they passed him and Eren would laugh, saying hi back. Over all, Eren was surprised at how well Levi handled them.

"Okay, get back in your spots and get your flags." The kids' run was fairly short compared to their run. Though it was all expected, due to their young age. Levi marched over to a CD player and pressed play, letting a song that was familiar to Eren fill the air. It hit him that the song was 'Send Me On My Way' and he hadn't heard that song in years. The last time he heard it, it was on a kid's film that his mother let him watch with Mikasa when their father wasn't home.

Once everyone was ready, Levi standing with his own flag and the kids standing with their smaller flags that had bright blue silk, they started their routine. It was a slow, uncomplicated routine with very basic movements. They started off with drop spins and moved on to other easy steps. After all, there was only so much that six year olds could do.

Seeing how well everyone worked together melted Eren's heart. The kids had so much fun and he could tell they had a genuine interest for the sport, whereas Levi was incredibly patient and always offered help but wasn't aiming for perfection. All they cared about was having fun and Levi knew that.

The children's break came faster than the normal break, expectedly. Most of them came running
for Eren once they got their snacks, much to his surprise. To his left, their was a little boy and girl who closely resembled each other with their freckles, brown hair and green eyes, and to his right sat three little girls. The ones on his left stared at him in bewilderment while the others glanced at each other and back at him, interested. He felt like the latest attraction at the zoo.

Eren was about to speak when the little boy beat him to it. "Are you in color guard too?"

"Yes," Eren answered. "I'm on Levi's team."

The children collectively gasped. "Are you as good as Levi?" The girl to his left asked.

Eren chuckled at their amazement. "No, I'm new. Plus, I don't think many people are as good as Levi."

"Hanji is as good as Levi." One of the girls on his right said, leaning on his knee.

"Okay, not many people are as good as both of them." Eren elaborated. He noticed Levi walking towards him and turned his attention to him. The kids followed his gaze and moved out of the way for Levi to sit down.

"Are these guys harassing you?" Levi joked.

"Nope." Eren shook his head. "They're behaving."

"Good." Levi nodded. He pointed over to the boy and the girl. "Those are the twins, Aleda and Gabryel." Then he motioned to the girl with pretty, dark skin, eyes and hair that was pulled into corn rows. "This is Maria," he then gestured to the girl with curly, ginger hair, "That's Rose, and she's Sina." He motioned towards the last girl who had been leaning on Eren's knee who was of Asian descent and had her hair pulled into a low pony tail. "I can never seem to separate these three." The three girls looked between each other guiltily, but not bothering to hide their laughter.

Eren's attention was brought to Aleda when she moved from the left side of her brother to the other and whispered something in his ear. Eren thought it was a bit redundant to switch sides just to whisper something, but he didn't point it out.

Gabryel nodded and looked up at Eren, poking his shoulder to get the attention he already had. "She says you're pretty."

Eren's mouth split into a wide grin. It was absolutely adorable. "Aw, thank you. You're pretty too."

Aleda and Gabryel giggled amongst themselves, as if they had a secret joke that they were hiding from Eren. He didn't think anything of it though, children tended to do things like that.

"A few more minutes and we'll start again." Levi reminded them. He stood up to go off in another direction.

The kids made themselves comfortable around Eren as they ate their snacks, all except Gabryel. He frowned and stared at the ground while the others ate. Eren couldn't stand to see a child as cute as him upset. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"I don't want to practice." Gabryel mumbled, picking at his shoes.

"Why not?" Eren asked, concerned.

"I don't like where I'm put. I wanna stand next to Aleda." He pouted.
Even Aleda seemed to be saddened by his words.

"Ask Levi to move you. Have you done that?" Eren tried consoling Gabryel. Disliking where he stood shouldn't be so bad that he doesn't want to practice.

"Levi says he has to stand there." Aleda explained. "He won't let him stand anywhere else."

Eren furrowed his brows in confusion. "Well, where do you stand?"

"On the left in the front." Gabryel muttered. "Aleda is on the right on the front."

"Hmm." Eren wondered why Levi would put them on separate ends. Perhaps he didn't know how much they wanted to be together. "I can't promise anything, but I'll talk to him about it if you want."

The twins' eyes lit up with excitement. "Will you?" Gabryel asked.

"Yeah." Eren replied. "After practice I'll let him know you two want to be together and hopefully he'll do something about it."

Aleda and Gabryel grabbed ahold of Eren and thanked him profusely.

~

Levi seemed to have a much easier time with the little guard as opposed to the regular guard. Then again, they didn't move from their spots and were all eager to participate. Levi instructed them to practice without him so he could observe their progress.

He stood back and glanced around the team while they worked and evaluated their performance. The majority of them were unsure of their moves, but made up for it with enthusiasm. Half of them were out of time, though not horribly. Once they were done, he came back up to the front. "That was good, you all had the correct routine. But what have Hanji and I told you all that you have to do that you keep forgetting?"

The guard looked down at their feet and swaying back and forth, aware of exactly what he was talking about.

"You guys have to smile. I didn't make up the rule, it's just something you need to do." He lowered his voice and took on a serious composure. "Has Hanji told you what happens when you don't smile?" The guard shook their heads and leaned in with curiosity. "Every time you don't smile in a show..." Pause for dramatic effect, "a puppy stubs its toe."

Eren snickered at the shocked reactions. Some eyes widened, a few mouths dropped and Sina gasped in horror.

Levi clapped his hands together. "With that being said, we're done. Don't forget to practice at home."

Everyone cleared out without having to be told twice. A few members stopped to hug Levi, though they were only tall enough to wrap their arms around his leg. In which case, he patted their shoulders in acknowledgement. Eren felt lucky that a few members said goodbye to him as well.
Once they returned to the car, Eren faced Levi, still as giddy as ever. "They're so cute! I couldn't picture you doing something like this until today."

Levi shrugged. "No one else would do it besides Hanji, and we can't let them be the only influential figure those kids have."

"Hanji's not that bad." Eren said, Levi responding with a noncommittal noise. "So, where to next?"

Levi cocked an eyebrow at him. "I have awhile until I have to work. I'll drop you off before I leave."

"No, I want to go with you. Where do you work?" Eren persisted.

"I don't want you to know where I work." Levi grumbled.

"Why not?"

Levi made a wrong move by glancing at Eren's pout and relented. "Alright, but I don't think you'd want to spend hours there while I work. I work at this diner down the road."

"I'll go with you." Eren confirmed. "I'll get some food while I'm there too."

"You're gonna be bored." Levi warned him.

"I don't care. I want to go with you." And that was that.

~

They arrived at Levi's house shortly after and Levi immediately started to make a meal for the both of them. Eren sat down at the table and watched Levi as he worked. "Levi?"

"Hm?" Levi hummed, too occupied in his cooking to face Eren.

"Can you move Gabryel's spot?"

Levi dropped what he was doing and turned around to regard Eren with a skeptical look. "Is there a reason I should?" He questioned.

"Well... he told me he wants to stand with his sister, but you won't let him." Eren treaded carefully.

Levi sighed and bit his lip. "I can't move him, he has to stay in that spot."

"Why?" Eren interrupted before Levi could continue.

"Because," Levi paused his work and stood next to where Eren was seated. "They all have to be ordered a certain way based on their height, so I can't put him in the center. But I can't put him on the right with his sister, because he needs to hear instructions and he has trouble with that when he stands on the right."

Eren knitted his brows together, puzzled. "Why does he have trouble with that?"

"He's deaf in his left ear." Levi explained. "If the instructions are coming from the right, because I
"Oh..." Eren breathed out. So it wasn't something Levi could control. "Is there anything you can do to let them stand together? They're really broken up about it."

Levi went into deep thought over the situation, scratching his head as he leaned on the table. "I suppose... I could talk to Hanji about it and move Aleda. That way he could still hear and the height order won't be messed with."

"I think that'll make them happy." Eren grinned.

"Yeah, thanks for bringing this up. I don't want any of them to be unhappy in the guard." Levi walked off to resume his cooking.

"Any time." Eren liked how Levi always took the wants of other people into account. He wasn't overly concerned about winning or being the best team, he just wanted everyone to have a good time.

Just as Levi put a plate of food in front of Eren, his mother walked in the door, looking fatigued as ever. Levi ignored his own plate of food and helped his mother into the house and took her coat to hang it up. Kutchel gave him a light hug to greet him. "Bonjour, mon fils." She said in a tired voice.

"Bonjour," Levi parted from her. "Ça va aujourd'hui?"

"Assez bien," she sighed. She looked over to Eren's direction and widened her tired eyes, walking over to him with a slow excitement. "Eren! You're back!" She said in a soft yet celebratory voice, hugging him from the side.

"Hello," he hesitantly hugged back, caught off guard. "It's nice to see you."

"And it's nice to see you too." She stood back. Eren could tell she had a rough day by her disheveled hair up in a bun and her eye circles that never left, though her clothes seemed to be as neat as ever. "Well, now that I'm here, I'll make everyone something to eat."

"Uh, maman." Levi cut her off, standing in her path. "It's already taken care of." He pointed to their plates of food.

"Oh," Kutchel breathed out. "Such a good boy you are." She leaned up to give him a kiss on the cheek and headed into the living room.

Levi rubbed his temples after her departure. "She does way too much." He muttered, returning to his plate, picking off bits of food. "I have to warn you about my job."

Eren snorted. "You work at a diner, what is there to warn me about?"

"Because she tortures me and she might figure out that we're friends at least and she'll mess with you to mess with me." Levi paused hearing the phone ring. "I'll get it!" He hollered to his mother, retrieving the phone placed at the end of the kitchen. "Hello..." After the person on the other line supposedly answered, Levi wore a scowl. "Yeah, she's right here." Levi spat out bitterly, handing
off the phone to Kutchel. He walked back into the kitchen and sat down next to Eren, who looked concerned to say the least.

"Who was that?" Eren asked tentatively.

"My uncle." Levi answered curtly. "As I was saying, if she tries to get to you, just pretend you don't care, she'll leave you alone."

Eren took his rushed answer as a hint that he didn't want to talk about his uncle, so he continued on with their conversation. "Why does she try to get on your nerves so much?"

Levi scrunched his eyes shut for a brief moment before answering. "She's my ex." Eren visibly stiffened at the explanation. "She fucked me over and instead of moving on, she wants me to suffer as much as possible... are you sure you still want to go?"

Eren thought it over thoroughly. He didn't want Levi to be all by himself with such a horrible person. "I'm going."

Levi shrugged. "Suit yourself."

~

Levi grabbed his keys and led Eren to the front door, only to be stopped by his mom.

"Levi, are you doing anything for Halloween?" She asked.

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"I'm going to visit your Uncle Kenny that weekend. I leave Friday night and come back on Sunday. He and I need to discuss some financial things and I was wondering if you would like to come visit with me."

Levi crinkled his nose. "No thanks."

Kutchel pouted subtly. "He's your family. I won't force you to go, but remember he's your uncle and he provides for us."

"But he doesn't care about us, and you and I work harder to provide. He only gives us money because he feels obligated to."

"Very well. Good luck at work, Lynne didn't seem too troublesome today." She hugged him goodbye.

"Good, see you tomorrow. Love you." Levi kissed her cheek and headed out the door.

"Love you too, mon fils. See you soon Eren!" She waved.

"Goodbye." Eren waved back with a smile.

~
In the car, Eren thought over Levi's mother's words. "How would she know how Lynne was acting?"

"My mom?" Levi glanced at Eren and saw him nod. He was a bit hesitant to tell him. "... She works at the same diner as me." Eren but his lip to keep down his laughter. Levi noticed and frowned. "What?" He barked.

"I think it's so sweet how you love your mom so much, you even work at the same place as her."

Levi relaxed his tensed shoulders. "... Oh."

"Did you think I was going to make fun of you?" Eren chortled.

"Kinda, yeah." Levi admitted.

"I won't make fun of you for that." Eren promised, earning a faint grin from Levi. They rode the rest of the way in silence.

~

They stood outside the door of the diner. Levi started having second thoughts about bringing Eren. He set his hand on the door handle and looked up at Eren for confirmation that he was ready.

"You're gonna be late if you keep waiting." Eren urged on Levi with a smile.

Levi took in a deep breath and opened the door. He entered first, shielding Eren from possible unfriendly greetings that could await them. Luckily for him, Lynne wasn't the one waiting at the front. "I'll get you a table." Levi told Eren.

Eren followed Levi to a booth near the front that was placed against a window. Eren sat down while Levi sneaked away for a moment.

Soon, Levi came back with an apron around his waist and a menu in his hand. "I'm Levi, I'll be your waiter for the night." Eren laughed at Levi's 'introduction.' "I'll serve you like normal and I'll come sit with you during my breaks. How does that sound?"

"Sounds good." Eren replied happily.

"Okay, I'll be right back."

Eren looked over the menu in Levi's absence. It was a standard menu that one would see at any diner, so he decided to order a burger with fries. When he set down his menu, he noticed a girl around his age approaching him.

"Are you being waited on sir?" She asked kindly.

"Yeah, thank you though."

"You're welcome." She walked off in another direction and Eren continued to wait patiently.
Levi returned within minutes with a new, furious composure. He tried to will it away once he got to Eren.

"Is everything alright?" Eren asked.

"Yeah," Levi tried shaking his head lightly to regain focus. "Sorry... um, what do you want to drink?"

"Water." Eren answered simply, still not convinced that Levi was feeling okay. "Did something happen?"

"No." Levi said a little too quickly. "Do you need more time to figure out what you'd like to eat?" Eren gave Levi his order and he scribbled it down quickly. "I'll try to linger when I bring you your food but if I'm gone for awhile, it's because I'm stuck welcoming people or waiting on others."

"I understand. I didn't expect you to stop working just cuz I came." Eren said lightheartedly.

Levi sent him an appreciative smile. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

~

Levi had gotten Eren his drink, placed his order and was told to be in charge of welcoming people until further notice. From where he stood, he could see the back of Eren's head, which he found comforting. He didn't want to let Eren out of his sight. Not with Lynne around.

Speaking of the devil, she strode over to Levi's side, with the intention of tormenting him no doubt. "That guy you're waiting on is really cute." She noted, enraging Levi. "Think I might chat him up when I get the chance."

"He wouldn't be interested." Levi said, trying to hide his anger and seem apathetic.

"I beg to differ. He seemed pretty interested earlier when I walked by a few times."

Levi saw red. He couldn't tell if she knew about them, but that was irrelevant. She was trying to upset him and get with Eren. His Eren. It was her choice if she wanted to throw away their relationship, but he'd be damned if she came between him and Eren. But still, he could not give away the fact that they were together. He promised him that he'd keep them a secret and he wouldn't go back on that. Levi knew better than to believe that Eren would leave him over her, especially seeing as Eren was gay, but she could still tamper with their relationship.

"Just get over yourself. There's not nearly as many people who'd want to be with you as you think." Levi muttered.

"Hmm." Lynne simpered deviously. "Then let's put it to the test, shall we?" Before Levi could stop her, she sauntered over to Eren's booth and set a hand on his shoulder.

Levi wanted to get her away, he wanted to distract her, he wanted to do anything to protect his boyfriend. But if he left the front door unattended, his boss would give him hell for it. He also kept in mind that if he was too possessive of Eren, he would expose them. However, in that moment, Levi started caring less and less, and his resolve was wearing thin.
"You're so funny!" Lynne laughed exaggeratedly. 

Eren shifted his gaze in several directions, wondering if she was serious. "I just said you're making me uncomfortable. How is that fun-"

"You know, you're really cute." Lynne sat down across from him. "You're really quite the catch."

"Um," Eren gulped nervously. "I'm with somebody. So if you could-"

"Just forget about them." She waved him off.

"I don't..." Eren broke off with a relieved sigh as he saw Levi come into his vision with his food.

"Here you go." Levi said with a professional smile. "Enjoy your meal." Levi then turned to Lynne with a composed, yet threatening stare. "Lynne. It's impolite to sit with a customer, especially without their consent." He spoke with a robotic voice, laced with venom. "If you care about your job, I'd suggest you leave."

Without a word, Lynne stood up and left. Levi's eyes followed her in a glare until she was out of sight. He took her place sitting across from Eren. "I'm so sorry about that."

"It's okay." Eren said. "I'm sorry for complaining that you didn't have time for a date." Eren apologized sheepishly.

"Don't be sorry. I'm on break now, so I have about fifteen minutes with you." He leaned over the table on his elbows. "Maybe we could plan a real date? I couldn't do something overly extravagant, but we can do something simple."

"Alright, we could go get coffee sometime and do anything you want after." Eren suggested.

"Well, I'd say that we do what you'd like for our first date. But coffee sounds nice."

"I've only ever seen you drink tea. Do you even like coffee?"

Levi smirked. "Yeah, I like my coffee how I like my clothes."

"Dark and tasteless." Lynne said as she returned, leaning on Levi's side of the booth and sporting a wicked grin. Levi scowled at her, whereas Eren simply looked uncomfortable.

"Correction." Levi began. "I'd like my coffee to resemble Lynne's heart." The interest of the other two was peaked. "Black and ice cold." Eren snorted and Lynne scoffed.

It was difficult for Lynne to think of a retort, so instead she changed the subject. "How come you can sit with a customer and I can't? I think I'd have better chances."

"Because you're a stranger to him and you'll scare him off." Levi answered through gritted teeth, without thinking.

Lynne's face lit up with realization, making Levi regret his choice of words. "You know him?"

Neither one dared to confirm or deny. "Oh, I see! Is this your new boy toy?"
Eren could see the way it pained Levi to hear the words come out of her mouth. He looked about ready erupt. Eren became livid over the fact that Lynne was getting him so angry. He didn't know what happened between them, but the least she could do was leave him alone and she didn't even have the decency to do that. She had to keep rubbing it in his face that she hurt him and Eren needed to get her to be quiet and let Levi be.

Levi reluctantly went to deny her accusation. "We're just fr-"

"I'm his boyfriend." Eren declared confidently. Both Levi and Lynne froze at his words. He wasn't scared of her, he knew she couldn't do anything harmful to him, only Levi and that sent him into a trance of protection. Eren held Lynne's stare by glaring daggers to get his point across. Levi was taken aback when he saw the determination in Eren's eyes and heard the certainty in his voice. He'd never been so open about their relationship or his preference in men, so to say that his announcement came as a surprise was an understatement.

Lynne stared back in astonishment. She had only been making a joke to annoy Levi, but she didn't expect the customer that she had been flirting with to be his boyfriend.

After observing how Eren didn't seem to be backing down, Levi sat back, crossing his arms smugly. "Yeah. He's my boyfriend."

Lynne searched for the right response an fell short of anything witty, so she tried for something that would get a rise out of Levi. "Well, doesn't matter what you are now, you won't stay with Levi for long. You'll find that he's not as great as you think he is."

Eren clenched his fists as he stared her down. "Maybe it didn't work out between you two because you weren't able to see how great he is. I won't take him for granted."

Levi looked at Eren, astounded. Though Eren didn't look back as he was in the middle of a face-off with Lynne.

Lynne narrowed her eyes at Eren while thinking over her reply. Eventually, she gave up on outwitting him and turned to Levi. "No matter, you'll obviously get sick of him sooner or later and come back to me. Being the nice person that I am, I'd take pity on you too."

Levi glowered at her. "That's like leaving gold for garbage. I'm not that stupid."

Lynne frowned and forfeited. "Whatever." She stalked off to the other side of the diner, probably to actually do her job and tend to customers.

Levi faced Eren with a soft smile, appreciative that he stood up for them. "I'm sorry about that."

"It's fine," Eren took a bite of his food, trying to clear his head. "It's just... what's her fucking problem? What did you ever do to her?" Another bite. "All that was unnecessary and it's like she can't take a hint. It's not like you made her miserable like she does with you."

Levi's smile faded and he attempted to cover it up by staring at the table.

He wasn't quick enough, as Eren saw his change in demeanor. "You didn't, did you?"

Levi avoided his eyes. "I don't know."

Eren pushed away his food to focus better on his boyfriend. "What do you mean you don't know? What happened?"
Levi shook his head. "She did something really awful to me, but... I might've... pushed her. It might've been my fault. I still don't know which one of us is the reason for our breakup."

Eren listened intently. "What did she do? Or, what did you do?"

Levi decided that it was only fair to tell Eren about what happened. Also, it was better to not keep him in the dark and it would be nice to get it off his chest. "A couple months before we broke up, Lynne started acting really weird. She would get mad over the tiniest of things and she'd yell at me whenever I had to cancel plans. Then all of the sudden, she seemed indifferent to everything and that's when I found out that she had been cheating on me. With a few people."

Eren's heart broke as he heard the story. He couldn't imagine why anyone wouldn't be just as crazy about Levi as he was and do something so horrible to him.

"Then I confronted her about it. She told me it was my fault. She said I wasn't satisfying and that I wasn't affectionate enough. She said I was too distant and she couldn't take it anymore. So, if I had paid more attention to her then she wouldn't have done that. But regardless of her reasoning, she should have never cheated on me, so I broke up with her. And she still acts like she did nothing wrong, which pisses me off."

Eren didn't what else to say, the story only made him hate Lynne even more. "I'm sorry." He said.

"Don't worry about it." Levi hushed him. "It all worked out, I'm not with that bitch anymore." He laughed dryly. "It's good that it happened. It made me realize that I never felt anything for her, because it wasn't even hard to leave her. But it still bothers me that I was so neglecting that I drove someone to do that to me. I don't want to be like that with you."

Eren shook his head, taking Levi's hand from across the table. "No, Levi. You didn't make her do that. From what I know, she's pretty crazy and she would've cheated on you or done something shitty eventually. It's not your fault. And don't worry about being that way with me. I think you're more than enough, and even if you think you're being 'distant,' or something like that, I don't. I think you're great just the way you are."

When Levi picked up the sincerity that Eren was conveying, it felt so foreign. To hear that the flaw that sent his life into a downward spiral wasn't a problem. To be told that he wasn't the cause of his own suffering. He was touched to say the least.

"You're such a sap." Levi didn't know how else to respond. He hoped that his facial expressions and tightened grip on Eren's hand showed him that he was honestly thankful for him.

Eren rolled his eyes playfully. "Yeah, well... you can be too, sometimes."

A low chuckle rumbled in Levi's chest. It was a beautiful thing how Eren could get him to laugh after feeling so distressed. He was truly grateful for him coming into his life.

"Why are you smiling so much?" Eren asked, unable to keep himself from grinning along with him.

Levi shrugged. "Dunno, just happy I guess."
"I didn't realize that you have to work so late," Eren whispered, walking upstairs.

"I try to forget how late I work," Levi said back, rubbing his eyes. "It's easier that way."

As they walked down the hallway, a door opened revealing Farlan turning in their direction, paying more attention to his phone than where he was going. He nearly ran into Eren. "Whoops, sorry Eren. What are you doing here?"

"Uh, I wanted to see where Levi worked and it got really late. So, I'm spending the night."

"Oh, cool." Farlan looked back down at his phone and addressed them both. "Hey, Hanji told me to ask you guys if you're coming to their Halloween party that's on Friday and lasts a couple days. They need numbers and they're picking Isabel and me up, so they also need to know if you guys need a ride."

"Sure, sounds like fun."

"Can't. Sorry." Levi cut off Eren, patting his shoulder. "Eren and I thought that'd be a good time to run through specific parts of the routine that he's having trouble with."

Eren furrowed his brows at Levi in confusion. "No, we didn't."

"Yes, we did. Don't you remember?" Levi sent him a look that said 'play along.' Levi faced his confused brother. "Tell them we can't go."

"Uh... okay. You sure you can't go?" He looked towards Eren who seemed just as uncertain as he was.

Eren glanced at Levi just to make sure. "Yeah, sorry."

Farlan shrugged. "Alright, I'll tell them." He walked past them and down the stairs.

Levi pushed lightly on Eren's back to get him moving towards his room. Once the door was shut behind them, Eren stared at Levi, perplexed. "What was that about? We're not practicing over that weekend."

Levi raised his eyebrows at Eren. "It's the perfect time."

Eren squinted at Levi. "Perfect time for what?"

Levi rolled his eyes and ushered Eren over to his bed, guiding him to sit down. "Think about it. My mom is leaving that weekend to visit my uncle," he trailed his hand around Eren's waist. "My brother and sister will be away at Hanji's," he closed their distance and moved up further on the bed. "The whole house will be empty for that weekend. Surely I don't have to spell it out for you."

Eren's face reddened before he realized it. "O-oh, is that a good time for you?" He stammered "Only if it is for you." Levi smirked.

Eren but his lip as his mouth split into another one of his goofy grins. "Yeah. It's perfect."

Chapter End Notes
ONE MORE TIME NEVER MEANS ONE MORE TIME.

I hope that chapter wasn't too awful, I tried writing it literally every free chance I got and I rushed to get it done, so I'm sorry if it's not of the best quality.

I hope no one minded the part with the kids, I tried finding names that had a meaning that went along with "the wings of freedom," and that's how I came up with Aleda & Gabryel. There will be more parts with them in the future I think. Also, our guard instructors used to tell us that puppy thing to get us to smile, only it was more morbid. They used to say "every time you don't smile in a show, a puppy dies," but I didn't want Levi to be that harsh with the kids.

And oooohhh boy, next chapter is the first of many smut chapters! I'm going all out with it too, so I'm scared that it'll either be too much or just written poorly, but I guess we'll see. I'm going to try really hard with the next chapter.

Translations: Bonjour, mon fils. - Hello, son.
Ça va aujourd'hui? - How are you today?
Assez bien - Well enough

I didn't edit, sorry for errors. My tumblr is dr-s--art. If you liked this chapter, please leave a kudos or comment to let me know! Thanks for reading!
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

The team gets their uniforms, Hanji’s party has started and the boys have a little fun on their own.

Chapter Notes

Wowza, that took me longer than I thought. Oh boy. In my defense... I have a bae now & the time I usually spend writing is occupied with me and him chatting (and talking about anime, I hit the jackpot guys!!!) so yeah. My updates won't be as frequent, but they'll be more frequent than when I was working on the musical.

This chapter is a mess and I am sin for writing it. The end note is so much longer so I'll cut this short. You're in for a bumpy ride, enjoy! (Translations are at the bottom.)

"Why have you been so jittery lately?" Armin questioned Eren as he tapped away at his computer. It had been awhile since Eren had came to his house rather than vice versa.

"Not sure, just am I guess." Eren shrugged, trying to come off as indifferent. Halloween was that week, which meant that Levi and him would be taking their relationship to the next level. He was ready, no doubt, but even being as prepared as he was, nothing could stop his nerves. They had been dating for around a month, hanging out at Levi's house whenever they could, sending meaningful glances to one another, spending extra time at their private lessons to have quality time. All the while, questions had been swimming in Eren's head. Was Levi a virgin like him? What would Levi expect? How would Eren go about things? And at what point in the weekend would they do it? Levi and him had discussed it and decided that they would in fact attend Hanji's party, but only for a short while before they would leave. He didn't want Eren missing out on the festivities. Eren was informed that he could bring Mikasa and Armin as well.

Trying to switch the subject, Eren turned the conversation around to Armin. "What are you going as for Hanji's party?"

Armin shut his laptop, ready to be fully invested in their discussion. "I'm not sure... I could always reuse my old Schrödinger's cat costume. But then again, I don't know how elaborate the costumes will be." He bit his lip, pondering over his decision.

Eren grabbed a solved Rubik's cube that was sitting on his friends desk and started messing with it aimlessly. "Is that that costume where you wear that huge box and draw on whiskers?"

Armin chuckled. "Yeah." A frown worked its way onto his features. "I'm still mad I didn't win best costume that one year."

"That's because no one knew what you were!" Eren scoffed, still fiddling with the cube. "Hell, you
told me five times and I still don't get it." Success, Eren had finally distorted the cube beyond repair. At least, to his abilities.

Rolling his eyes, Armin continued. "For the last time, Schrödinger held an experiment where--"

"I'm gonna stop you right there so you can save your breath. You can explain it eight more times and I won't understand." Eren put down the cube and marveled at his chaotic work.

Armin huffed, taking the cube and starting to switch it back. "Stop messing with this, Eren. It took me two whole days to get it right."

Eren clicked his tongue and shook his head. Armin didn't even realize how his complaints made him appear less pitiful. "Back on topic," he began, drawing a light laugh from his friend. "Isabel told me that the costumes range from subtle to really dramatic. So, wear whatever you want."

Armin nodded, trying to fix his Rubik's cube. "I'll think of something in time. What are you going as?"

The million dollar question. Eren wanted to dress up, of course, he never missed a Halloween, even if it meant making a very unimpressive costume. He always dressed up with Armin and Mikasa and he didn't want to change that. But this year, he felt like it was somehow different. There were new friends that he had barely left an impression on, along with other unknown guests that they would invite, not to mention Levi. He was sure that Levi wouldn't judge him for any choice in his disguise, but that didn't mean that he was open to making a fool of himself.

"I have no idea." Eren answered simply.

"Better get to thinking then, the party is Friday." Armin chastised him, putting away his finished cube where Eren wouldn't try to get it.

"You don't need to remind me." Eren muttered.

~

Practice on Thursday came with hushed murmurs of excitement dispersed throughout the guard. Eren walked in to be met with enthusiastic grins on most of the members and impatient conversations being held with the rest. Unbeknownst to him, the guard was becoming anxious with the knowledge that their uniforms were arriving that day.

Eren gravitated towards Annie, who happened to be the closest person to him. "Hey, what's going on?"

Annie turned to him and pointed to the other end of the gym. "You see those boxes? They have our uniforms and jackets in them. We're getting them today."

Eren swallowed thickly. He was nervous that the uniforms would look overly 'feminine' or degrading. He didn't want anyone from school or his family making fun of him even further. "Do you know what they look like?"

Annie shrugged. "No one knows except Levi and Hanji right now... god, I hope they don't have sequins."
"I second that." Eren gulped.

Everyone waited with bated breath for their instructors to arrive. Eventually, Hanji and Levi strutted through the door, unfazed by their team's hushed anticipation. They took their sweet time getting everything ready and ignoring the others to add on to their impatience. After setting aside their equipment, Hanji stood in the front center of the gymnasium with their hands on their hips.

"It seems that you're all aware that we have the new uniforms." Affirmative hums and nods followed their statement. "Well..." They drawled out teasingly. "We have a lot of work to do, so I think we should wait until the end to distribute them."

A collective whine sounded through the team, along with a few hurled insults.

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding!" Hanji calmed them. "I couldn't do that to you guys, that's just cruel. Levi!" They clapped. "The boxes, please!"

Levi frowned and muttered under his breath, "I'm not a dog, you don't need to clap."

Levi brought over the boxes, sliding them on the floor over to where he and Hanji originally stood. The guard crowded around, though at a respectable distance almost as if it were on command. "Shirts first, please." Hanji said. Levi opened the box closest to him and eyed everyone else, signaling them to stand back a bit, to which they complied. He reached in as slowly as possible to prolong their waiting before he held up one of the t-shirts, eliciting a gasp from the crowd.

The shirts were black and had a silhouette of a red and blue flag crossing each other with a deep purple drawn flame behind them. Written on the front in a range of the three colors was 'Trost High Varsity Winter Guard.' Levi turned the shirt around to reveal the back, which adorned the outline of a red, flaming bird with blue fire surrounding it, all under 'The Phoenix' in purple script.

"You can all get these after we distribute the rest." Levi said, reaching for another box.

"It's time for our jackets!" Hanji hollered. "For all the newbies, this is the single object that lets others know that you're one of us. The only thing represents your individuality and also claims you as a team member. Your recognition as a full fledged color guarder. The-"

"Get on with it, shit glasses." Levi interrupted.

"Right." Hanji cleared their throat. "And now, for the induction ritual. As we call your name, come up to receive your jacket and present to everyone your alias."

'Alias?' Eren thought, puzzled. Then he remembered Petra telling him that they have nicknames printed on the back instead of their last names.

"Okay, Levi. Who's first?"

Levi held up a folded, black windbreaker jacket with both a first and last name in red, embroidered on the breast pocket. "Christa." He announced.

A squeal came from the back of the team and Christa trotted forward to accept her jacket. She unfolded it, revealing a name in massive white letters across the back, with the two logos on their shirts below. "It's 'Queenie!'" She yelped excitedly.

A round of applause followed after. Eren joined in, aware that clapping just seemed like the thing to do. "We picked that because you always look like a queen." Hanji informed her.
"Thank you!" Christa held the jacket to her chest, jumping in joy as she returned to the back.

"Farlan," Levi called next.

His younger brother came to the front, collecting his new apparel and unfolding it, just as Christa did. "Wow..." Farlan breathed out. "Sinatra!" He showed everyone, earning himself more clapping.

"Because you're just so musical." Hanji elaborated.

"I love it!" Farlan praised on his way back to his previous spot.

"Ymir, you're up."

Ymir sauntered up to Levi, putting on a bored facade, though not coming off as completely stoic as she had planned. Levi handed her her jacket and she followed the procedures. As her eyes landed on the name, she rolled her eyes so far, Eren thought they'd disappear into her head. As reluctant as she was, she still showed everyone. "Dancing Machine." She said dryly, being greeted with applause that didn't match her tone. Though she appeared unimpressed, everybody could pick up her subtle elation.

"Come on," Hanji began. "With moves like yours, how could you have expected to get anything else?"

"Annie." Levi went on.

She went up like all the rest, and showed surprise as well as contentedness when she announced her name, 'Titaness' that was given for her strength and skill.

The rest of the team was very happy with all of their names. Petra was more than pleased to receive 'Tree Hugger' for her love of the earth. Marco on the other hand, was irritated, but undoubtedly amused to get '2 & 1/2 Man,' due to his inability to get a three toss. Bertolt really enjoyed his given name, 'Colossus' for his towering height. Sasha chortled and blushed over her name 'Hot Potato,' which Hanji explained was a play on words involving her favorite food and her unmistakable beauty. Nanaba was positively delighted over 'Nanny,' a nickname she'd earned over the summer from Marco. Isabel nearly screamed when her big brother handed her her jacket that read 'Wilykit.' Levi explained that after seeing her excitement when Eren pointed out her resemblance, he couldn't think of a better name to choose. And Hanji whooped and yelled in their rejoice when they read the words 'Triple A' adorning the back of their jacket.

Only two remained and Hanji wanted to hand over the one that belonged to Levi. He looked at them, confused, when he didn't understand the assignment of the name 'Corporal.'

When asked, Hanji had a glimmer in their eye. "You see Levi, there are a few reasons for that name. Allow me to explain." They rested their hand atop Levi's shoulder. "You're teaching methods are a bit military-like, you're five foot three and you're French. Know anyone who shares those traits?" As they expected, Levi shook his head. "Napoleon. And I didn't want to put down Napoleon, so I used his nickname. He was known as the 'little corporal,' so there you go."

Levi frowned. "You put together all those things to come up with Corporal? How long did it take you to come up with that?"

"I'm not the one who thought of it, Ymir did when she was studying for her history exam."

"You're welcome, Levi." Ymir said from her spot in the crowd.
"Gee, thanks." Levi said, dripping with sarcasm while everyone clapped. Though, even he had the tiniest of smirks on his lips that only Eren could notice. Or at least, Eren was the only one who looked long enough to notice.

"Eren," Hanji smiled at him. "It's your turn."

Taking a deep breath, he approached the box, Levi handing him his jacket with a faint grin still resting on his features. Eren took it and unfolded it, letting the air out of his lungs and taking in the name.

"Rogue." He mused aloud. It seemed to fit.

"Do you like it?" Hanji asked.

Eren thought it over. Rogue. Straying from the norm and defying a greater role. Unpredictable and potentially dangerous in it's tendencies. He liked it.

"Yeah, it's perfect." He breathed out.

"Great. It just... sounded like you, you know? You weren't what anybody expected." Hanji told him.

An applause slowly built up behind him and he couldn't help the smile that snuck it's way on his lips. It was the closest thing he had to people saying that they accepted him.

~

It came time to try on the uniforms and everyone's already thin patience was dissipating. Levi and Hanji left to change so they could show how the uniforms looked and brought Isabel along, explaining that they needed one more person to show them all every variation. Eren waited anxiously, afraid that they would be overly flamboyant or just downright embarrassing.

They all paced back and forth or occupied themselves in meaningless conversation until Hanji's voice boomed from the hallway. "Drumroll please!"

All at once, the team started stomping and slapping they thighs. Farlan imitated the noise verbally, Petra used her rifle to bang it on the ground and Eren felt too nervous to join in.

After a prolonged moment, Hanji strutted in, receiving all the hoots and hollers from the team. Their uniform was a deep purple, one piece article of clothing. The top, iridescent portion was wrapped around the neck and came to a point at the mid stomach, framed with a strip of silver. After the silver ended, black continued around their hips and down one leg in loose fabric, leaving the other leg dressed in a matte purple. "Because I have a continued solo, I'll be the only one in purple." Hanji said. "And now for what you guys are wearing. Levi, Isabel! Come on out!"

Eren bit his lip, Hanji's uniform wasn't too bad in his opinion. He was relieved that he wouldn't be in purple, but he still had to see what he would be dressed in.

Levi marched out casually with Isabel trailing closely behind, only more standoffish. They were given the same attention as Hanji was as they came out into view.
Their uniforms were very similar. Levi's had an iridescent blue section coming off one shoulder that swooped down to his hip and it was held up with a black piece on the other shoulder. Black and silver were also pulled into the spot where the blue ended. One leg was clad in black while the other was in blue, similar to Hanji's. Isabel's was exactly the same, only red replaced the blue. Eren was pensive over the two looks. He liked them and almost appreciated that the boys and girls uniforms were identical, but he couldn't decide whether or not he would feel ridiculous in them.

"Everyone who has a red flag gets a red one, blues get blue." Hanji said. Eren realized that he would have a red uniform and wasn't too opposed to that.

~

The uniforms were distributed in large bags so that they wouldn't wrinkle too badly. Everyone appeared to be overjoyed with the exception of Sasha. Some noticed how she looked like she was about to be sick when Levi handed her her bag as she weakly said her thanks.

Before she made it to her original spot, she turned back around to discuss things with Levi.

Levi raised a brow at her as she approached. "Is there something you need?" He asked politely.

Sasha gave a meek nod. "Yeah... u-um, there aren't any sleeves on the uniforms." Her voice shook with shame as she spoke. "Is it possible for me to wear a long sleeve shirt under it?"

Levi didn't need her to explain herself to understand her reasoning. He sighed in frustration for not having thought about her position while deciding on the uniforms with Hanji. "Well... I don't think you could do that, but maybe we can figure something out." He talked in a quiet manner as he thought over their options for a brief moment. "Are... are they healed enough for you to put makeup on them?"

"That wouldn't help." She muttered.

"Okay, how about we..." Levi broke off as Hanji walked over to them.

"Hey, guys. What's up?" They greeted them.

Levi leaned over to whisper into Hanji's ear. "We didn't take her scars into account."

Hanji's jaw dropped with regret as soon as they heard his words. "Oh," they breathed out. "I'm so sorry, Sasha. It slipped our minds. I'm guessing you're still not comfortable showing your arms?"

Sasha shook her head solemnly. "No, is there anything you can do?"

Hanji and Levi glanced at each other, pondering over their thoughts. Hanji was the one to reply. "We could always order in separate elbow sleeves for everyone to wear. Granted, they'd take a week to come in but that's something."

Sasha's eyes lit up with relief. "Could you do that? Are you able to?"

Hanji nodded. "Of course. It'll be a week at least until we get them, but it's doable."

Sasha let out a breath she had been holding in. "Thank you so much. That helps me out a lot."
"No problem, it's our job to make sure everyone in the guard is happy." Hanji patted her shoulder reassuringly. "Now get back to your spot, we have work to do." They chastised lightheartedly, sending Sasha on her way. They stood in the center of the gym, calling everyone's attention. "Listen up! I know we normally practice with our uniforms on the day we get them, but we're still waiting on some extra pieces. We should get them soon, but until then, we'll keep practicing in our gym clothes."

The team nodded in understanding and that was that. No team member would feel uneasy on Levi and Hanji's watch.

~

That night at Eren's home, he had to get everything in order for when he would be with Levi that weekend. Though he felt silly doing it, he made a check list to make sure he wouldn't forget anything to avoid any awkward moments with his boyfriend during his first time. Most of the things listed were related to his body's appearance and his knowledge of what he needed to do. It would be pretty embarrassing if they were just about to go through with things and stopped just because Eren didn't know what to do.

He had a shower and took extra time to make sure every part of him was clean, leaving no area forgotten. After drying off, he figured it was time to shave. He shaved his face first, even though he barely grew a fraction of facial hair. Eren knew it wasn't necessary, but he did it just in case. He was about to put away his razor when he had the thought of whether or not he should move on to other areas.

Eren stared at his reflection in the mirror, frowning at the blush gathering. He wasn't too keen on asking Levi if he would prefer if he shaved, and if so, where he should shave. He gazed downward at his legs, noting how hairy they were. Would Levi even care either way? Eren wasn't sure. He ran his hand up his thigh to test out how they felt and didn't enjoy the bristly tingling they caused. Perhaps it would be safest if he shaved his legs, he thought.

He raked the razor up his leg, feeling a little odd and not quite sure what to think of the sensation. He trailed his other hand in the razor's wake and marveled at the smoothness. His leg hadn't been that soft since childhood. Maybe Levi would appreciate it if he shaved his legs.

When he finished, he admired his work and prided himself for not accidentally cutting himself due to it being his first time. He cleaned himself off to be rid of any excess hair and readied himself to exit the bathroom... until his thoughts nagged him further. Were his legs enough? Eren considered shaving around his more private areas, but would that be going overboard? He didn't really know if it was normal to be lacking in hair, but he also was unaware if it would make things easier. So, with great uncertainty, he picked up the razor again.

~

Eren entered his bedroom with a funny walk, not used to the new feeling. Now it was time to get everything packed. Eren pawed through his drawers to find two pairs of boxers that wouldn't be
embarrassing to reveal in front of Levi. He might've been overthinking things, true as it may be, but he couldn't help that he wanted everything to be perfect. Next he rummaged through his closet to find loose fitting clothes that were easy to remove, but were still flattering.

After that was finished, he packed extra deodorant, mints and even an old bottle of cologne he rarely used. More supplies than necessary for keeping his hair nicely brushed and groomed also made their way into his bag. As he packed, he remembered to cross off everything on his list. All that was left now was the research. Oh joy.

Eren opened his laptop, feeling paranoid that his parents would spontaneously check his internet history. Googling the do's and don'ts of sex wasn't something he thought he'd ever search, but he wanted to be sure that he wouldn't do something horribly offensive or not do something essential. He knew how sex worked of course, he wasn't stupid. But given that his parents never had 'the talk' with him concerning intercourse with males instead of females, their schools sex ed course never went in depth, and he hadn't ever been one for watching porn, looking these types of things up was something he just had to do.

He found many sources telling him that lubricants were absolutely necessary, and he figured that that was something that Levi would already have. Most websites said to be safe and consensual, but he knew that too. Everything he checked basically told him that anything is okay as long as both partners are at an agreement, but he was looking for specifics. He needed to know what he should do with his hands if they weren't needed, he needed to know things he should and shouldn't say to set the mood, he needed to know common mistakes for first timers that he could avoid. Eren needed technicalities.

Unfortunately, he didn't find anything of use to him and he eventually gave up. He figured that even if the internet proved to be useless, Levi would go through things with him, try not to rush and they would both figure things out together. Now that he thought of it, that was much better. This wasn't the type of thing he wanted to have to study for, in his opinion it should be spontaneous and in the moment.

~

Friday after school, Levi spent all his time getting the house ready for Eren's arrival. After thinking about it, Levi realized that it wasn't fair to keep Eren from going to the party if he wanted to go. So, he told him that they could go for a couple hours, or until he got bored, then they would go home.

Levi rearranged the fridge to have Eren's preferences located conveniently at the front, he washed all the counters and moved on to the living room. Levi agitatedly cleared off the coffee table, picked up around the couch and fixed the decor, moving on to dust.

Kutchel passed through with a suitcase trailing behind her. "Back at it again with the cleaning?" She teased.

"I'm having Eren over this weekend and I want everything to be spotless." Levi answered, too invested in his work to look back at her.

"Surely you can spare a moment to say goodbye before I leave." She said with a hand on her hip.

Immediately, Levi dropped what he was doing and ran over to her, gripping her in a tight hug.
"Sorry, I always have time for you."

Kutchel smiled as she hugged her son. "And same goes for you." She stood back, with Levi still in her arms. "I'll see you around nine o'clock on Sunday night."

Levi visibly deflated. "That's very late... be careful on the roads."

"I will, I promise. Isabel and Farlan are staying at the party, right? And they have a ride home?"

"Yes, everything's taken care of." Levi reassured her.

Kutchel nodded and kissed her son's cheek. "I've already said goodbye to them. I have to get going now if I want to be there by tomorrow morning. Be good, mon fils."

"I will." Levi said, letting her go. "I love you maman, have a safe trip."

"I love you too, see you on Sunday." She waved goodbye and headed out the door.

Levi got right back to work and headed upstairs to clean his room, having already finished the bathroom. He made his bed, straightened the things on his desk, dusted where he needed to and got out candles on the off chance that Eren would want them. Levi wanted everything to be just right for his boyfriend.

After dusting off his dresser, Levi turned around to see Farlan eating an apple in the doorway. "Whatcha doin?" He asked around a bite of food.

"Cleaning? What does it look like?" Levi laughed dryly.

"You literally cleaned the whole house Wednesday. Why are you going through it again?"

Levi shrugged. "Eren's coming over and I like to have a nice house for our guests."

Farlan nodded. "When are you going to get into your costume? You don't want to be the only one there not in a costume... what are you even going as?"

The one thing Levi didn't think through.

He vaguely glanced over at his closet, wondering what kind of makeshift creature or random person he could dress up as. "Not sure, I'll figure it out though. What are you going as?"

Farlan stood up straight and grinned proudly with his arms at his side to get into character. "I'm being Inspector Javert."

Levi rolled his eyes. "You two are obsessed with that musical. Is Izzy going as a character from that too?"

"No," Farlan answered. "She's going as a werewolf red riding hood."

Levi hummed in interest. "That's cool."

"So, are you gonna hurry up or what?" Farlan whined jokingly.

Levi sighed at his brothers antics. "Let me finish up in here and I'll find something to dress up as."

Farlan trotted off, taking another bite of his apple. "Pfft, you better..."
Eren knocked on his sister's door, tapping his foot as he waited patiently. She opened the door not too much later. "You're good with makeup, right Mikasa?"

Mikasa shrugged. "I guess I'm okay. Why?"

"I can't think of a costume for the party, so I was wondering if you could do something that's scary or creepy, but nothing too disturbing, you know?"

Mikasa scratched her arm as she thought over the possibilities. "Hmm... I think I know just the thing. Come on." She opened the door wider to let him in.

Eren entered the familiar room of his sister that had very dark purple walls and a maroon carpet. He rarely came in there, but when he did, it never ceased to amaze him just how little light was in there. She ushered him to sit down at a stool next to her desk and turned on a lamp as she pulled out her makeup supplies. "And I swear, if you put something really embarrassing or girly on me I'll-"

"Relax," Mikasa drawled out, cutting him off in the process. "Have a little faith in me. I actually have a cool idea. And if you still don't trust me, then look in the mirror every once in a while."

Eren was silenced with that response, so he slumped on the stool, ready for Mikasa to begin her work. She took a medium sized makeup brush and black eyeshadow first. "Close your eyes." She ordered him.

Eren complied, putting his full trust in her.

"Annnd... you're all done." Mikasa declared. "Now look in the mirror quick so I can get ready."

Eren did as told and anxiously leaned over to look in the mirror. Despite having been given an invitation, he never checked Mikasa's progress. Now looking back on it, it was a good decision. The surprise of seeing the masterpiece she created was well worth the wait. It was fairly simplistic in structure, but came off very striking. His eyes had been swallowed with black and shadows to exaggerate a drawn on, furious expression as she tried to replicate how furrowed brows would appear. Over his mouth and even his cheeks were a new set of teeth that looked to have protruded from the skin.

"Wow," Eren tested out the movement of his mouth, entranced with how it moved the teeth. "That's awesome, thanks Mikasa."

"You're welcome, now out with you." She pushed at Eren's shoulders to get him to stand up and out of her room. He went without an argument.

Eren grabbed his bag from his room that had all his clothes and supplies for the weekend and slid
down the banister. As he reached the bottom, his mother sighed and scolded him from her spot at the sink. "Eren, how many times have I told you not to do that? It's not good for the stairs." She started to turn around to face him. "Just because you're athletic, doesn't- oh, my goodness!" She held her hand over her chest walking over to her son. "You damn near gave me a heart attack! When did you put all that on your face?"

"Mikasa did it for the Halloween party." He snickered.

Carla put her hands on her hips, trying to calm herself. "Well, it's definitely scary enough. What are you supposed to be?"

Eren shrugged. "Dunno, I just told her to do something creepy. I guess I'm supposed to be some kind of monster."

"As creepy as it is, I'd like to get a few pictures with you and your sister before you leave. Will she be ready soon?"

"She started getting ready a minute ago. I don't know what she's going as or how long it'll take." Eren explained.

~

"Hurry up, Mikasa!" Eren hollered up the stairs. "They're going to be here any minute!"

"Eren, I swear to god, if you tell me to hurry up one more time, I'll kick your teeth in!" Mikasa yelled back.

Eren sighed heavily, growing more impatient as time went on. Levi texted him, telling him that he would be ten minutes late, but that was six minutes ago. He waited until she made her way down the stairs in a what he would call a gray cardigan pulled in by a loose belt. Her pants were long and black and revealed her white socks and black sandals and her hair was pulled up into a tight bun. "I'm ready." She announced.

"Who are you?" Eren asked, puzzled.

"I'm Mulan, duh." Mikasa said, exasperated. "This was my costume last year."

Eren lifted a confused eyebrow. "Wasn't she a princess? Why aren't you in a dress?"

Mikasa frowned and lightly slapped her brother. "She was a warrior!"

Eren flinched, but didn't have long to complain over it, as his mother was dragging them both towards the blank wall. Without a word needing to be said, the two siblings stood together. She took out her phone and took several pictures to make sure at least one came out nicely.

A honk from outside alerted them that Levi and his siblings had arrived. They told their mother goodbye and left to get into Levi's car. Noticing three figures in the front seats, Eren guessed that they had to take the back seats.

Once in the car, the Ackermans turned around to glance at the two new passengers. Isabel, in her red hood and werewolf makeup, was the first to speak. "I love your Mulan costume!" She
practically squealed.

"Thank you," Mikasa said, elbowing Eren. "See? Someone knows who I am!"

Eren had drowned out their further conversation as he looked at Levi, who had black eye makeup going up to the brow and his hair was uncharacteristically and severely ruffled. Though, Eren couldn't find it in himself to mind in the slightest. He actually rather enjoyed the look on him. His train of thought was interrupted when Levi cleared his throat.

Eren blinked rapidly to bring his thoughts down to earth. "Huh?"

"I said I like your face makeup." Levi said amusedly.

"Oh..." Eren replied dumbly. "Thanks, I like your costume too, but... sorry if this is rude, but who are you supposed to be?"


"Right." Eren nodded, trying to play it off like he knew exactly who that was, which earned a knowing smirk from Levi. Levi turned around to start driving as Eren and Mikasa complimented Farlan's costume, which consisted of an old fashion, blue military suit.

"Izzy, seat belt." Levi reminded her.

"Oops, sorry." She clicked in and sat forward. The car ride was silent at first then one by one, the other passengers started to hear Isabel quietly sing to herself. "Let's get down to business... to defeat... the Hun..."

Mikasa giggled in the back seat along with Eren. Levi would've fixed her a look if he hadn't been driving. Farlan on the other hand, looked at Isabel critically. "Izzy?" She stopped singing to face him. "Is there something you'd like to share with the class?"

Isabel saw his challenging demeanor and mimicked it. "Yeah, Farlan. I love Mulan."

"Oh, yeah?" He inched closer to intimidate her.

"Yeah." Isabel said firmly.

For what seemed like a good while, they had a bit of a stare off. Mikasa and Eren glanced at each other in anticipation. At long last, Farlan gave his reply. "Well so do I. BE A MAN." And like that, the song began again, only Isabel's volume was much higher than before.

"We must be swift as a coursing river!" Isabel continued.

Mikasa leaned over to whisper in Eren's ear. "Does this happen a lot with them?"

"Yep, all the time." Eren laughed.

Levi groaned and shouted over his deafening brother and sister. "Eren where does that friend of yours live? Make sure to speak loudly so you can drown out these two."

~
"I like your Han Solo costume. I'm a huge fan of Star Wars." Levi commented.

Armin smiled at him through the rearview mirror. "Thank you, Levi. That's more of a compliment than I've gotten from my own friends." Armin sent an exaggerated smile at Eren and Mikasa, trying to be sarcastically passive aggressive.

"Armin, come on. We said it looked cool." Mikasa tried consoling him.

Eren loved seeing his friends interacting well with his boyfriend finally. Hearing Levi let small pieces of information about him slip out made him smile. Over the weeks that they've been together, they learned more about each other, but his favorite things were the insignificant little facts, like how he liked Star Wars. He remained silent, so that he could hear Levi carry on a casual conversation with his siblings while Mikasa and Armin halfheartedly argued.

~

They pulled into the driveway at a house that was rather large, but not nearly as enormous as Levi's home. Each of them exited the car and Isabel led the way, while Levi fell behind to speak with Eren. "Did you bring your things?" He whispered.

"Mhm." Eren mentally thanked Mikasa for all the makeup that hid his blush. "It's all in the car. Are you taking Armin and Mikasa home when we leave?"

"Of course, I'm not going to leave them stranded in a place where Hanji is roaming around." Levi scoffed.

Eren chuckled at Levi's comment and caught up to his friends who were waiting at the door. Eren could see the ranging lights though the windows and he could hear the booming music from inside. He could also take in everyone's costumes now that he was out of the car. Levi wore his normal black clothing only it was more casual and covered most of his skin. Isabel had a knee length, white dress and went as far as to add a little wolf tail under her red cloak. And Eren was able to see Farlan's suit in its entirety.

Once inside, they all jumped back, getting hit with the sounds waves and the bass pulsed through them. The Ackermans all glanced at each other with distaste, unimpressed with the music choice.

The first person to greet them was Petra, who was wearing a yellow, glittering top hat and matching jacket with a colorful top, black shorts and stockings. "You guys made it! Are you all staying the weekend?" She greeted them all cheerfully.

Levi answered for them. "Isabel and Farlan are, but the rest of us are going home tonight."

Petra nodded. "Well, it's good that you came at all. And who are you two?" She directed the question towards Mikasa and Armin.

"I'm Eren's sister, Mikasa." She helpfully filled in.

"I'm Armin, Eren's friend. It's nice to meet you." He shook Petra's hand to make a good first impression.
"It's nice to meet you too." Petra chimed. "I love all of your costumes!" The group all said their thanks and Mikasa asked who she was dressed up as, to which she tipped her hat and answered, "I'm Columbia from the Rocky Horror Picture Show." Some nodded even though they weren't certain of who that was, while the Ackermans all gave her their compliments. "Well, let's not just stand here! There's a party going on."

The group followed her into the living room to see where all the lights were coming from and all the guests in their disguises. Ymir, Sasha and Connie were in the center, dancing to the current upbeat song that was playing. Eren wasn't expecting to see Ymir dress up very much, and he wasn't wrong as the only sign of a costume was a headband with red, plastic devil horns. Sasha and Connie on the other hand made Eren break out into light laughter as he recognized their characters very well. Sasha dressed up as Wayne and Connie was Garth, two characters from Wayne's World, a film that Eren's mother let him and Mikasa watch about a year ago.

Christa stood on the side, watching Ymir and cheering her on. Christa had a flowing pink and green dress, flowers in her hair, glitter on her face and butterfly wings on her back. She made a very lovely fairy.

Levi led Eren and his friends over to the couch to watch the dance off, while Isabel and Farlan went to get a drink. They happened to sit down next to Nanaba, who waved hello to all of them as Eren introduced her. They asked who she was, puzzled at her bandana in her hair, her blue shit with the sleeves rolled up and vibrant lipstick. She told them to guess and flexed and immediately it clicked that she was Rosie the Riveter.

Across from them, they could see Bertolt, Reiner, Annie and two strangers on the opposite couch. Levi offered to escort them all to get food. Armin, Mikasa and Nanaba agreed, but Eren said he wanted to go chat with the people on the other couch. He maneuvered around the three people on the dance floor and made his way to the other side of the room. It wasn't much of a shock when he heard Reiner's booming voice over the music. "Hey, Eren! Long time, no see!"

Eren resisted flinching, noticing the fake scars all over his face and the realistic metal-looking claws on his hands. Though even had never watched the film this character came from, he had no problem identifying him as Freddy Krueger. "Yeah, it's been awhile. Don't take this the wrong way, but you look scary as hell."

"Heh, thank you. You look pretty creepy too. What are you?" Reiner marveled at Eren's face makeup.

"I'm not sure, a random monster I guess." Eren shrugged.

"Well, whatever you are you look cool." Reiner said. "It would've been funny if you dressed up as spider man and started climbing everything like you did that one day."

Eren snapped his fingers and shook his head over-dramatically. "Damn, if only I had thought of that." He said sarcastically, laughing along with Reiner. He looked past him to look at Bertolt. "Why didn't you dress up?" He asked in a curious manner.

"I couldn't find anything I wanted to be." Bertolt responded curtly.

Reiner turned back to Eren. "Originally, he was going to be Big Bird. But that didn't work out as you can tell."

Eren chuckled. "Why not?"
"He said no." Reiner laughed. "It was just something I said would be funny if he did it."

Bertolt rolled his eyes, but smiled nonetheless. Eren could even see Annie on the other side of him slightly shaking, trying to hide her laughter. Eren stepped to the side to see her better and noticed the skillfully painted skull on her face and her skeleton sweatshirt. "Hey, Annie. Nice costume."

"Thanks, I like yours too." Short and sweet, like most of his conversations with her.

Eren migrated his gaze over to the other two people sitting at the end of the couch. One was a girl with short, wavy, brown hair and had red spots on her skin and parts of her face outlined. Eren guessed that she was a generic comic book character. The boy to her side had shortly trimmed, black hair and put minimal effort into his disguise, only wearing an orange shirt that said 'costume.' "Who are these guys?" Eren asked Reiner, aware that he would be the most cooperative person on terms of communication.

"I'm glad you asked." Reiner sat up. "These are our friends from our old school. Guys, this is Eren."

Eren smiled and waved. The girl was the one to clear her throat and speak up. "Hi Eren, I'm Hitch and this is Marlo." She gestured to her friend who looked rather anxious but smiled back at Eren to acknowledge him. Hitch seemed rather peppy and served as a juxtaposition between Annie and Marlo, which amused Eren.

"Nice to meet you. Do you guys go to their color guard shows?"

Hitch sighed with a faint smile. "Yeah we do. I mean, we kinda have to, because we also compete, but this'll be the first year when we're not on their team."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Eren thought that that was the right thing to say.

"It's fine." Hitch waved him off. "At least now we can actually watch them, now that we're on different teams. And same thing for them."

"Well, that's good." Eren would've loved to stay and chat, but a firm grip on his shoulder had him turning around with interest.

Levi released Eren as soon as he faced him. "Come on, I want you to meet some of my friends."

~

Eren was led into the basement in the game room to be met with a rather humorous sight. Who he assumed was Hanji was currently in the middle of a very intense game of ping pong with someone he didn't recognize entirely. He wasn't certain if it was Hanji, because whoever it was wore a purple wig and an intricately designed, black jacket. The receiver of their furious swings of the paddle was somebody with dirty blonde hair and a nervous expression. His costume was an old looking, tan suit that almost constricted his movements, which may have been why he was struggling to keep up. Eren had never seen a ping pong game played so rapidly and intensely and it was almost comical.

Levi showed him over to a row of chairs filled with people watching the game. "You've already met Erwin and Mike." Levi gestured to his friends, Erwin in a makeshift Captain America costume
made out of only a shirt with a logo and shoes and pants that had matching colors. Mike on the other hand was unmistakably a burglar with a hat and mask. Each of them greeted Eren in their own way, Erwin giving him a hand shake and Mike slapping him on the back perhaps a little too hard. "But you don't know Erd," Levi pointed to a man with blonde hair tied back, wearing a business suit. "Or Gunther." Levi pointed to the neighboring man who had dark hair and skin and wore an identical suit to Erd. "These are old friends of mine, they graduated along with Erwin and Mike." Levi faced his friends. "This is Eren, that rookie I told you about."

The two stood up to see him properly. "We've heard a lot about you. Apparently you're a natural at the sport." Erd said, smirking at Eren.

"Well, I don't know about that." Eren rejected his statement modestly. "I mean... I'm okay."

"Don't let him fool you," Levi cut in. "He just doesn't think he's that great because he has a hard time with a few moves. But he's a fast learner, faster than most."

Eren wanted to switch the situation out of fear that he would show how flattered he was. So he cleared his throat. "Um... you guys look cool, are you FBI agents?"

Erd and Gunther made a dash for sunglasses that they hid in their pockets and put them on. Gunther held up a device with a red light and answered Eren. "We're the men in black."

Eren nodded at the realization. "Even better."

The six of them continued to watch the game and occupy themselves in idle chitchat. Eren found out that Gunther and Erd were also in color guard, which didn't surprise him as much as he thought it might've. It seemed that all of Levi's friends were in the sport at one point in time or another. After a few more games between who was now confirmed as Hanji and their friend Moblit, Eren challenged Hanji to a game. A big mistake on his part.

~

"Wanna go again?" Hanji teased, twirling their paddle.

"No... thanks..." Eren heaved out his breaths. As it turned out, Hanji was extremely competitive and competitiveness mixed with long lasting energy was a fatal combination for Eren.

Eren sat down next to Levi, trying to regain his breathing. "I'm disappointed," Levi joked. "There were plenty of times when you could've scored some points."

Eren glared at his boyfriend. "You think it's so easy against them? I'd like to see you try."

"Fine." Levi stood up and told Hanji that he wanted to go against them. Eren slumped back and watched as they started. At first, Levi was a little slow to start but he eventually caught up to the point where he wasn't struggling. The game was intense like all the others, but Levi remained stationary and didn't put as much of his body into the game as Hanji did. Moblit, as Eren learned, was standing at Hanji's side, cheering them on but also cautioning them as the game progressed.

Hanji was skilled enough to take small glances around the room while they played without getting distracted. That was until Armin arrived. He had entered the basement, looking around for Eren. He eventually caught sight of him and strided over to him.
As Hanji took a glimpse around and saw Armin, they caught the ping pong ball in mid air when it came to them and slammed their equipment down on the table.

"What the fuck, Hanji?" Levi glared at them exasperatedly.

Hanji stomped over to Armin with Moblit trailing closely behind. "It's Han Solo!" They practically jumped where they stood in excitement.

Armin was initially put in shock after the high staccato of Hanji's voice. After a moment he studied them and Moblit and broke out into an equally wide grin. "Are you two Tonks and Professor Lupin from Harry Potter?"

"You know it!" Hanji dug around in their jacket to pull out a handmade wand. "Your costume is so well made! I was Han Solo last year, but my outfit wasn't nearly as nice as yours."

"Are you kidding? I only spent two weeks on it. It could be better. But your costumes are amazing, did you make them yourselves?"

The three of them engaged themselves in an in depth conversation about the process of creating their costumes. Eren watched in mild amusement and looked over to Levi who looked utterly disappointed that his friend had just abandoned him. Levi sauntered over to Eren and whispered his offer of going back upstairs. Eren agreed.

~

"Guess I'll never know what Armin had to ask." Eren said, sitting on the couch with Levi.

Levi huffed out an amused breath. "Yeah, sorry Hanji stole him from you."

"It's okay. I'm going to go get a drink, do you want one while I'm up?" Eren asked. Levi shook his head and Eren left into the kitchen.

Eren took a gander trying to find the kitchen. He completely guessed, but he didn't get lost. All he had to do was keep going in the direction Sasha came from, seeing as her arms were full of plates full of food. He stepped into a dimly lit, narrow hallway and entered the small kitchen, immediately disgusted with what he saw.

"Jaeger?" Jean sneered at him. "Dressed up as a psycho, I see."

"Dressed up as a horse, I see." Eren retorted, noticing Jean's lack of costume. "Who the hell invited you?"

"Marco, as a matter of fact." Jean smirked. "Who invited you?"

Eren bit his tongue to prevent himself from saying that he was in the guard, and therefore automatically invited. But since he had told Jean otherwise at the homecoming game, that wouldn't work in his favor. "... Levi invited me. As a thank you for working at the concession stands."

Jean narrowed his eyes at him, suspicious of his explanation.

Eren glowered at him. "Could you stop staring at me like that? God, how can someone as nice as Marco be friends with someone like you."
"I heard my name." In came their aforementioned friend with an angelic, curious smile. Due to the illusions of makeup, that smile looked as if it was split down the center. One side of Marco's costume was in dark, yet bold colors, including his face, while the other was clean and untouched. One of the more well executed Two Face costumes Eren had seen.

"Eren said it." Jean slipped away while grabbing a handful of candy on his way out. Eren sent Jean a dirty look as he walked past him.

Marco redirected his attention to Eren after Jean had left. "What were you guys talking about?" He asked, still sporting that perfect smile.

Eren went for the honest route, Marco deserved that much. "Well, I was saying how I couldn't believe someone as nice as you is friends with him."

Marco gasped inaudibly. "Why would you say that? Jean's a nice guy."

"Not to me." Eren defended himself. "He owes me five bucks, he keeps trying to get with my sister, even though she's said no countless times, and he tries to piss me off any chance he can get."

Marco's shock ebbed away. "I think you just haven't gotten to know the real him. I don't believe the five dollars are really that important. And if he really likes your sister, who can blame him for being persistent? She is very beautiful after all. And I can't see him actually trying to make you angry. Maybe you two just got off on the wrong foot. I think you should give him a chance."

Eren knew he was right, though he wasn't exactly willing to give Jean a shot. The odds of Jean being understanding were slim, at least he thought so. But, Marco made some fair points, so he thought he'd appease him. "Fine, I'll try to be nicer. But if he keeps treating me like shit, I'll do the same."

"All I ask is that you try." Marco said, patting him on the shoulder.

~

The clock reached ten, and Eren guessed that they had been there for nearly five hours. Their time spent was filled with a lot of laughs and a lot of fun. Levi was sure to get many pictures with his phone for his mother, just like he promised her. After discussing it with Levi, they decided to gather Eren's friends and leave. Though, neither of them had seen Armin or Mikasa for a long time.

The more he thought about it, the faster Eren realized that he hadn't seen Armin since he started talking with Hanji. It was safe for them to assume that he was still down in the basement with everyone else.

The two journeyed down to the basement and luckily found both of Eren's friends. Although, they didn't expect to see them the way they were. Mikasa was currently invested in playing a ping pong game with Farlan, whereas Armin was sitting at a table with Hanji, Moblit and Mike playing some board game. Eren walked up to Armin and raised his eyebrows in confusion upon hearing the conversation being had.

Mike stuck up his index finger over dramatically and sat up straight. "I would like to name the dragon Burny."
Hanji just threw their empty cup at his head. "For the last time, you cannot name the dragon!"

Moblit spoke up from the other side. "Why not?"

Hanji gawked at Moblit in betrayal. "Because I said so!"

Suddenly, Eren no longer had the desire to leave. This was quite the show, as he had never seen Hanji even remotely angry before.

"But Hanji," Mike whined like a child.

"What?" They snapped.

Mike leaned in and whispered so the others would have to strain to hear him. "Feel the burn."

The table erupted with laughter and Hanji looked like they had reached rock bottom. They laid their head down on the table in defeat. "I swear to the goddess, this is the last time I'm being the DM."

Eren figured that that would be the most convenient time to intervene and take Armin away. "Hey, we were thinking about leaving soon if you and Mikasa are ready."

Everyone at the table started whining and complaining, and Mike even had the nerve to throw his head back and kick his feet, calling Eren a 'buzzkill.' Eren couldn't find it in himself to be offended, Mike was always the jokester, so he didn't take it seriously.

"But Eren, we're having so much fun! Do you know how long it's been since I've played Dungeons and Dragons?" Armin pouted. "Scratch that, do you know how hard it is to find people who play Dungeons and Dragons?"

Eren sighed and casted a glance at Levi. He didn't want to be the one to ruin his friend's fun. Levi rolled his eyes in amusement. "Ten more minutes."

~

Ten more minutes turned into twenty more minutes because Levi couldn't drag Armin away when he was having so much fun. Mikasa and Armin were glad to have properly met everyone on Eren's color guard team and it was mutually agreed that everybody had a great time, despite having to leave early. Everyone said goodbye as they left and soon, they were on their way.

On the way home, fatigue was present with everyone, with the exception of Levi. Armin did little to cover up his yawn when speaking. "Levi... why didn't you bring Isabel and Farlan back again?" Armin let his tiredness take over and leaned on Mikasa for comfort.

"Because, Hanji's party lasts until Sunday." Levi explained to Armin politely.

"Why does the party last so long? Don't parties usually only last a night?" Eren asked.

"Yeah, Hanji has parties that are planned around the holidays for their religion. Some of the holidays last a few days, so they had one that lasted for a whole celebration. Everybody that went decided that it was more fun that way, so they kept doing it like that."
Eren hummed noncommittally as they parked temporarily in the driveway of the Jaeger household. "Bye Mikasa. See you Sunday."

"Bye Eren, bye Levi, thanks for bringing us." Mikasa said, unbuckling her seatbelt and brushing the hair that fell from her bun out of her face.

"No goodbye for me?" Armin asked drowsily.

"Oh... I didn't know you were staying here." Eren said.

Armin huffed and scooted out of his seat. "I'm always a shadow." He moped sarcastically, making the others laugh. "But yeah, I told my grandpa and he's fine with it. Goodbye."

"Bye." Eren and Levi said simultaneously.

~

Levi turned on the light and closed the door behind Eren. Eren stepped into the light that was streaming into the kitchen and he couldn't help the shivers that went down his spine. Just the knowledge of what they would be doing soon had him biting his lip with anticipation. First, Levi took the time to feed Kitty and buster before he forgot. Levi approached Eren afterwards to take his hand and led him upstairs. "Let's get cleaned up, then we can start on the fun part."

Eren sucked in a sharp breath as he followed obediently. Once in the bathroom, Levi handed Eren a makeup wipe and they started on removing the product from their faces. Every so often, Eren would miss a spot and Levi would step in to reach the hard places, gently wiping away the makeup while cradling Eren's chin. Eren failed at willing away the blush when Levi handled him so carefully. After that was finished Levi examined his hair in the mirror. "Do you want the shower first?"

"Oh, um... you can have it first if you want. I don't mind either way." Eren shrugged. He was grateful that he was given the option to shower, but he didn't need it right away to remove things from his hair like Levi did.

"Alright, you can relax in my room while I shower. I'll be really quick, then you can get in."

~

Levi had finished fast, just like he said and Eren didn't take much longer either. Eren took a little extra time drying his hair with his towel and using his fingers to comb through it. After looking himself over in the mirror, he decided that he looked presentable. He dug through his overnight bag to find his dark blue pair of boxer briefs, long yet loose pajama pants and a random, equally loose shirt. All of which were easy to remove.

Eren took a deep breath, preparing himself for what was to come. He wanted this, he wanted it so badly and he was as ready as he'd ever be. He couldn't wait to have Levi moaning and begging for him.
Inching the door open, Eren slipped through the entrance to Levi's bedroom, catching him laying comfortably on the bed, eagerly awaiting him. Eren walked over and sat down on the bed. Levi propped himself up on his side, leaning on his elbow so he could talk with Eren better. "Are you nervous?" He purred.

Eren shuddered at the lowness of his boyfriend's voice. "A little, but I'm okay. What about you?"

"Hmm..." Levi thought it over for a moment. "I'm more anxious than nervous. I'm really excited, actually." Levi set his hand on top of Eren's.

"I'm excited too." Eren wore a cheshire grin.

Levi sat straight up and guided Eren over to be seated completely on the bed. "Then why wait any longer?" Levi wrapped his arm around his shoulder and brought him in to connect their lips.

Eren adjusted himself to be seated more comfortably and eagerly returned the kiss. Everything about it was seducing to Eren. The roughness of Levi's lips, the perfect rhythm he kept, and the enticing way he'd flick his tongue over Eren's lips to ask for permission to enter. It was all so intoxicating. Eren removed his jacket without breaking the kiss and snaked his arms around Levi's waist to hold him close.

Levi made his way into Eren's mouth, exploring it with fervor and determination. Eren pushed back, wanting to take control over the kiss. Surprised by his actions, Levi used more force without being too rough to ensure dominance over his boyfriend, but it only seemed to spur Eren on. Instead of taking it further, Levi focused on unbuttoning his shirt, having subtle difficulties every now and then, but removed it soon enough.

Eren parted from Levi to observe his body. His eyes skimmed over Levi's torso, followed by his hands roaming the sides. The faint light from the moon streamed through the window and pronounced Levi's silhouette, making his image dark and alluring. Eren thought it made him look positively sinful.

Sinful. That word jarred in Eren's mind and wouldn't leave. In this type of situation, it seemed appropriate and he thought it should've made him even more ravenous for Levi. But it didn't. He paused in a straight stare, locking eyes with Levi and pondering over the effects of their actions.

Levi hadn't noticed Eren's conflicted mindset and smirked, tugging off Eren's shirt. Eren was stuck in a trance of perplexity, barely aware that Levi was undressing him and kissing his shoulder. His hand automatically found refuge on Levi's back, but he didn't purposefully place it there. His mind, instead, wandered elsewhere. Would Levi tell anybody about their sex life? Would he be comfortable to tell someone like his mother, given their close bond and honesty? Eren couldn't remember if Levi said whether or not he told his mother that their relationship was a secret. She could tell someone, including his parents. Had she already said something to someone? Eren didn't know why his thoughts were proceeding in this direction.

Levi began moving over to Eren's clavicle, searching for his waistline with his hands and tugging down. His breath sped up when he realized what Levi was doing. He was getting closer and closer to the act of taking his virginity. Something that his mother lectured him and his sister about how it was sacred and only meant for one special person. A piece of him that he couldn't get back once it was lost. They were about to do something that his father had just barely prepared him for... only, with a girl.

Eren's mind completely blocked out the timeframe from when he lost his pants to when Levi freed himself of his own. Levi went back to kissing him, but he only kissed back just enough to keep his
current train of thought going. They were on their way to doing the single most frowned upon act that everyone told him would earn him a one way ticket to hell. He couldn't hear the sweet noises that Levi made as they kissed. All he could process were the slurs hurdled towards him from people at school, the bible verses drilled into his head, the screams of how he was an abomination. And even worse, all of those things directed at Levi. These thoughts had him shaking.

He didn't want to be the one that would damn Levi to hell or sentence him to a life of torment and discrimination. He couldn't do it, he wouldn't let it happen. But right then, he had to make a choice in order to prevent any of it from happening. Without even thinking about it, his hands grasped at the sheets, pulling them all the way up to cover him from his feet to his chest. The sheets acted as a shield from Levi's actions, but he didn't feel safe from society or even god. He had never felt so vulnerable or targeted in his life. He felt like he'd die.

"No." Eren jerked back, clutching at the sheets covering him like they could keep his purity. He shook where he sat, staring at Levi in fear for both of their sakes.

Levi retreated to give him some room. "No? What's wrong?" Levi felt something moving beneath them, but he didn't notice that Eren had pulled up the sheets. "Did I go too fast? I can slow down if you need me to."

"No." Eren repeated in a wobbly voice. "This is wrong. What we're doing is wrong."

Levi furrowed his brows in confusion. Eren looked borderline traumatized when only moments ago, he was more than willing to go through with this. "What do you mean it's wrong? Do you not want to do it anymore?"

Eren looked down at his lap, though he didn't really see anything. He started shaking his head and scrunched his eyes shut. "We're wrong. We shouldn't be like this."

Levi's heart dropped. He hoped that Eren didn't mean what he thought he meant. "What do you mean we're wrong?" He rested his hand on Eren's shoulder and was devastated when Eren flinched.

In his state, Eren didn't understand why Levi couldn't see what was wrong, it was so plain to him. "Two men... we'll get in trouble."

Levi shook his head, tilting Eren's chin up so he could look at him. He used his other hand to gently stroke Eren's arm for comfort. "No, baby. We won't get in trouble. We don't have to tell anyone what we're doing, because this is just between us."

Eren sighed agitatedly. Levi didn't get what he was saying. "Not just that." He gulped and tried to think of some way to explain to Levi what he thought was the inevitable. "Do you know what'll happen to us?"

"Eren, does this have to do with your religion?" Levi asked softly.

Instead of answering, Eren continued with trying to convince Levi that they needed to stop. "I don't want you to go there."

Levi knew that Eren was referring to hell. He couldn't stand seeing his Eren so scared and worried about being punished for nothing. "Babe, I've told you before, there is absolutely nothing wrong with being attracted to someone who is the same sex. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be with whoever you choose. You're not hurting anyone." Levi tried soothing him.

Eren tried focusing on Levi's words, he really did. But he wasn't sure if Levi knew what he was talking about.
When there wasn't much of a difference in Eren's mood, Levi started to think. After a minute, he began wondering out loud. "Hmph, I never understood that part. Could you explain it to me?"

Eren raised a brow at him. "Explain what?"

"The part where your god just does that. Just answer this. If your all-loving, all-forgiving god sends people to hell, a place for endless pain and suffering for all of eternity, just for loving someone... then what does the devil do?" Levi asked with a befuddled expression. He realized that he may have crossed a line when he took note of Eren's shared confusion and furthered his statement. "I'm not trying to say what you believe is incorrect, I'm just genuinely curious. I don't get it."

That question echoed in Eren's head. Indeed, what made the devil so bad if his god did all that? It certainly didn't sound like the caring, loving, great god that he believed in and was always taught about. It didn't sound like the god that an infinite amount of people worshipped and preached about either. It don't sound like the god that put faith in people's hearts and had so many singing about his glory. No. That was not his god. And whether Levi believed in him or not didn't matter, he had a point. And little by little, Eren stopped shaking.

Given the amount of time that Eren went without responding, Levi stopped expecting a reply and worked on taking care of him. "Come on. We don't have to do anything tonight. Let's get you in some clothes." Levi kissed Eren's cheek and helped him into his pajamas.

Eren wasn't really up for sex at that point anyways, but Levi, in his own confusion, cleared up something that terrified Eren for years. A weight was miraculously lifted off his shoulders and he was no longer afraid. He himself never knew why people said that gay people were damned, and he still believed in a forgiving god, but Levi's question helped him reach a point of view that finally made sense to him. Maybe he wasn't the one who was wrong after all. Maybe everyone else just didn't see his god the way he did. And for once, he felt okay with that answer. Which was why he didn't protest when Levi and him settled into bed without furthering their conversation.

"Goodnight baby." Levi murmured into Eren's hair as he held him against his chest, threading his fingers through his hair and rubbing circles in his back.

"Goodnight Levi." Eren cuddled up to Levi, welcoming the warmth that spread through him. Eren fell asleep to the rhythmic breathing from his boyfriend and an indistinguishable patter on the roof.

~

Familiar lips made a halo around Eren's head, urging him to wakefulness. Slowly, he peaked an eye open to see where the sensation was coming from and he adorned a bright smile when he looked up at Levi.

Two things registered in Eren's ears. The first thing was Levi wishing him a good morning. "Rise and shine, sleeping beauty." The second thing he heard was the forceful downpour coming from outside. Eren leaned up to find the rain crashing against the window and he couldn't keep his grin from growing.

"It's raining." Was all he said when he settled back down, giddy as a child.

Levi rolled his eyes, thinking he should've known better to expect anything else from him. "You're such a dork."
"But you love it." Eren whispered with glee.

Levi simpered down at him and placed a chaste kiss on the tip of his nose. "I know. I'm going to go make us some breakfast. How do pancakes sound?"

"They sound great." Eren chuckled.

"Good. You can wait here and I'll bring them to you, or you can come with. Your choice." Levi kissed Eren's lips one more time before rolling out of bed and making his way downstairs.

Eren considered staying in bed, but he then decided that he wanted to spend as much time with Levi as possible. So, he stumbled to his feet and walked downstairs, scratching his head as he entered the kitchen. He took a seat on one of the stools at the table and waited for breakfast to be done.

The pancakes were served quickly and Levi joined Eren at the table after turning the stove off. Levi watched him as he ate and picked away at his food while other things were on his mind. "Are you okay?" He asked, having a fresh memory of the night before.

Eren switched his attention from his food to Levi. He stared, puzzled for a minute before he figured out what he meant. "Yeah, I'm alright. Sorry if I worried you."

Levi waved him off. "You have nothing to be sorry for. I just don't want to pressure you into something you don't want to do."

Eren didn't know what had gotten into him the previous night, but now he had a brand new understanding of how he saw things. "I want to though... and if you don't mind, I'd like to try again. After breakfast."

Levi leaned his chin on his hand, smirking amusedly. "Really? Right after breakfast?"

Eren scoffed. "Well, not right after breakfast. But... sometime soon. Within the next hour or two if that's okay?"

Levi smirked and shook his head, snickering lightly. "You dog, I'll finish up this pancake real quick and then we'll go." He ignored Eren's spluttered reply, reveling in his adorable embarrassment.

~

Eren went through the same process with choosing his clothes and getting ready for Levi. Meanwhile, Levi was in his room, making the bed and double checking that he didn't leave anything unnoticed. He stood up, halting his work with smoothing out the blankets as Eren returned dressed in clothes similar to what he wore the night before.

"So... are you ready?" Levi asked.

Eren nodded confidently. "Yes. I'm positive this time." He stepped over to meet Levi by the bed.

"Good." Levi took Eren's hands in his, sitting down with him on the bed. "Just in case something similar happens, I want you to know that we can stop at anytime if you decide you don't want to go any farther."
"Thanks, but I don't think I'll want to stop." Eren admitted bashfully. "But if you do, we can stop."

Levi chuckled. "Trust me, I don't think I'll want to either." He kissed him just as he had the other night, not even bothering to wait to work his tongue past Eren's lips, resting his hand on his thigh and massaging it gently.

Eren wasn't subtle in showing Levi that he liked his actions. He moaned quietly into Levi's mouth and allowed him more room to feel around. He would never get tired of the feeling of Levi's piercing gliding over his tongue, or his lip ring hitting the side of his mouth for that matter.

Levi retreated to help Eren slide off his shirt and couldn't help but stare at his magnificent body. They both flinched at a roll of thunder, Eren looking out the window to see a flash of lightning, while Levi kept staring, entranced with how the lightning lit up Eren's figure. Eren grinned at the weather, enjoying how it may as well have been night, considering how dark and cloudy it was. Levi stared as much as he pleased, adoring the lovely sight before him. "Mon dieu..." He breathed out.

Eren snapped his head back to look at Levi. A heavy blush worked its way onto his face before he could stop it. It was at that point that Levi realized he had the upper hand. "What's that blush for, hm?"

"N-no reason." Eren smiled despite himself and tried to drain the color staining his face.

Levi caught up with Eren by removing his own shirt, making a show of it and scooted closer. "Do you like it when I speak French?"

Unable to think of a better way to get off of the topic and avoid embarrassment, Eren nodded meekly.

"Ah, there's no need to feel shy, mon cher." Levi placed his hand by Eren's head and scratched behind his ear. "What would you like me to call you?" He cooed, making Eren squirm. "Mon ange... mon amour... je sais que tu es mon cœur, je suis certain."

Eren leaned into the touch, becoming pliant and loving how Levi's black nails felt teasing him. His eyes fluttered shut and he hummed contentedly.

Levi chuckled darkly. "Tu te comporte comme un loup. C'est là, tu es mon loup."

Still grinning and humming, Eren replied in a lazy voice. "I have no idea what you're saying, but it sounds hot."

Levi rolled his eyes and leaned in closer to start nipping at Eren's ear lobe and softly scratch down his back, causing him to grab ahold of Levi's shoulders. "Do you mind if I leave marks?"

"I'll cover them up if I have to, do whatever you want." Eren's desperation had reached its peak and he abandoned all self restraint.

Levi took the hint that Eren went crazy when his ears were teased and saved that bit of information for later. Levi began kissing right below his ear and biting tenderly as he worked his way down. He would occasionally stop to lick a stripe up to his ear and suck at the juncture between his neck and shoulder. Eren needed to do something with his hands so he used one to thread his fingers through Levi's hair and accidentally scraped his undercut, sending him into a frenzy, using more force as he left hickies all over Eren's neck.

Eren couldn't stop the mewls that came out of his mouth and he started to nudge Levi to tell him to
get on the bed more. They crawled up the center near the headboard and Eren reached for Levi's pants to slide them off. Levi readjusted to take them off entirely and helped Eren out of his. Eren inhaled sharply when he caught sight of a rather dark patch of hair leading into Levi's black boxer briefs. Had he made a mistake by shaving? He couldn't even be bothered to worry about it in that moment, he was too far gone and more than a little intrigued to see how Levi looked without his boxers on. Though, there was little left to the imagination as he eyed the bulge in his boxers while Levi continued leaving marks on the other side of his neck.

Eren was too nervous to be the first one to be entirely naked in front of the other, so he mustered up his courage to glide his hands down Levi's muscular sides and thumb at his waistband. Levi paused and looked into Eren's eyes, wearing a growing smirk. "Are you ready?"

"Yeah." Eren answered.

Levi sat back a bit to let Eren have a better view. As if his happy trail wasn't teasing enough, he had to take off his boxers tantalizingly slow, only revealing an inch of skin at a time. Eren bit his lip the whole time, wanting to shout to his boyfriend to be rid of them already. He felt himself becoming harder as Levi went on.

With one last fluid motion, Levi stripped off his boxers, tossing them on the floor. Levi held back his laughter when Eren's jaw dropped slightly. Eren didn't know what to do. From what he could tell, Levi's erection was much larger than his own, he had thick hair surrounding the area, and though Levi had told him about his piercing and he was fairly certain of where it was, he had completely forgotten about it. A curved, silver frenum ring located underneath the head of his cock caught his eye last, but maintained his attention the longest. He thought his face would burn with how hot it was. Levi's husky voice brought him out of his reverie. "I hope staring isn't all that you're gonna do." Levi put his hand on Eren's thigh again, his ghostly pale skin being a nice contrast on Eren's beautiful, tan leg.

Eren tore his eyes away, willing himself out of his daze. He briefly wondered what Levi thought about his shaven leg. "It won't be."

"Good." Levi made a move to take off Eren's last article of clothing and Eren moved to accommodate Levi's actions, letting him reveal his own erection. Eren's wandering eyes were nothing compared to Levi's as he examined more than stared, and had something almost animalistic glimmer in his eyes.

Eren became self conscious the more Levi looked. "I-Is there something wrong?"

"No," Levi shook his head without switching the direction of his gaze. "It's just that... I didn't expect you to be uncut."

Eren really didn't want to be having this conversation. Yes, he was uncircumcised, but he didn't want to be gawked at by his boyfriend for it. "Is that a bad thing?"

"Not at all," Levi replied simply. "It just makes things more fun for us, mon loup." He brought Eren in for another kiss and wrapped his hand around Eren's cock, slowly stroking it and making him whimper with pleasure.

Eren braced his arms around Levi's shoulders to stabilize himself. Levi dragged his thumb over the slit and then moved it down between the head and the overlapping skin. Eren was losing any shred of dignity he had left with the noises that came out of his mouth and how easily he let Levi handle him however he wanted. He had wanted this for so long, spending the majority of that time believing he'd never be in this situation. Nothing else mattered in that moment other than Levi
making him come undone.

But he couldn't let himself be unraveled so quickly, not when they hadn't even gotten to the good part. Eren gripped Levi's hand to stop him. "Do you have condoms?"

"Yeah, let me get one." Levi crawled to the other side of the bed to open the drawer of his nightstand, pulling out condoms and lube. He took one out of the box, setting the box and bottle of lube on the nightstand. Eren took the condom from him and went to tear it open when Levi stopped him, taking it back. "It's okay, I can put it on myself."

Eren waved him off. "I won't make you do that. I mean... I've never put one on before, but it can't be too hard right?"

"Relax, there's no sense in making you put a condom on me." Levi said.

Eren studied him with knitted brows. "Um... don't you mean put the condom on me?" He pointed to himself.

Levi scoffed amusedly. "Why would I put it on you? You're not going to be penetrating anything here."

Eren stared at him incredulously. He couldn't figure out if he was being serious or not. "Do you know how sex works?"

"Yeah, obviously."

"I'm not sure that you do."

They stared at each other for a moment, attempting to understand what the other was trying to say. The silence was only broken by the harsh rain and roaring thunder from outside, but it didn't reach their ears. They could see the wheels turning in each others' heads and at once, they both discovered exactly what the other meant. "I'm topping!" They yelled simultaneously.

"There's no way in hell I'm bottoming!" Eren exclaimed.

"If you think for one second I'm bottoming, you're out of your damn mind." Levi shot back.

Eren frowned at his boyfriend. He couldn't believe he had the audacity to suggest such a thing. "You're shorter, it only makes sense that I should top. It's easier that way."

Levi scoffed. "Oh please, you're way thinner. You wouldn't be able to hold me down."

"Hold you down? What, are you gonna fight back the whole time?"

"If you're on top, yes. Because I'm not fucking bottoming."

They stared each other down, not letting the other gain an inch. Levi tried convincing Eren to let him top, explaining that it didn't make him weak or feminine to bottom. Eren argued back, saying that he didn't care, he just wanted to top. He also said that if there wasn't anything wrong with bottoming, then Levi should have no problem taking that role. But neither of them were ready to back down.

Just when they were about ready to throw in the towel, Eren had an idea. "First one to pin the other down gets to top?"

"Really? You wanna fight it out?" Levi squinted at Eren.
"Well, can you think of a better idea?" Eren challenged.

"... No." Levi admitted. For a moment, they just stared at each other, waiting for the other to move. After a minute, Levi pounced to push Eren back into the bed, but Eren was too quick and pushed back.

They both struggled for awhile, Levi being too forceful to keep control and Eren not being strong enough to make Levi budge. Eren started using his body weight to lean into Levi, but miscalculated his weight distribution, letting his knee give way and Levi came down on top of him. Levi waisted no time in pinning Eren's wrists to the bed, looking down at him smugly. "I win."

Eren huffed agitatedly, giving in at last. "Fine, you can top." He said through gritted teeth.

"Hey," Levi brushed some misplaced hair out of Eren's face. "If you really don't want to bottom, we can figure something out." He didn't want his Eren to be miserable during their first time together, or at all.

"No," Eren shook his head. "It's fair this way. Just... can you promise to let me know what you're doing, before you do it?"

"Of course." Levi bent down to give Eren a sweet, tender kiss, sealing his promise. "I won't do anything you're uncomfortable with. Now, I need to prep you."

Eren turned onto his side, bringing his legs up slightly as Levi reached for the lube. Eren watched out the window while Levi popped open the bottle, pouring out the lubricant and warming it in between his fingers. Levi reached his hand down and took notice of Eren's odd position. "Is that how you want to lay while you're being prepared?"

"Mhm." This way, Eren wasn't fully exposed like he would be on his back and he could still see Levi, something he couldn't do while on his stomach. He watched impatiently as Levi teased his entrance, and shuddered at the sensation.

"I'm going to put one in now, tell me if it's too much." Levi uttered quietly, earning a small nod from Eren.

He pressed in his finger up to the first knuckle, making Eren shut his eyes in pleasure and let out a high pitched whine. He stopped and Eren opened his eyes wide, in horror of the noise he just made. Levi checked to see if he was okay and Eren assured him that he was fine, then begged him to add more. Levi complied, sliding his finger all the way in. After he let him adjust, Levi asked before putting in his second finger, causing Eren to practically mewl at being filled little by little. Eren couldn't get over it, he had never felt anything like it and it was marvelous. He wouldn't have objected to being on bottom if he knew it felt this good, and all he knew was he wanted more and more. "Another." He demanded in a breathy voice.

Levi was all too happy to do as he asked, working in a third finger and observing how beautifully Eren’s face contorted as he dropped his mouth open. Levi’s mouth watered at the sight and he felt like the luckiest man on earth to have been blessed to witness such a thing as deliciously lewd and gorgeous as this. Eren was all his, those pretty little noises were all for him and those facial expressions, involuntary jolts, and clenching of muscles all belonged to him and only him. He was being driven mad with desire and he found it hard to hold back for much longer. But he needed to hear a little something more. So, he searched around for a specific bundle of nerves that would send Eren reeling. He curled his fingers, pumping in and out to find it and he just barely nudged it when Eren gasped loudly and froze in place, gripping the sheets so hard his knuckles turned white.
Levi smirked victoriously and bent down to whisper in his lover's ear. "Aw, did I hit your sweet spot?"

Eren nodded furiously, rutting down to make him hit it again, but to no avail. Levi snickered and positioned himself right behind Eren's ear, flicking it with his tongue. "Hurles pour moi, mon loup." He pressed into Eren's prostate, massaging it continuously.

Eren couldn't prevent the wails and profanities flying off his tongue. It felt incredible, he couldn't even remember his own name. "F-fuck, Levi! Oh... O-oh my... god." He breathed in heavy pants, his mind spun, he felt disoriented and it was glorious. "M-more..." He breathed out. "I need it... need you."

Levi pulled his fingers out, leaving Eren empty and disappointed. He swiped a few tissues off his nightstand to clean off his hand, then reached for a condom.

Eren eyed him timidly, but didn't speak a word. Luckily for him, Levi saw his expression and stopped trying to open the foil. "Is everything okay?"

Eren debated whether or not he should voice his thoughts, then figured he should. "Uh, would it be safe to not wear a condom?" Levi tilted his head, not understanding his reasoning. "I... I want to know what you really feel like," He glanced at Levi's cock and felt a desire to feel him bare. Plus, the his piercing would be a little extra bit of stimulation he wanted to feel.

Levi thought it over for awhile. "I think it would. You're a virgin and I'm assuming you've never been exposed to anything. That, and I've never done anything that would transfer an STD. So, yeah, I think we'll be safe."

Eren bit his lip in anticipation, then realized what Levi had said. "Wait... is this your first time too?" Levi nodded. "I thought you've been in other relationships."

"I have." Levi answered. "And I've... done things before, but I've never gone all the way, or anything close to it."

For some reason, that made Eren's heart flutter. Levi was his first and he was Levi's. He might've just fallen a little harder for him.

Levi coated his length with lube, spreading it using his hand and slightly hissing at how it felt. He wiped off his hand again with another tissue and situated himself near Eren, holding up his leg. "Is this how you want to do it?"

Eren was still laying in his side, but he thought it would be most comfortable. "Yeah."

"Alright. Tell me if you need to switch positions. I'm gonna put it in now." Levi lined up his cock with Eren's entrance. Eren braced himself, ready to be filled with Levi. Levi pushed in just past his frenum ring and let his head fall back, listening carefully to hear Eren moaning his name.

Levi tilted his head back down to look for any signs of discomfort, and when he saw none, he went in a little further. Eren screwed his eyes shut and writhed on the bed. "Shit... L-Levi."

"Are you alright?" Levi asked, hair falling in his face.

"Need to... move," Eren whined. "From behind..."

Levi knew what he was talking about, so he pulled out and grabbed Eren by the hips, adjusting him so that he was on his elbows and knees with his ass in the air. "Better?" Levi positioned himself
directly behind Eren, on his knees and holding his hips securely.

"Yes, just do something!" Eren begged with his face resting on a pillow.

Levi didn't need to be told twice. He pushed in to his original depth and sank in until he was fully sheathed. Eren moaned and Levi groaned in pleasure. "I'm gonna move now." Levi pulled back ever so slightly and pushed back in, sending them both over the edge. He rocked his hips a few times, testing the waters and fell into a perfect rhythm.

Eren squirmed and clenched his muscles, tightening around Levi. He rutted back against Levi, slapping their skin together when their hips met. Eren adored being full and feeling Levi's piercing move inside of him. He couldn't get enough.

Levi's grip became more forceful and he started rolling his hips a bit faster to get more gratification. "Tu sens très bon... tu me ronds fou." Levi leaned over, fitting himself to Eren's back and wrapping his arms around him, mostly to hear the wonderful noises leaving his mouth, but also to leave a trail of kisses on his back.


Levi increased his speed and did as Eren told him. Levi faintly heard the creaking of the bed and the storm that persisted. He kissed over to the nape of Eren's neck, making him stiffen and cry out. Levi experimentally bit down on his nape and Eren lost his balance, letting his knees slip from under him so he was barely hovering over the bed. Levi used one of his hands and took a hold of Eren's cock, pumping him along to his rhythm and using his other hand to tease one of his nipples while he sucked at his nape.

Eren was lost in the moment, taking in everything at once, praying for release. He just about went mad when Levi switched from sucking on his nape to nibbling on his left ear and driving him wild.

Eren turned his head around to face Levi, reached for the back of his head to bring him in for a kiss. "I'm coming..." He whispered just before their lips met. At hearing that, Levi went harder, grabbing an handful of Eren's ass in one hand, moaning at how long he'd wanted to do that, and stroking Eren to completion.

Eren came with a shout, burying his face in the pillow and coming on the sheets and in Levi's hand. Levi followed soon after, clamping down on his shoulder with his teeth and releasing his seed into Eren, filling him to the brim.

Levi lapped at the bruising spot he had created and pulled out of Eren, dropping himself onto the bed next to him. Their erratic breathing wouldn't calm down for a long time and the sweat wouldn't disappear anytime soon either. Their hair stuck to their foreheads and they couldn't find it in themselves to do anything about it. Levi looked over to Eren, who was smiling stupidly and had a heaving chest. Eren crawled up against Levi and snuggled into him. "I'm speechless." He huffed out.

"You enjoyed it, I take it?" Levi kissed Eren's head and wrapped his arm around his waist.

"Mhm... if you're still up for it... could we do it again? Like... when we've calmed down?" Eren asked hesitantly.

"Fuck yeah, we can." Levi breathed out.

"Really?" Eren's eyes widened with excitement.
"Of course, sex doesn't have to be over just because we both came." Levi held him tighter.

"Good, I have lost time to make up for..."

~

They did it many times after that, putting their youthful energy to good use. They tried out different positions and Levi tested out different methods of making Eren come, sometimes without penetration, trying to find out what he liked best. Every once in awhile, Levi would help Eren to the restroom or bring them both some food. Occasionally, something would happen, like when Levi clanked his teeth against Eren's, or when Eren smacked his hand on the headboard in the middle of a round and they'd both burst out laughing. By seven o'clock, Eren was covered with dark marks all over his body, making him look like a Dalmatian. Levi even had a few marks that Eren had left. As it turned out, Levi didn't only love having his undercut scratched, he adored it when Eren would kiss and tease his neck. Levi had the opportunity to make lighthearted jokes about Eren, saying how he knew he'd be a screamer. Eren would pout every time, but now he couldn't argue, as his voice was nearly gone.

And now, Levi offered to take Eren one last time before they called it a night. But this time was different. Every other time, Levi had been maddeningly rough or satisfyingly teasing. But this was... different. And Eren didn't know what to think.

Levi took him from the front this round, taking his sweet time and going nice and slow. He wasn't teasing Eren, he was simply being leisurely. Eren's mind was a blur, Levi kept whispering in his ear about how beautiful he was, how perfect he was, how Eren made him so happy. Every time Eren thought he was about to say some sort of confession, Levi murmured something in French and it killed Eren not to know what he was saying. Levi didn't tell him how tight he was or how sexy he sounded, just little words of endearment that sent Eren's heart soaring. To Eren, this wasn't the two of them fucking for the sake of feeling good, he believed that it was something more. Even though they had been having sex the entire day, this time was the first time they had actually made love.

Once they both climaxed, Levi pulled out but didn't separate from Eren. He held him tightly to his chest without saying a word. Eren held him just as tightly and before he knew what was happening, tears spilled over his eyes, one by one. Feeling the wetness on his chest, Levi looked down and wiped the tears away with his thumb. "Baby, what's wrong?"

Eren took a deep breath, letting it out to calm himself down. "I don't know why I'm crying. It just happened." He said confusedly, in a hoarse voice.

Levi smiled down at him tenderly. "It's normal to cry after sex, especially your first time."

Eren let out a short giggle, wiping away a stray tear. "Does that mean we can count this whole day as our first time?"

Levi laughed. "Sure, if you want. Let's go get cleaned up and then we can rest."

~
Levi helped Eren into the tub, knowing he was sore from head to toe and had trouble walking. Levi was a bit sore too, but not as much as Eren. Levi admired the marks covering Eren's body, a symbol that he belonged to him. And Levi had his own, to let others know that he was Eren's. Even if he couldn't show anyone.

Levi wanted to pamper Eren, so they had a bubble bath together, Levi cleaning his boyfriend who's back was to his chest. He'd leave little pecks and kisses over his neck and shoulders, a little more kisses than necessary, but he heard no complaints. Not that he expected to.

Once their bath was over and they were both clean, Levi gave Eren an old Bauhaus shirt and a pair of his own boxers to change in. He didn't even try hiding the fact that he wanted to see Eren in his clothes, and he mentally noted that they looked a hell of a lot better on Eren.

Levi led him down to the couch in the living room, handing him the softest, plushiest blankets they had so he could nest in them. Eren looked like a giddy child smiling lovingly at Levi all bundled up. Levi brought their DVD case and told Eren to pick out a film or two he wanted to watch while he worked on getting them a proper dinner. Eren found it rather confusing that Levi promised over and over that he wasn't leaving him and was only going to make dinner, but he didn't mind or bring it up.

In Levi's absence, Eren picked out a couple Disney films, not being in the mood for something too serious. He let the sound of the never ending downpour comfort him while he waited.

Levi returned, with their meal and small sweets on the side, taking Eren's chosen DVD and putting it into the DVD player. "Aristocats." He hummed. "Good choice. I can't promise that we can watch both movies tonight before we fall asleep, but we'll watch the other tomorrow if you want."

Eren smiled in acknowledgement, trying to save his scratched up voice. Something told him that Levi wasn't really interested in watching a kid's film, but he did it for Eren.

After pressing play, Levi huddled up under the blankets along with Eren, letting him lay on his chest as he fed him. Levi wouldn't let him eat a bite unless he was the one feeding it to him. Eren didn't argue, only enjoyed the show.

Eren loved all the colors that danced on the television screen and the old-timey music that accompanied it. He hadn't seen the film since he was little and it brought back a great sense of nostalgia. After the food was gone, they settled in and Levi massaged Eren's hips, shoulders and neck, trying to soothe any aching part of him. Eren felt like he was being treated like a king and practically purred under the attention. Levi noticed him nudging his chin, adoring all the light touches he was giving him and chuckled. "Tu es comme un chaton maintenant. Mon chaton." He chuckled again, amused at how cuddly Eren had become. "Comme les chats sur la télé. Mon petit mimi."

Eren cocked an eyebrow at him suspiciously. "Mimi? What's that?" His voice came out in low rumbles and little squeaks due to him overusing it earlier.

Levi smiled at him, tickled pink at how adorable his Eren was. "Pussycat."

Eren frowned and pouted insincerely at the nickname. "I don't like that."

"Non, tu n'est pas mon mimi." Levi shook his head. "Tu es mon loup, mon grand, beau loup."

Eren sighed. "What?" He asked weakly, a tiny laugh escaping.

"You don't need to know. All you need to know is it's all good things." Levi patted his head,
smoothing out his hair and planting a kiss on his lips.

Eren decided that he'd let it slide this time, mostly because his voice wouldn't allow him to push it further. But the next time Levi was talking to him in French, he'd persist until he gave in, he was sure of it.

"Happy Halloween." Levi whispered.

Eren sat up to face him. "I forgot."

That elated smile never left Levi's face. "Was this one of your better Halloweens?"

Eren nodded, trying to hide his blush. "The best."

"Good." Levi ushered Eren to lay down with him as they continued watching the film. At this point, one of the kittens was trying to hiss and did very poorly. "You're the orange one." Levi pointed to the hissing kitten, earning an elbow in his ribs from a humored Eren.

Eren couldn't have dreamt up a more perfect day than this one. Levi made this the best day of Eren's life and he couldn't thank him enough for that. He felt loved on a way he never expected to be. Levi was taking care of him in a way he couldn't take care of himself. The day wasn't perfect, Eren decided, Levi was perfect and he was certain that he'd stay that way forever. He felt like he could do anything with Levi by his side and Levi made all his fears go away. Levi was safety to him, he made him realize that everything as going to be okay, despite what other people may think or do. Levi was all he needed, all he wanted and he could think of only one way to tell him that. If these were his last words to him, even though they would be said in a cracking voice, he'd have no regrets. "I love you, Levi."

Silence followed his confession. Scared that he had went too far, Eren turned to look Levi in the eyes. He expected him to be angry, distant, happy even, but not confused. "Levi?"

"Don't say that unless you mean it." Levi said firmly and seemed to be waiting for Eren to confirm or deny what he had said.

Eren didn't even need to think about it. He knew he loved him with his entire heart and nothing would change that. "I mean it. I love you." He reassured him in his sincerest tone.

Levi's composure softened and he sunk down to kiss Eren slowly and sweetly. He only sat back enough to speak against his lips. "I love you too, Eren. I love you so much."

They ended the night in each other's arms, with the storm lulling them to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: always use a condom kiddos! Even if your otp doesn't.
Warning; very long notes await you.

Okay, let's go in chronological order. First, did everyone get my references with the jacket names? Some are references to the anime while others are references to the manga and there are two that I'm waiting for people to yell at me for :/ I'm also waiting for someone to yell at me for Marco's costume. Also I plan on having rough sketches on my tumblr to show you what the uniforms look like, they'll be out by the
I actually made a drawing of "Hanji Solo" on my tumblr. I had the idea awhile ago & I'll reblog it right after I upload this chapter on tumblr so you don't have to go digging if you'd like to check it out! :D (see what I did there with the name? Hanji Solo? Yes, no?)

Sorry if the introductions for some characters were really short, but you'll see more of them, don't worry.

Oooo man, that smut part tho. Some of you might think it's vanilla (I know of the hardcore shit out there, trust me I've read it all) but I'm sitting here red as a tomato because it's the most in depth smut I've written. Or maybe you're like me thinking its too much. What did you think? Was it too far or just bad in general? Did you like it? I'm not asking for an essay, I just gotta know, thumbs up or thumbs down? Also, I'm tired of people bitching about who tops and who bottoms, like comme des fuck down. They're both doms, how bout that? Happy? See what you made me do? And you thought Eren was topping. Bish u thot BISH U THOT. But yeah, don't worry, I promise Eren will be topping in later chapters. :D

Translations:
mon cher - my dear
Mon ange... mon amour... je sais que tu es mon cœur, je suis certain. - My angel... my love... I know that you're my heart, I'm positive.

Tu te comporte comme un loup. C'est la, tu es mon loup. - You behave like a wolf. That's it, you're my wolf (mon loup is a commonly used term of endearment in France.)

Hurles pour moi, mon loup. - Howl for me, my wolf.

Tu sens très bon... tu me ronds fou. - You feel so good... you're driving me crazy.

Tu es comme un chaton maintenant. Mon chaton. - You're like a kitten right now. My kitten.

Comme les chats sur la télé. Mon petit mimi. - Like the cats on tv. My little pussycat.

Non, tu n'est pas mon mimi. Tu es mon loup, mon grand, beau loup. - No, you're not my pussycat. You're my wolf, my big, handsome wolf.

Overall, what did you think? Please tell me if you liked it, be it through kudos or comments. (Your comments are so sweet and make me feel special, thanks guys ;-) <3) My tumblr is dr-s--art if you'd like to check out my art or be updated on my fic progress. Sorry for any errors! I don't edit. Thank you so much for reading! <3
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Eren gets closer to Levi as well as his teammates.

Chapter Notes

In all honesty, I don't really like this chapter. I wrote the majority of it while I was sick and not thinking straight. This is mostly just a filler chapter, but I'm still not happy about the way it's written. Hopefully the next chapter will be a lot better. Regardless, I hope you enjoy this! (Translations at the bottom)

Something hesitant and light pressed itself on Eren's waist, causing him to peak his eye open and investigate the situation. As quietly as he could, without moving too suddenly, he lifted himself to look at the source, feeling a second pressure. Eren stared down at his waist to see Buster walking over him, trying to nest between him and Levi. Realizing that he was in no danger, he laid back down, snuggling back up to Levi.

Levi's face was so serene and peaceful as he slept. Eren wanted to preserve that image in his memory permanently. Levi, without a furrowed brow, lips slightly parted and completely untroubled by the surrounding world. He was beautiful.

Buster settled down right below where Levi's arm was securely wrapped around Eren and started clawing on the both of them to make himself comfortable. Eren bit his tongue, wincing in pain while trying not to disturb Levi. It was all in vain, as Levi stirred awake and flinched away from Buster. His eyes fluttered open and stared at Eren, forgetting his initial task of finding what had clawed him. He hummed happily, kissing Eren's forehead. "Mm, good morning babe."

Eren chortled, adoring Levi's drowsy state. "Good morning, handsome." He said back, or rather croaked, pecking Levi's cheek.

Levi lifted a brow, smirking at the nickname. "Handsome?" He questioned.

Eren nodded. "Mhm. Cuz that's what you are." Eren's voice faltered still. His voice was still mostly gone, but he was more comprehensible now.

Levi shook his head. "You're such a sap." He closed his eyes again, attempting to regain some energy before he actually got up. He took his hands that were currently braced on Eren and slid them down his back, attaching them to the round mounds at the bottom, smiling to himself for his findings.

"That's my ass." Eren remarked, poking Levi's shoulder accusingly.

"You don't need to tell me, I know." Levi punctuated his statement by squeezing down on his ass.
"You have no idea how long I've needed to do that." He went a step further and slipped his hands under his boxers that he had given Eren to feel the smooth skin against his hands. "I'd worship this ass if you'd let me."

Eren laughed, hiding his face into the pillow. "You're too much sometimes." He kissed Levi again, fiddling with his lip ring before separating. "But that's okay, I like it."

"Good, because this would be really awkward if you didn't." Levi joked, making Eren laugh more. How he loved that laugh, even if it was weak and quiet from his abused voice. The sound chimed like Levi's favorite song and Eren's visage mimicked the bright sun and held such a pure, untainted aura.

"Why are you staring like that?" Eren asked, still grinning like a giddy child.

"Stop using your voice, you'll hurt it." Levi shushed him, earning an adorable frown.

~

The two had finished breakfast that was made by Levi and were now focused on getting ready for the day. Eren had been taking longer in the bathroom than Levi thought was necessary, so he decided that he should check up on him. Levi traveled upstairs to find the bathroom door wide open, which he found confusing so he looked in to see a shirtless, wide eyed Eren staring back at himself in the mirror. Eren whipped his head to the side to look at Levi and pointed to his neck and chest. Levi bit his lip to keep from laughing. The marks that he had left on Eren's neck, chest, stomach, sides, shoulders and even back were all blooming in dark colors and seemed to be rather large. It was possible that the bigger ones were multiple marks in the same area. And those were just the ones on Eren's torso. Levi knew without having to look that there were just as many on his hips, thighs and most likely one or two on or above his ass. And Levi couldn't even feel guilty.

"... So many." Eren breathed out, his gaze now returned to the mirror. He gently poked one near his rib cage and winced at the small jab of pain.

Levi smirked as he waltzed over behind earn and snaked his around around his waist, looking at him through the mirror. "Sorry about that." Levi murmured, not sounding sorry in the slightest. "I couldn't help myself."

Eren's concerned demeanor change to one of bashfulness. He took a hold of Levi's arms and leaned into his embrace, glancing at Levi's marks as well. "We're even." He said, voice breaking.

Levi kissed Eren's shoulder, then rested his head there. "How do you plan on hiding that from your parents?"

Panicked eyes stared back at him through the mirror.

~
"So, you obviously can't wear a scarf for however long it takes for these to fade... which from the looks of it, will be awhile." Levi whispered that latter part of the sentence. "Let's try this." He dabbed some of his own foundation on the back of his hand with his brush and lightly smoothed it over a mark on Eren neck. Almost immediately after placing the product there, his hand drew back. "Yeah... this isn't gonna work."

Eren angled his head in confusion. "Why not?"

"It's too pale. You look like I just slathered sour cream on you." Levi shook his head on distaste and grabbed a makeup wipe to get rid of the foundation.

"Well... what else can we do?" Eren asked, readjusting himself on Levi's bed.

"We'll figure something out. Don't worry." Levi put his makeup supplies back on his desk and came to sit back with Eren, looking him up and down. It hit him that those bruises wouldn't last forever. "God, I wish I could take a picture."

Eren stiffened at his words. He fought the blush away as best as he could but to no avail. His reaction got Levi thinking, had he taken him seriously? And if so, would he agree?

"Could I?" Levi sat closer, grabbing Eren's hand.

"Um... I don't know." Eren squeaked. "I don't want anyone else to see this."

"You don't have to let me, but if you do, I promise no one will see them but you and me. Besides," Levi pecked Eren's cheek. "This is only for my eyes. I wouldn't want anybody to see you like this."

"Then... yeah, I guess you can." Eren said, feeling the blush spread and started grinning sheepishly.

~

Levi took plenty of pictures for himself, allowing Eren to take several pictures of his neck so that they would be 'even.' But Levi knew it was just for his own enjoyment.

After their little 'photo shoot' was over, they went back to figuring out different ways for Eren to hide his marks. Levi told him that since he was so sore, he could get out of practice, claiming he was sick or overworked, in which case he could wear scarves or turtlenecks the rest of the time. Eren didn't like the idea of having to wear such heavy clothes all the time, and he didn't want to miss out on practice if he could help it. Especially since Levi told him that they would probably be finishing up their routine that week.

While watching television and letting Eren hold Kitty for the first time, Levi had an idea. "I just thought of something." Levi announced, tearing Eren's attention away from the rabbit. "My makeup may be too light for you, but you basically have the same skin color as Isabel."

Eren's eyebrows shot up with hope. "Call her and ask." He told him, petting Kitty, who was behaving nicely in his arms.

Levi got up to get the phone and dialed Isabel's number, waiting for her to pick up. After about five rings she answered, Eren could only hear one side of the conversation. "Hey, Izzy. How's the party?"
Eren crossed his fingers, hoping that Isabel would say yes. "That's good..." Levi continued. "Okay, this is a weird question, but can Eren borrow some of your foundation for a week or so?" Levi nodded then paused, fixing a pensive look at Eren. "Um... we were practicing and he... got a black eye."

Eren stared at him mouthing 'what the hell?' Levi looked back at him, shrugging and putting up his hands in a 'I didn't know what else to say' motion. "Yeah." Levi spoke to Isabel. "Yeah, he's fine, he'll just get in trouble if his parents see... okay, thank you. See you tonight." Levi hung up and faced Eren. "We're all set."

Levi sat back down next to Eren, slinging his arm around his shoulders. Eren kissed Levi upon his return and settled back in his spot. Eren tried readjusting his position, trying not to jostle Kitty and winced as he shifted in his seat. "You alright?" Levi asked, studying his face to figure out what the problem was.

"M' okay." Eren said. "My ass just hurts." He admitted, sinking down into the couch.

"You know why it hurts?" Levi said, lifting his pierced brow.

Eren looked at him, confused. Of course he knew why it hurt, but it seemed that Levi was getting at something else. "Uh, why?"

Levi took a moment before answering. "It's because you didn't stretch enough."

"Levi, I swear to god-"

~

Eren entered his home, melancholy over having to leave his boyfriend. Although, once Levi told him to keep the shirt he leant him, he was granted with subtle satisfaction. Before he left, Levi helped him put some makeup over his marks and gave him the products to use until they cleared up.

Eren was hoping to get upstairs without being noticed, but was unfortunately not that lucky. His father had entered the kitchen in search of something to drink and stopped to greet him. Eren’s heart stilled. It wasn't like he was going to tell his father about his recent activities and all the evidence was hidden, but the fact that he did what he did had built up a guilty conscience. "Oh, back from your stay, I see." Grisha prompted. "Did you have fun?" He asked with his signature business-like smile.

"Yeah, I did." Eren said timidly.

Grisha furrowed his brows, worried for his son. "Are you alright? What happened to your voice?"

Eren had completely forgotten his voice had gone. He scrambled for a reply, trying to think of a believable excuse so he wouldn't have to tell his dad how he lost his voice screaming for his boyfriend in bed for an entire day. "Um... well... my friend and I were..." He decided on the most believable and 'masculine' thing he could think of. "We were watching a game on tv. And... we were yelling for our team to win." He nodded to himself. That sounded plausible.

His father's expression turned to one of understanding. "Oh. What game was-"
"I don't remember." Eren hurried up the stairs, cringing at the pain that accompanied each step when lifting his leg sent shocks all through him. Levi's absence was more punctuated when Eren faced difficulties (such as ascending the stairs) that Levi would've helped him with, or even carried him through. He kept walking to get to his room when suddenly he felt a force crash into him, making him hiss in pain.

"Oops, sorry." Mikasa apologized. "Did you have fun at Levi's?"

"Yeah, it was-"

"Whoah, what happened to your voice?" She interrupted.

Eren sighed and rolled his eyes. He was preparing himself to explain that to more people within the next few days. "I was watching a basketball game with Lev-"

"Basketball?" Mikasa laughed. "You watch basketball? Since when?"

"Yesterday, I guess." Eren lied exasperatedly. He just wanted to rest in bed at that moment, he was tired and had had a lot happen to him within two days.

Mikasa looked at him skeptically. "You sure you weren't smoking?" She joked, slapping his shoulder right on a hicky, making him tense up and freeze. "... I did not hit you that hard."

"I know." Eren gritted out. "I just... hit my shoulder with a rifle. We were practicing earlier."

Mikasa nodded, falling for his lie. It wasn't the first time she had hit a sore spot that had been abused with his equipment. "Sorry, won't do that again."

Eren slipped past her, still groaning at the discomfort of walking. Mikasa stared at him, befuddled. "What is the matter with you?"

Eren halted and gave her the first excuse that came to mind. "Color guard pains."

"You've never had them like this before, did you do something different?"

Eren mentally cursed Levi for providing him with the perfect reply. "... I didn't stretch enough."

Practice on Tuesday was very productive. The team had nearly finished the routine, adding in work with the saber, only leaving room for solos. Eren was excused from participating, given his physical state. He lied, saying that he was very ill and Levi allowed him to sit out so he could at least watch the new addition, telling him he'd spend extra time on it during his private lessons. Thursday's practice came along and Eren was healed enough to the point where he could perform with everyone. He almost didn't go, having been instructed to bring his uniform, as it would be their first practice with them. Though, he knew that if he skipped out, he'd never hear the end of it from Levi.

He came with his uniform bag and flag bag hooked on his back. Eren gravitated more towards Levi, passing some team members already in their uniforms and some still in their gym clothes. "Should I change into my uniform right now?"
"You don't have to do this second." Levi said. "Later there'll be a chance to change for those who haven't yet." Levi observed Eren for a moment before lowering his voice to ask, "Are your marks all gone yet? Some of mine are still there."

Eren dropped his volume level as well. "Yeah, only a few. There's still that one on my shoulder, two on my collar and one on my hip. The rest are all faded or gone."

"Good." Levi hummed. "Well... good for you. I wish they'd never go away." Levi sighed, walking to the center of the gymnasium to meet with Hanji, leaving Eren a blushing mess.

Hanji hauled in a box, positioning it on their hip. "Alrighty, everybody. We have the last part of our uniforms at long last. These'll go in your uniform bags as well. Now, come on up and we'll have them distributed." The guard stepped up and surrounded them as they set the box on the ground, opening it up. Everyone stared in anxiously as Hanji reached in a plastic bag, pulling out thin pieces of black fabric. "Arm sleeves!" They announced, receiving oo's and ah's from the crowd. "These reach from your wrists to your elbows."

The team seemed to be rather excited about the addition to the uniform, but no one was more excited than Sasha for being able to cover up and be comfortable. Hanji and Levi passed out the sleeves and Sasha gave both of them her hushed appreciation. Levi told everyone who wasn't changed to do so at that moment before they begin, and so they did.

Eren found the uniform to be easy to move in, but it felt too loose for him to be perfectly comfortable in it. He was more used to clothes that clung to him and had more heft, like his jeans and jackets. Even his gym clothes were heavier. It was so light weight that he felt exposed in a way, also due to how it moved with him and showed his body's exact shape. He had to keep reminding himself that he was covered from head to toe. Next, he slid on the arm sleeves, which felt rather nice and he strapped on his gloves and slipped on his shoes, ready to reenter the gym.

Once he returned, a familiar face was waiting in the bleachers. Rico was sitting cross-legged, writing somethings down on a notepad placed on her lap. He took his spot in the performance lineup and awaited instructions from Hanji or Levi.

Levi was the one to herd the group back to their spots so they could begin stretching. "Okay, as I'm sure you've all noticed, Rico is back. She'll be watching our performance today and by the end of practice, the solos will be assigned. So, if you want a solo, work really hard. We'll take just a few more minutes for water and such before we start."

Everyone journeyed back to their bags, taking out their waters to stay hydrated. Eren's belongings were next to Sasha's, so, it only made sense that he would sit with her. He decided to be friendly and engage in conversation. "So... who do you think is gonna get the solos?"

Sasha giggled, waving him off. "Everyone already knows who's going to get the solos. It's obvious."

It wasn't overly obvious to Eren, so he pushed further. "It isn't to me. Who are they?"

"Well," Sasha began. "Hanji kinda has a solo throughout the whole show, so they're going to get one. Most likely the flag solo, because of what the others will get. There's one solo for each piece of equipment, so by process of elimination, they'll get the flag solo. That, and they can work with two pieces of equipment at the same time, so their gonna get some type of solo, but most likely flag. We all know Levi will get the saber solo for sure. He's the best with the saber, so he's bound to get it. He always gets it. Levi holds his saber really weird, he holds it backwards I think. And if he's the only one using a saber at the time, it doesn't look out of place. And Rico says because it's
harder for people to hold it backwards and still do things right, we score higher. I don't know how
he does it, he says it's easier or he learned it that way first or something. So, he has the saber solo.
And Christa will get the rifle solo. She's gotten it for three years in a row and I bet she'll get it
again this year. Christa has always been the best with the rifle, she always gets solos, she's always
the one helping people who have trouble with rifle routines, there's no way she won't get it. Rifle
has always come easy to her, and she rarely messes up, so we all know that she's getting the solo."

"That seems a little unfair." Eren commented. "To get solos year after year and for it to be so
obvious who gets the solos, that's not right. Isn't that favoritism or something?"

"No, it's completely fair." Sasha objected. "They're the best at those pieces of equipment, so we're
using that to our advantage so we have a better chance at winning."

Eren frowned. "I guess. But shouldn't we at least switch it up sometimes?"

Sasha smiled sadly. "It would be nice for other people to get a solo. But that's just how it is. For
example, someone like me or you, we'd never get solos."

"Why not? I mean, I don't want a solo, but why couldn't you get one?"

"Because I suck." Sasha laughed humorlessly.

Eren's jaw dropped. "Sasha, no-"

"Eren, think about it." Sasha sighed. "I just started last year. Everyone else has been doing it for so
much longer. I'm not really skilled, I'm clumsy, and I always drop. There are plenty of other people
better suited for a solo. I'd love to get a solo, but it wouldn't be the best for the team. But I'll be
fine. I'm just happy to be part of the guard."

Eren didn't like that. He didn't think that she should have to settle for never getting a solo. It was
clear as day that she wanted one, but Eren knew she'd never have the chance. It was just like she
said, they used the skill of the team members to their advantage, and being completely truthful,
there were others far more skilled than her.

They all heard the beckoning clap of Hanji's hands, signaling that they needed to get started.

"Well, better get going." Sasha said, standing up and offering Eren a hand to help lift him. She
started walking to get to her spot before Eren grabbed her elbow to gain her attention.

"I don't know if this will mean much to you, but if it was up to me, I'd let you have a solo." Eren
tried cheering her up. And in all honesty, he would give her one if it was his decision. She wanted
it bad enough and he could tell.

Sasha smiled genuinely at him. "Thanks Eren."

~

Eren had never seen more effort put out from his teammates since he began. It was intimidating
to say the least. He only put in extra effort so he could keep up with the team, after all, he wasn't
interested in getting a solo. Which was why he wasn't too concerned with how poorly he executed
the saber work. But saying that he felt a little inadequate next to the rest of the guard with how they
were performing would be an understatement.

At one point, Eren saw Farlan drop his saber and was hit with a surge of panic as he rushed to retrieve it and struggled to get back into the flow. Eren felt bad, he could tell that Farlan really wanted a solo spot too. He wouldn't have tried so hard to fix his mistake if he hadn't.

Eren felt even worse when Sasha dropped her equipment at least four times. She never dropped that often, so it was likely that the anxiety was getting to her. That broke Eren's heart even more. Even after she stated that she wouldn't get a solo, she still tried so hard. However, as many times as she dropped, she had no trouble picking up and getting back into the routine seamlessly.

It seemed as if everyone was dropping that practice. Though, Rico wasn't even fazed by it. She watched with an impassive expression, occasionally jotting down notes and studying the guard. The drops meant nothing to her, she expected them all to drop, aware that her presence and decisions were adding on to their nerves.

Once there was twenty minutes until practice officially ended, Rico told them all to change out of their uniforms and meet back in the gym. After everyone was seated in the center, Rico briefly flipped through her notes then cleared her throat. She stared back at their impatient faces and couldn't wait to end their torture. "Okay." She started, feeling the pressure of all the eyes settling on her. "Let's start with notes."

A long groan from the team sounded after her announcement and she was quick to silence them. "Oh shut up, you all know the drill. Anyways, I'd like to address the saber portion first. Eren," Eren perked up. "What the hell was that?"

"Why not?"

"I was sick."

Rico narrowed her eyes at him. "Were you bleeding, vomiting or dying?"

"Well, no-"

"Then you should have practiced." Rico looked back at her notes to assess another area of difficulty. "The beginning was very good, but it needs to be less timed if you're planning on making it look scattered."

Rico kept listing off things that they should improve on and things that they did very well. Eren listened selectively here and there, so he had a basic idea of what she was talking about. He couldn't focus too much, because he was so tired after working so hard all practice. Sweat gathered all around him and it was exceedingly hot. He took the collar of his shirt and patted his face and rubbed at his neck and chest to get some of the sweat off.

"I think that's everything. Now for the solos." A dull murmur followed her words and she tried talking over it.

Eren noticed Sasha scooting next to him to whisper in his ear. "Watch, they'll be the ones I told you they would be."

"The flag solo goes to Hanji." Rico waited until the round of applause was over before she continued. "You seem to have the easiest time handling flags and I think you can come up with something really creative. For the saber solo, it goes to Levi." Another round of applause. "Of
course, your ability to handle the saber in such a complicated way helped me come to that decision."

"And the last will be Christa." Sasha whispered to Eren.

Eren sighed, he wanted her to be optimistic, even if the outcome wasn't very likely to change. But then again, he was somewhat glad she didn't get her hopes up so she wouldn't be let down.

"And the rifle solo goes to Sasha." Rico stated.

Sasha froze, staring wide eyed at Rico, barely aware of the clapping and Eren patting her on the back.

"You've improved so much from last year and you can get back into the routine without having to think about it. That's more important than not dropping. Congratulations you three, I can't wait to see your solos put together."

Sasha sat still, stuck in the moment. She couldn't believe it, she couldn't fathom that someone like her would get a moment in the spotlight. She hoped that Christa wouldn't be too mad.

She was the last one to stand up, still in shock over the honor of being presented with a solo. Sasha snapped out of her daze when Christa came marching over to her with open arms. She flinched at first, before she realized that Christa was hugging her. "I'm so happy for you, good job Sasha!"

Christa exclaimed.

"But... didn't you want the solo?" Sasha asked, hugging her back.

Christa pulled back. "Not really. I've had it for three years in a row, I could deal without one more. You enjoy it!"

"Thank you." Sasha beamed. All at once, the guard gathered around her as well as Levi and Hanji to congratulate them all.

Eren made sure he told Sasha how happy he was for her before he walked over to tell Hanji the same thing. While maneuvering through the crowd, Nanaba tapped him on the shoulder to grab his attention. "What's that one from?" She asked, looking at him expectantly.

Eren furrowed his brows. "What's what from?"

"Your bruise." Nanaba used her own fingers to demonstrate where it was, tapping her collar bone. "Is it new?"

"Woah, Eren." Isabel chimed in. "That's a nasty one, does it hurt?" She drew the attention of several others and soon, Eren had a little audience. Even Levi turned to look and when it hit him, Eren could see the panic in his eyes. Though, Eren still wasn't sure of what they were talking about.

"Ouch, how'd you get hit in a place like that?" Marco examined the mark that everyone was discussing.

Eren angled his head down to see what they meant and felt all the color drain from his face. He then subtly looked at his hand and noticed makeup gathered on his palm. He must've smeared it when he wiped at his neck. He looked back up at the others, who were still waiting for his explanation. "O-oh, that bruise. Um..." Eren was at a loss of words. He could've easily made up an excuse, but there wasn't one coming to mind.
"You mean, none of you saw it?" Levi interrupted from the back, making his way up to Eren. "Earlier, when he dropped, the butt of the rifle hit him there. Took it like a champ, though."

Everyone looked from Levi back to Eren, trying to recall such a thing that never happened. Eren had dropped a few times, but of course he was never hit in the chest. The team thought it over and no one seemed to buy the excuse.

"I remember him dropping, but I didn't see him get hit." Annie commented.

"Yeah, I didn't see it either." Bertolt agreed.

"I saw it." They all looked behind Eren at Rico. She shrugged when even Eren looked at her confusedly. "Right near the beginning of practice. You were all probably too busy focusing on the routine."

The guard seemed to be satisfied with Rico's confirmation and seized to pester Eren about it. The crowd dispersed shortly after, and they all started packing up the floor and set pieces. As Eren was helping fold up the floor, he was pondering over how grateful he was that Levi saved him. Then he started wondering why Rico said she saw him get hit when he never did. He didn't question it too much, thinking better of it and just happy that she helped him out.

Afterwards, Eren grabbed all his things and stayed back to thank Levi. He motioned Levi over to stand next to him and waited until there weren't any others around that could hear him. "That was good thinking, thanks for helping out." He whispered.


Eren coughed, caught off guard by Levi's fluent change in tongue. 'Great,' he thought. 'I just dodged one bullet with the hicky, now Levi's throwing me under a hail of them with his stupid French talk.' He tried fighting off the blush that came and couldn't help but ask, "What does that mean?"

Levi snickered. "I might tell you... some day." He strutted past Eren, walking in a way that was sure to catch his eye. How he loved driving that boy crazy, just because he could.

Eren wished he could do something to get even, but he didn't think he could do anything that would match Levi's actions.

Just as he was about to leave, he heard Rico call his name. Eren turned to see her beckoning him towards her, so he approached without hesitation. "Yeah?" He asked.

Rico stepped in closely and lowered her voice for Eren's sake. "As a responsible adult, I have to make sure..." she eyed his bruise pointedly, something he didn't miss. "You were at least protected, right?"

Eren knitted his brows together before what she was getting at clicked. He spluttered to try and tell her otherwise and help his own case. "No no! I mean, uh... wait!"

Rico held up her hands and shook her head. "Never mind, I don't want to hear about it. I don't care who it was, I don't want to know what you did, but I get it. You're young, you have a lot of free time, just put your school work and guard practice ahead of your... nightly activities and be safe about it. Alright?"

"But I... uh..." Eren felt beyond embarrassed. He didn't think she knew that he was with Levi, or even gay, but she still figured out he had a sex life.
"This isn't going to get less awkward, just say you agree." Rico offered.

"Okay. I agree to that." Eren relented, avoiding eye contact.

"Alright, good talk." She patted him on the shoulder and made her exit.

Eren hung his head and blew out a long breath. He was going to have to get smarter with how he hid his secrets.

~

Friday night, Eren stayed up on the phone with Levi, chatting about random things. Eren stayed curled up in his bed while they talked, smiling all the while. They had had practice at Levi's house that day and got a little touchy at parts while Levi was teaching Eren the saber part of the routine. Those fond memories never left Eren's mind.

Levi was getting ready to hang up after an hour of speaking with Eren. "You need to get to sleep, I'll see you tomorrow. Oh and pack extra lunch and wear clothes that you'll be comfortable wearing the whole day."

"Why?" Eren inquired. "Practice only lasts a few hours."

"I know, but afterwards, the team is coming over to my house then we're going to Bertolt and Annie's wrestling match."

Eren hummed in acknowledgement. He didn't know why he wasn't told about this before, but at least he wasn't told at the last minute. "Alright, sounds like a plan. I'll see you tomorrow, Levi."

"See you tomorrow. I love you." Levi quickly added.

"I love you too, Levi. Goodnight." Eren but his lip, mouth splitting into a wild grin.

"Goodnight, mon grand." Levi hung up before Eren had a chance to bother him about what it meant. After several minutes of lying on his back with his phone to his chest, replaying Levi's words of affection over in his head, Eren decided he didn't need the last part to be translated.

~

Levi changed out of his uniform in the boy's locker room, as usual, and waited for everyone else to be ready. He promised to drive Christa, Ymir and Eren to his house along with his siblings, so he couldn't exactly leave without all of them being ready. Annie and Bertolt had already left early to get ready for their match, so it was decided beforehand that everyone else would go to Levi's house to work on surprises for them.

Soon, everyone was ready to go and the team left for Levi's house. They all made it to the Ackerman home safely, letting Levi lead the way there. The swarm of color guarders made their way into the house, taking off their shoes upon entering, just as Levi had previously told them to. Eren could tell that most of them were no strangers to the Ackerman's household.
Petra kneeled down to pick up the whining cat at their feet. "Buster! It's been awhile." She exclaimed, lifting him onto her shoulder and flinching as he dug his claws into her skin. "Good... cat." She praised him in pain.

Nanaba wandered into the kitchen, pulling out cups from the cupboards and filled a kettle with water. "I'll get some tea ready while you set up, Levi."

"Thanks, we'll be in the practice room." Levi informed her. He started walking towards the practice room, showing everyone who hasn't been there the way.

While the group migrated to the practice room, Kutchel walked out of a hallway, holding a transparent, plastic case, filled with different types of glue. She smiled brightly when she caught sight of the group and stopped in her tracks. "Oh, wonderful! You're all here already!"

Hanji raced to the front of the group, taking the case from Kutchel and setting it down. They pulled her into a hug and squeezed tightly. "Kutchel! How are you?"

"I'm great, Hanji! How have you been, dear? I haven't seen you in two weeks." Kutchel gladly returned the hug.

"I'm doing fabulously, thanks for asking." Hanji said happily.

The rest of the team let themselves in the practice room while Levi stayed back with Eren. He leaned in to whisper to him. "See that? My mom loves my friends more than me."

Levi's mother gasped, having heard him loud and clear. She tore herself from Hanji, rushing over to him and attacking him in a warm embrace. "That's not true, mon fils! How could you say that?"

"Maman, I was joking. I know that's not true." Levi chuckled, patting his mother on the back to calm her down. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay, as long as you don't actually think that's true." Kutchel kissed his cheek and went to retrieve the case she had. "Most of the supplies are already in there like you wanted, I just have to set out a few more things."

"You've done enough, I'll get the rest." Levi took the case from her. "Thanks for letting us use your supplies."

"Oh, it's no trouble." Kutchel shushed him. "I'll be scrapbooking in the living room if you need me." Kutchel whispered in Eren's ear, though much more quietly than Levi had been. "I'm scrapbooking the night of the dance you and Levi went to."

"Oh, cool. Can I see when it's done?" Eren whispered back.

"Of course, dear." Kutchel turned back to Levi and Hanji who were vaguely discussing something. "Have fun!"

"Thanks, maman." Levi said. "Alright, let's go." Levi ushered Eren and Hanji into the practice room where everyone was already cracking into Kutchel's art supplies and decorating things on the floor.

"What are we doing exactly?" Eren asked.

"We're making signs and posters to hold up for Annie and Bertolt. And I think Nanaba and Marco are working on one for their other friend Reiner." Levi filled in. "The guard always goes to special
events for all our members to show our support, even if it isn't a school event."

Eren thought that that seemed a bit excessive, but he also thought it was very kind. He was glad to be a part of such an encouraging group of people.

Levi set down the case next to a pile of opened cases and turned back to exit the room. "I'm going to get the rest of the supplies and help Nanaba with the tea."

Eren watched him leave and looked back at everyone working diligently. His eye was caught when Isabel started waving her arms frantically, trying to flag him down. "Eren!" She shouted. "Help me make a sign for Bertolt!"

He couldn't say no to her, so he made his way over to her spot on the ground, gazing at the blank poster board. "What are we writing on it?" He asked, sinking down to sit with her.

"I was thinking 'Get 'em Big Bert!' What do you think?" Isabel stared at him excitedly.

Eren nodded, biting his tongue to keep from giggling. "Sounds great, let's get started."

~

"I think they're all dried enough, we need to get going if we want to make it in time." Hanji announced, rolling up their sign.

The time was spent with a lot of laughter and a lot of productivity. Christa, Ymir, and Petra all worked on an eye catching poster for Annie, bordered with sequins and covered in glitter. (Thanks to Christa.) Nanaba, Marco and Hanji worked on a sign for Reiner, keeping it rather simple, but bold nonetheless. The one that Eren and Isabel (and Sasha, as she was later invited over) made had a brick wall background with the words looking like they were bursting through. Eren discovered that Sasha was actually very artistic and helped in trying to make the letters look three dimensional. They made good use of Kutchel's glue dots to raise up the paper. Hanji, Farlan, and Levi worked on a longer sign that showed off their school's colors and logo, which was a pair of crossed wings. Farlan managed to draw their school mascot on either side, which was a swallow. Levi would make remarks every few minutes of how swallows were the least threatening animal to use as a mascot, especially during a wrestling match and often rhetorically asked 'what were they thinking when they chose a swallow? The Trost Swallows, who's idea was that?' Farlan and Hanji couldn't help but snicker every time he made a comment.

They packed up everything neatly, being careful not to ruin their signs in the process. Kutchel helped them get everything set in Hanji's van as well as her own car, as she would also be attending the match. She even packed extra food in a cooler, placing it in the trunk of her car.

To avoid suspicion, Eren chose to go in Hanji's van rather than with Levi. Isabel and Farlan rode with their mother while everybody else split between riding with Levi and Hanji.

~
The group made a dash for the entrance of an unfamiliar school, carrying their signs and food under their arms. If Hanji was correct with their timing, their school would be competing soon.

It was a new feeling for Eren, walking into a different school with people buzzing with the excitement over a match. The layout was far different from his school and he'd take an invested look at the awards and art projects on the walls every few seconds, running it through his head that these were made and won by real students. He took a moment to think over how this place was someone else's everyday life and not just somewhere to host a sporting event. Eren wondered if he'd feel like that when it came time for him to go to his own competitions.

The group followed signs on the walls that directed them to the gymnasium, accompanied by the squeaking of their shoes on the freshly mopped floors. Eventually, they found the gym and tried to find a clear spot in the bleachers where everyone would fit and also have a good view of the match. There were currently no teams competing on the floor, so that moment would be the best time to stand around to find the perfect seats. Kutchel led the group on, looking into the bleachers when Nanaba called for her.

"Kutchel," she said. "Let's go up here." She pointed to an empty section near the lower portion of the bleachers, next to a man that was waving at her beckoningly.

"Do you know that man?" Kutchel asked, starting in the suggested direction.

"Of course, it's Annie's dad." Nanaba explained, ushering them all into the spot in the bleachers. "Hello, Mr. Leonhardt! How have you been?" She greeted him as she sat in front of him.

"I'm alright, what about you?" He smiled at her politely.

"I'm good, thanks for asking." Nanaba replied.

As the adult of the herd, Kutchel sat next to him and introduced herself. The rest of the group filled up the barren area, situating themselves so that they'd be able to hold the signs up so they'd be visible. And the waiting began.

~

After listening to popular, energy lifting songs play over the loud speaker for around twenty minutes, the noise died down and an announcer thanked the crowd for their patience and declared the upcoming weight class and schools competing. One of the first schools that was up happened to be theirs.

They all cheered and hollered for every member of their school's team and held up the school's sign when they were called up, but saved the energy for their close friends.

After the first three members from their school competed, their first friend was ready to have his turn. Bertolt began walking up to the mat, looking rather nervous and unsure of himself. Once he was properly announced over the loud speaker, the group started screaming and yelling for him, Marco holding up the sign made specifically for Bertolt while Farlan, Hanji and Ymir held up their school's sign. All at once, they started stomping in their seats, rattling the bleachers and shaking the structure.

Levi thought that it would be the most opportune time to scare Eren. So, he grasped a firm hold on
Eren's arm, startling him and making him jump as he spoke lowly, "We're all gonna die." He said as the bleachers continued to rumble beneath them.

At first, Eren was frightened by the urgency of his actions and tone of voice, but once he heard what Levi had said, he burst out into laughter. Levi smirked with pride from making him laugh.

The two looked back at Bertolt who had stared back at the crowd after hearing the shouts and thudding metal. When his eyes landed on his friends and their signs, he appeared less anxious and more relaxed, exited to go up against his competitor.

"Go, Bert, go!" They chanted, raising up the signs and jumping up and down for him.

Eren felt their exhilaration, he had never been so excited for a sporting event. But the encouragement going out to his fellow guard member and the energy they sent to him was contagious. He couldn't help but join in and cheer him on along with the rest of his friends.

Eren thought about that for a long moment. He had never referred to them as his friends before, only his teammates. He remembered the first practice he had when Levi scorned them all, reminding them that they were considered to be a family. Did they view him as that yet? Was he worthy? He remembered that not too long ago, he was certain they all hated him. But since then, he had gotten along with them and vice versa. Eren didn't want to busy himself with these thoughts while his... friend was about to compete. So, he decided that they were all friends until he had time to think it over more.

~

Eren found himself feeling extremely impressed and a bit intimidated by the strength and ability of Bertolt, Reiner and Annie. The way they exhibited strength he never imagined they possessed was captivating. Eren was aware that Reiner specifically was able to some heavy lifting, but to apply his strength in such a way against another person was incredible.

Everybody stayed to watch their awards being given of course, they were curious to see how the three had placed.

Eren didn't notice that he was on the edge of his seat, just like the others, impatiently awaiting the results to see how they did.

Celebratory roars emitted from the bleachers when they found out that Bertolt placed second in his weight class, Annie placed second as well, and Reiner came in forth. Keeping in mind the amount of people they came up against, they were all happy with the results. But no one was prouder than Annie's father after seeing how well she did and hearing her placing.

When their coach gave them the okay, Annie, Reiner and Bertolt came over to celebrate with them, thanking them for showing up. Since they were new to the school, and the team, they hadn't expected them to come and weren't aware that this was a normal thing for them to do.

It was later than Eren would've expected it to be when it was time to go home, but he didn't complain. They went to Scouts afterwards, as a reward for the effort that the wrestlers put in. Kutchel paid for everyone's meal, much to her children's protest, but she insisted that it was spending money given to her from their Uncle Kenny.
Levi sat next to Eren at the end of a booth, so they'd have some more privacy for their conversations. "Did you have fun tonight?" Levi asked.

"Yeah," Eren said, thinking about the night he'd had. "I don't really hang out with any of them much, aside from in gym class, but I'm so happy for them. It's weird, I barely know them and I feel so proud."

Levi smiled. "Now imagine how it'll feel to win something with them. To work with everyone and achieve something. All of this effort you're putting into color guard is going to pay off, and we'll all be there when that happens."

Eren allowed himself to bare a small grin. "I didn't think I'd ever feel this way, but I'm actually excited for that."

"Yeah," Levi agreed. "You have a lot of things to look forward to."

Chapter End Notes

Again, I'm not overly happy with this. Sorry if it was really bad!

The pictures of the uniforms will be up on my tumblr as soon as I post it there, in case you'd like a better visual of them. (I'm bad at describing things, so I thought I'd roughly sketch them.)

Translations: Mon grand - literally translates to "My big" but is used as if to say "My big guy." Common term of endearment in France.

Sorry for any errors, I don't edit. If you'd like to check out my tumblr, it's dr-s--art. If you liked this, please let me know with a comment or kudos. Thanks for reading! <3
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Their first show gets nearer and nearer and Eren and Levi are having fun and setting things in place along the way.

Chapter Notes

A wild sex scene appears!

I have no self control, you guys know this. Stuff is going to start happening next chapter! (I'dk what stuff... but stuff. Good stuff, I'm sure.) This chapter isn't too significant to the plot, but I like it. I'm sorta happy with it, so yeah. I hope you guys like it! <3

Translations at the bottom.

"Alright, take a break." Levi huffed out, tossing Eren a water bottle. Levi discovered that Eren always worked harder at his house rather than at practice. He wondered if it had anything to do with the fact that they were one on one in this situation.

Eren took a swig of water before replying. "Do you think you could help me with tosses after the break?"

"Yeah, I noticed you're having trouble with those. We need to work on how you catch." Levi sat down against the wall, waiting for Eren to join him. He watched Eren slide down the wall, sighing as he reached the floor. He quirked his pierced brow at him. "You alright?"

Eren nodded without looking at him. "Yeah, I'm fine." He took another drink of his water, staring into space.

"You're shit at lying." Levi commented casually. He smiled at Eren's pout. "So, what's up?"

Eren shrugged. "I was just overthinking things."

"Like what?" Levi wrapped his arm around Eren's shoulder.

"Like how I wish I could tell people about you. I wish I could tell my mom and my friends. But I don't think that would be a good idea still." Eren admitted solemnly.

It broke Levi's heart every time Eren got upset over not being able to tell anybody about them, not that he'd ever tell Eren that. He wouldn't want to make him feel guilty. "Well... I know it's not as good, but you could still introduce me to them. Then when you're ready to come out, it won't be as much of a shock." Levi would never force Eren to tell everyone about them, but he'd always offer alternatives to make the waiting more tolerable.
"All my friends already know who you are, but my mom hasn't met you. Would you like to meet her sometime?" Eren asked, looking at Levi, eyes filled with hope.

"Of course I would." Levi gave him a kiss. "I'd love to meet your mom. But, what about your dad?"

"He's never home anyway. Plus, I don't think anyone would like to meet him. He's not exactly the greatest person ever." Eren explained.

Levi exhaled an amused breath. "I see. Well, if you'd like me to come over some time to meet your mother, I'd be happy to do so."

"Thanks." Eren beamed, giving his boyfriend a quick kiss. "You could stay for dinner and spend the night if you'd like. Maybe this weekend?"

"Sounds good to me." Levi patted his shoulder. "Now let's get back to work." He stood up, prompting Eren to come with.

Eren scoffed. "Already? That was barely a break." He stayed in his spot in an effort to show Levi he wasn't ready to keep going.

"Quit whining. You'll be fine, that was plenty of time." Levi hoisted him up into a standing position, bringing him over back to the center of the room. He tossed over Eren's rifle, ignoring his frown. "So, tosses. You're release point is where it's supposed to be, you just have to work on how you catch. Show me a toss."

Eren begrudgingly lifted his rifle to the beginning position and tossed it, fumbling when it came to the ground. He looked sheepishly at his rifle after barely catching it.

"Okay, I see the problem." Levi stepped closer. "First things first, you need to watch where your arms are after you release." He led by example, taking a step back to show him how to toss. "After the rifle leaves your hands, you put both your arms straight down. That's called east coast technique. A judge can always tell if you're not confident with tosses or when you don't know what you're doing. And that's when you stick both your arms straight out, like what you're doing, and when both of your arms are straight above your head. Now try again, both arms down."

Eren readied himself, getting into position. He tossed his rifle, keeping his arms down as Levi asked and prepared himself to catch it. Just as he brought his hands out to catch, the rifle came down too quickly and hit his wrists, making him jump back and grab them. He caught Levi himself flinching and reaching out for him as he got hit.

Levi came up to Eren, taking his wrists in his hands examining them. "Are you alright?" He inquired, running his thumbs along the areas that were struck.

"Yeah, I'm okay." Eren said instinctively, trained to block out the pain. As he thought about it, Levi was the one to train him to block it out. It didn't make sense to him why Levi was suddenly so concerned. "I thought if I didn't have a broken bone and if I wasn't bleeding, then I'm always fine." Eren jokingly quoted.

Levi realized that he had forgotten that in that moment of seeing Eren's pain and tried to cover up his mistake. "Right, well... I thought the rifle hit you a lot harder than it actually did. So... I was worried."

Eren smirked smugly. Eren may have been a horrible liar, but Levi was too. "Yeah, sure." He added sarcastically.
Levi let go of his wrists and picked up his rifle, shoving it in his hands. "Again." He decided to punish Eren for sassing him by forcing him to keep going.

Eren reluctantly took it, stepping back to do another toss. For quite a few tosses, he was unsuccessful. Several times, the result was the same as the rifle hit his hands, forearms or even his feet. Each time, Levi had to restrain himself from reacting how he had previously. Occasionally, Eren would jump out of the way completely, seeing that it was impossible to catch without getting hit and letting it land on the ground with a loud clatter.

The first time Eren caught his rifle correctly, he wasted no time celebrating, looking to Levi with bright, elated eyes. Levi congratulated him, but otherwise kept moving forward with helping him improve. "Very good. Now, all you have to fix is where you catch. Right hand underneath, grabbing the strap at the neck," Levi demonstrated for him. "Left hand grabbing the tip."

Naturally, Eren struggled to execute a proper catch, continuing to drop it and accidentally hit himself.

The more Eren failed and kept going, the more entranced Levi became. He adored his drive and will to persevere. Levi was enthralled with the fire in Eren's eyes whenever he set his mind to something, dead set on achieving his goal. Every now and then, Levi would stop him to get him refocused, but otherwise remained fixated on his concentrated visage and anticipating reflexes. He couldn't help it, Eren was just too captivating. It was times like this that Levi reflected on just how lucky he was to have him in his life. "Let me show you again."

~

Eren walked into his home, reluctant as ever to be leaving his boyfriend once again. He could already smell a traditional German meal cooking as he stepped through the door. It was nothing like the simplistic yet filling meals that he received at the Ackerman's home.

"Dinner will be ready soon, don't get too comfortable on the couch." Carla said, noticing Eren walk through the door.

"Alright." Eren mumbled, restraining himself from saying a sarcastic 'hi mom.' He didn't even get a hello when he came in and that alone had him missing Levi's house, where he knew Levi's mother would tell him hello and give him a hug or a friendly smile no matter how exhausted she was.

After he set his things down in his room, he returned to the kitchen and just waited, not really thinking about anything besides how much he wanted to go back. He loved his family and his home, but after he had known a new home, this one seemed less appealing. Armin's house was just him and his grandfather, so Eren didn't look at it as a place to live, only to stay for short times. He'd been to the houses of other people as well, but only for parties. Levi's house was the only other home to him.

He stared blankly at the table and was caught off guard when his mother sharply called his name. "Eren Jaeger, what does your shirt say?" He picked up a hint of anger in her voice and checked his shirt and cringed at what he was wearing.

He'd forgotten that he was wearing an Alien Sex Fiend shirt that Levi had given him. After their first time, Levi had a habit of letting Eren borrow his shirts. This was only the second he let him
keep permanently. "It's uh... an Alien Sex Fiend shirt." He murmured, scared of getting in trouble.

Carla gawked at him. "And what is that exactly? Is that a gang?" She put her hands on her hips, staring down her son.

"It's not a gang, ma. It's a band." Eren scoffed at her, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Then again, he would've thought the same thing had Levi not showed up in his life.

Carla rolled her eyes. She'd always dreaded the day her son would start keeping secrets, hanging out with the wrong bunch, talking back to her and lose touch all together. Had she really gotten that old? "When did you even get that shirt?"

"Today. Levi gave it to me." Eren explained.

Carla sighed heavily. She realized that if she kept fighting back, she'd only push him further away. She wanted a strong relationship with her son and that wasn't going to happen if she played the 'you kids and your damn music' card. "Well... I suppose I can get over the inappropriate shirts with the... scary men on them, but I suggest that you change before your father sees it. You know how he'd react."

"If he even shows up tonight." Eren muttered, drawing circles into the table.

She hated this. Carla hated how her kids doubted their father's consistency. She hated how their bond with him was crumbling. But what she hated most of all, was the fact that they had every reason to doubt him and drift apart. Still, she did what she could to weave them back together. "Eren, he's a busy man. He has an important job, you know-"

"I know." Eren stood up, letting the chair screech against the hard wood floors as he did so. Without another word, he left to his room to go change.

Carla stared at his wake. She returned to her cooking, preparing everything to get served, pushing her own doubts in her husband further back than she had already been harboring them.

Upstairs, Eren took off his shirt lethargically, not too keen on doing it. He pressed it to his face and inhaled Levi's scent before placing it carefully in his dresser drawer. He took out a plain, red shirt, slipping it over his head. Just as he was about to return downstairs, he looked out his window to see his father's vehicle pulling in the driveway. 'So, he did show up.' Eren thought bitterly to himself.

~

Carla's meal wasn't too bad this time, mostly because it was an old one she had practiced. Grace was said by Mikasa this time around, as it was her turn. She had always been speedy with grace, she never complained about doing it or letting someone else do it, but she was one to be snarky about cold food.

"How was work?" Carla began, cutting up her food.

"It wasn't too awful." Grisha responded, taking a bite. "Very slow for the most part. They fired that atheist boy. For the best, I suppose." He took another bite, not even concerned with the news he had just shared.
Eren glanced at his mother who looked a bit frustrated, then at his sister just looked tired of these conversations. What angered Eren was that after all these years, his father never noticed how uncomfortable he made his family.

"Why do you think that is?" Carla asked, not too interested in the answer.

"I don't know." Grisha furrowed his brows, trying to remember. "Well, not really important, as long as he's gone." He gave a small chuckle, earning eye rolls from his family.

Silence soon took over, like every other night when Grisha was home. Eren didn't see any point in waiting, and the conversation was obviously dead, so he posed a question to his mother. "Hey ma, can I have a friend over this weekend?" Grisha didn't even point out that he left him out of the question. He wasn't going to be home, so it only made sense that Eren would only ask Carla.

"Of course, is it Armin?" Carla stood up to refill her glass of water.

"No, it's Levi. I was wondering if he could spend the night Friday or Saturday."

"I don't believe I've met Levi." Carla hummed as she sat back down in her chair. "Isn't he the boy who... let you borrow a shirt?" Carla treaded carefully, not wanting to offset her husband.

"Yeah, he's on the color guard team too." Eren ignored his father's not-so-subtle laugh. "Can he come?"

Carla thought it over for a minute. Levi gave him an inappropriate shirt and she had never met the boy before. "Sure, but on one condition. I'd like to meet his mother first."

That didn't sound too hard, Kutchel was a wonderful woman and got along with most people from what Eren had seen. "Okay, that sounds fair."

~

Levi and Kutchel sat in their car, parked in the driveway of the Jaeger's home. Kutchel stared straight ahead with a determined attitude, ready to make a flawless first impression. Levi on the other hand, was still trying to convince himself that that was how things were going to go. Flawless. "Okay, let's go over this one more time." Levi breathed out, palms sweating. "What subject do we avoid at all costs?"

"Eren's relationship status and your relationship status." Kutchel replied immediately, having been over this plenty of times that morning.

"Good." Levi nodded. "If religion comes up, what are we going to advocate for?"

"Christianity." She said confidently.

"Right. And if they ask-"

"You, Isabel, and Farlan have the same father, I maintain strict rules at our house, but I'm not too firm, I'm always present when he comes over, keeping a close eye on the four of you, and I'm a widow, not a single mom by choice." Kutchel recited.

"Yeah... I think that's it." Levi took a deep breath. Of course, he didn't want to lie to Eren's parents
and he didn't condone lying (and neither did his mother,) but they had a lot at stake. Eren could be banned from seeing him. Eren could get his privileges taken away. Lots of things could happen that would hurt Eren, this was for his rights and safety. They had to be cautious.

"I'm ready when you are." Kutchel announced, unbuckling her seatbelt. She cast an encouraging gaze at her son, squeezing his hand for extra reassurance.

"Alright, let's go." Levi exited the car, shadowed by his mother and stepped up to the door, knocking and standing by.

Not long after, Carla opened the door with a polite smile that faltered as she gasped in shock upon seeing Levi. She held her hand over her heart, taking in the sight before her. As quickly as she could, she made up for her mistake by plastering her smile back on. Carla knew from Eren's new shirt that Levi would certainly be unique, but she was a bit unsettled to see a boy with spikes and studs on his jacket, wearing jewelry, makeup, ripped jeans and even had plenty of piercings that decorated his pale face. "Hello!" She greeted him with a robotic, cold voice. She may have been taken aback, but she still attempted to not be rude. "A-are you Levi?"

"Yes and you're Eren's mother?" Levi asked, with a genuine smile. It was a normal reaction he got when strangers met him and he didn't hold it against her. He wouldn't let that outshine the fact that he was honestly excited to meet Eren's mom. After she nodded affirmatively, he stuck out his hand, giving her a firm handshake. "It's nice to finally meet you, I've heard a lot about you."

"All good things, I hope." Carla laughed nervously. Her gaze wondered to the figure looming behind him, who seemed eager, but wary nonetheless. "And I assume you're Levi's mom?"

"Yes, I'm Kutchel. Pleasure to meet you!" Kutchel mirrored Levi's actions, shaking her hand and smiling politely. After watching her reaction to seeing her son, she now had her guard up. She wouldn't allow someone to make him feel insecure or worse under any circumstances. Regardless, she still maintained an optimistic attitude about their meeting.

"It's a pleasure to meet you too. I'm Carla. Oh, please come in." Carla stepped out of their way, letting them enter. She was still concerned that such an... unusual person set foot in her home and discreetly crossed herself as their backs were turned. Though, she was happily surprised to see him wiping off his feet on the door mat and taking off his shoes. Something she wished her own children would do from time to time.

Levi examined every inch of the room that he could without seeming nosy. "You have a lovely home." He noted.

Another pleasant surprise for Carla. "Oh... thank you. Excuse me for a moment, I'm going to get Eren." Both Levi and Kutchel tipped their heads to acknowledge her statement. Carla couldn't believe the manners this boy possessed. She headed to the base of the stairs. "Eren!" She shouted. "Levi's here!"

Kutchel and Levi looked at each other in silent question, asking each other with their eyes if they had heard wrong. What was the point of excusing herself if she was just going to yell anyway?

"Coming!" They heard Eren holler back.

"He'll be down shortly." Carla said.

"We heard." Kutchel chirped lightheartedly.

Carla blushed, embarrassed. She had expected Levi to be disrespectful upon looking at him for the
first time, and she expected his mother to be the same, believing he must've gotten it from somewhere. But now she was the one lacking class, making a fool of herself. "Why don't you both take a seat at the table? I'll make a little something to eat. Would either of you like some coffee?"

"Tea?" The Ackermans asked simultaneously.

Carla felt like she was in the twilight zone. "Right, we have some of that as well. Milk or sugar?"

"No, thank you." Another in-sync response.

"Alright then." Carla busied herself with making the tea and cutting up some vegetables to put along side a bowl of dip for them to snack on while they talked.

Eren came downstairs not much later, smiling brightly when he saw Levi and Kutchel. "Hey guys." He said, taking a seat next to Levi.

"Hey." Levi replied curtly.

"Hello, Eren." Kutchel sat up as he entered the room. "How are you?"

"I'm good, you?" He leaned on the table, making himself comfortable.

"I'm well, thank you for asking." Kutchel redirected her attention to Carla. "Carla, you're son is such a nice boy. He's so polite and always behaves so well when he's over."

Eren shrunk into himself, frowning and angling his face away so Kutchel wouldn't see. He felt like he was being talked about like a child.

"Thank you." Carla beamed, setting the dish of vegetables out on the table. "That's great to hear, considering he doesn't always behave even when he's at his own home." She kept up her grin, pinching Eren's ear lightly, making him flinch away. He glared at Levi, daring him to laugh. Levi bit his lip, restraining himself as best as he could. Carla poured out some boiled water into four cups, setting out the box of tea bags. She delivered Levi and Kutchel their cups first.

"Thank you, Carla." Kutchel took her cup, gracefully setting it down on the table.

"You're welcome." Carla nodded.

Levi nudged Eren under the table with his thumb to get him to pay attention to him without having to say it. Eren looked on, understanding his intentions, as Levi accepted his cup. "Vielen Dank."

Carla started to say 'you're welcome,' then paused, looking at him incredulously. She glanced at Levi's mother to see if she was the only one who heard wrong, but when all Kutchel did was look unfazed, she raised both eyebrows at Levi. "Wait... did you just...? What did you...? Say that again."

"Vielen Dank." Levi repeated simply, smiling all the while. He took a mesh tea bag, dipping it into his cup as he waited for it to sink in.

A simper slowly worked its way into Carla's face, and soon she was lit up like a Christmas tree. "Is that...?"

"German?" Levi filled in for her. Carla nodded excitedly and Levi knew he had succeeded in winning her over. "Yes, it was."

Eren hummed quietly, realizing that he must've been planning it out. Now that he thought of it, he
remembered telling Levi about his mother's obsession with their heritage and Levi saying he knew German.

Carla resembled a child in a candy store. She frantically pointed at herself, tapping her chest. "I'm German! I mean, we're German!" She gestured to Eren.

"Get outta here." Levi feigned shock, causing Eren to roll his eyes.

"No, it's true! I've been trying to get in touch with my roots for awhile now. I make German dishes every night." Carla explained.

"That's amazing." Levi said. "I've never had a German meal before. I think that would be an interesting, cultural experience."

"Oh, it is." Carla was practically jumping up and down at this point. "German food has a terrific variety of flavors. I highly suggest you have some. Maybe I could make some for you!"

"I would love to. But... that's only if I'm welcome to stay." Levi added, waiting expectantly, crossing his legs.

"Hush up," Carla silenced him. "You're always welcome here."

Eren noticed Kutchel nodding at him, discreetly giving him a thumbs up.

~

A little over half an hour went by with Carla pestering Levi about how to say things in German and how he learned it. Eren kept telling her to give Levi a break, but he insisted that he didn't mind. After a significant amount of time passed, Carla said that she'd like to talk with Kutchel to know her a little better as well. They all moved to the living room, Eren and Levi staying with them to make sure everything went smoothly.

"Are those knitting needles I see?" Kutchel pointed to Carla's basket of yarn and unfinished projects.

"Yeah, I knit and crotchet in my spare time." Carla sighed.

"I used to weave a long time ago." Kutchel informed her. "I used to love it, but I've moved on to other hobbies. May I see something you've made?"

"Um... I'm going to say no." Carla laughed nervously. "You see, I'm not the best at knitting. Everything I've made looks so sloppy, it's a bit embarrassing." Kutchel nodded in understanding. "What hobby have you taken up in its place?"

"I'm glad you asked!" Kutchel reached for the pocket of her sweater, pulling out her phone. She turned it on and started scrolling threw her photos. "I've become really fond of scrapbooking. Have you ever tried it?"

"I don't think I have." Carla looked at Kutchel's phone as she showed her a couple pictures. "Wow, these are beautiful." She breathed out.

"Thank you." Kutchel hummed, flipping through photos of pages she'd made. "I love taking
pictures of my kids mostly, but as nice as the pictures are by themselves, scrapbooking makes them a little more special. Oh, I made this one recently. This is of my daughter's last birthday."

"How did you make a pocket on a page?" Carla asked in awe.

"It's actually very easy." Kutchel went into detail about how she constructed the page.

Eren and Levi gave each other a look, realizing that they were going to be awhile. Eren waited until the two women came to a point of silence in their conversation. "Hey mom?" He waited until she looked up at him. "Levi and I are going to my room."

"Okay, go ahead." Carla said, resuming fawning over Kutchel's work.

The two got up, heading out of the room before Kutchel stopped them. "Levi, while you're up there, could you show Eren the picture I sent you?"

"Sure." Levi followed Eren up the stairs and down the hall to his room. He looked around at the bare, white walls, the cluttered, forest green carpet and his messy desk area.

"Sorry if it's a bit of a mess." Eren apologized, scratching back of his neck, kicking his backpack out of the middle of the floor. He took a seat on his bed, smoothing out the sheets for Levi to come sit next to him.

"Could be worse." Levi noted as he sat down. Aside from the clutter, he couldn't believe the lack of character in the room. No pictures on his desk, no posters, his walls didn't even have color. He wouldn't have questioned it, assuming that Eren liked a simplistic decor, if it wasn't for the fact that Eren was so lively, so different from their surroundings. He was about to give up on looking for any signs of personal interests when he saw a plain, bronze, cross necklace hanging from the handle on the closet door. Levi pointed over to it. "Is that there for decoration?"

Eren shrugged. "Not really. Sometimes I wear it."

It didn't even have an intended purpose of being there. Levi couldn't understand why, but the fact that there was no expressive outlet visible made him almost upset. There was no sign of Eren anywhere. He tried ignoring this, remembering that Eren's interests weren't in material things, but more in what he did. Eren never talked about shows he watched or wore shirts of bands that he listened to. Eren was more concerned with doing things he liked rather than liking things already made. Even so, Levi still felt a bit of pain as a result of the lack of evidence that this room was Eren's, even if Eren didn't mind at all.

"So, what's that picture your mom wants me to see?" Eren tore Levi away from his thoughts.

"Oh... right. Let me find it." Levi took his phone out of his pants pocket and pulled up the photo, handing it over to Eren.

Eren accepted it eagerly, letting a wide grin settle on his features. "She finished it." He mused, observing the scrapbook page of him and Levi on the night of the homecoming dance. The page consisted of dark hues of red, green, and blue and would've looked like a Christmas themed page if it weren't for the black, trimmed borders. "She really talented. It's so nice."

"Yeah, it looks cooler in person." Levi corrected.

"Guess I'll have to see it next time I come over." Eren suggested.
Saturday practice was going to start soon and Levi and Eren had to get over to the school. Levi changed into his gym clothes and got his equipment and uniform out of the trunk of their car and came inside to tell his mother goodbye. Kutchel told him that she'd be staying to chat with Carla for awhile longer and then she'd be on her way, and told him to have a good day. Carla wished her son good luck and the two left for practice.

The walk over was short, thank goodness. The bitter, November wind was cold and unrelenting as they journeyed to the school. Once they arrived, they had to change into their uniforms as everyone else did. For some reason, this process took awhile for everyone to complete, so Eren, amongst a few others were done before the rest.

He took a seat on the bleachers and waited for everyone to finish up. He dug around in his bag, looking for his water bottle. The same one Petra had given him in fact. As he took a drink, he noticed out of the corner of his eye a vaguely familiar figure approaching him. He set down his water and looked to find Erwin coming to sit next to him. "Hey, Erwin." Eren said with a smile.

"Hey, what's up?" Erwin reciprocated his polite smile.

"Nothing. Just waiting for everybody else." Eren replied. "Came to watch practice?"

"Yeah, whenever I have a day off work and away from college and practice lines up, I'll come and watch." Erwin glanced over the gym, barely focusing on the other members who were also killing time. "God, I'd give my right arm to be back in this guard."

"Miss it a lot?" Eren asked.

"Mhm." Erwin nodded. "My college has a color guard team, but with my classes and a job on the side, I don't have the time."

Eren hummed noncommittally. "How long has it been since you've practiced?"

"Uh... Like, three days? Around there," Erwin chuckled when Eren stared at him, confused. "I'm not on a team, but I still have my rifle, flag, saber and my gloves. Sometimes I'll mess around with them when I'm bored."

"They let you keep the equipment?" Eren asked. He assumed that would end up being very expensive for the school.

"Only the rifle and the gloves." Erwin answered. "I bought my own flag and saber. Since the gloves are cheap and fitted for you, you can keep them. And then there's the rifle." Erwin stared into space reverently. "One doesn't simply take away your rifle, you develop an emotional attachment with it. You are one with your rifle. I've seen people name theirs, get special symbols carved into the butt of their rifle. People refuse to get new ones, so when they get dirty, they just clean them with bleach. You can imagine how heartbroken we get when they break. We will use them until it's physically impossible to."

"Break?" Eren raised a curious eyebrow. "Like when the strap falls off?" Eren couldn't picture how a rifle would break exactly.

"No." Erwin looked at him with a serious expression. "They break in half."
Eren's jaw would've dropped if he hadn't heard weirder things. "They break in half?" Eren took his rifle out of his bag, inspecting it. "How the hell does that happen?"

"Oh, yours wouldn't. May I?" Eren handed over his rifle to Erwin. "Yeah, this won't break. This is made out of silicon and its hollow. You'd have to mess up pretty bad to break one of these." Erwin gave it a once over and gave it back. "Those are the new ones, you're lucky to have one. So much nicer than the old ones." Erwin looked around the gym to find somebody with an older rifle. "You see Christa?" Eren nodded once. "Her rifle is wooden. They put tape all over the wooden ones so they don't break and hope for the best. Plus the tape helps when you handle it so you don't get splinters."

Eren wondered to himself, why must everything in color guard be a safety violation? "Then why have the wooden ones at all?"

Erwin furrowed his eyebrows at Eren, thinking that he was joking at first. "Do you know how expensive the silicon ones are?"

Eren sat back a bit, feeling foolish. "Guess I don't."

"Time to stretch, everyone!" Hanji hollered from the center of the floor.

"Gotta go." Eren said, gathering up his equipment and standing up.

"Have fun." Erwin told him.

"Thanks." Eren sent him a smile before going off to the stretch and help set up the floor and set pieces.

Setting up was never Eren's favorite part, but it needed to be done and everyone had to help. The set pieces were left alone after the floor was laid out and stayed in the back until they finished stretching and running laps.

Just as the stretching and laps were ending, everyone was distracted by an individual coming through the door. "Sorry I'm late, everybody." Rico sighed. "Car broke down. I'll be watching to see the finished routine." Now that Hanji, Levi, and Sasha had added in their solos, the routine was complete.

Without any further conversation, they all got to work, and ran through the routine. As they went through the routine, Eren was getting excited, anticipating the solos. The solos were supposed to be made on their own, rather than with the group, and Eren wanted to see what they had come up with.

As they reached the bridge of the song during their routine, it was time for the solos. At this point in the routine, only the three people were standing. Everyone else was on the ground, slowly crawling to reach their flags with the flaming pattern on the silk. Of course, Eren had to pay attention to what he was doing, but he also wanted to see the solos.

Hanji started with their solo, using two strange looking flags that Eren hadn't seen before. The flags were about half the size of a regular one, and the silk was twice as long, nearly covering the entire pole and were a shining purple hue. Eren couldn't keep up with their movements as they traversed the front border of the floor with the flags dancing all around them with such grace.

They stood still and soon, Levi was the one demanding attention as he worked with his saber so skillfully. Handling it in such a bizarre way and still keeping control was astounding. He finished off with a nine toss, executed perfectly, and falling to the ground like everyone else.
Hanji started moving again, keeping up the same style of performance and going back to the other side of the floor and stilling once again.

At this point, Eren knew it was Sasha's turn, but because of his angle, he couldn't watch. He was very disappointed with that fact, he was so excited to see what she had done with her five seconds in the spotlight, but he'd have to ask her to show him another time. He presumed that her solo came to an end as everyone grabbed their flags and jolted upward, continuing with the routine.

~

At the end of practice, Rico informed them that she was very impressed with the solos and the routine overall. She gave them advice on how to improve certain parts that weren't in sync or were just poorly done and applauded other parts. When she was done with notes, she let Levi take over the announcements.

"We're getting close to our first performance. It's the weekend after thanksgiving so we have to get everything in order before we go. So, now isn't the time to start slacking."

Eren snapped out of his daze. Their first show was coming up so soon? Why hadn't anyone told him? Maybe he was told, but wasn't exactly listening at the time. He made sure to pay close attention to what Levi was saying.

"Keep your grades up, so you're allowed to compete, stay hydrated, eat well, and for the love of god, don't get sick. If you get sick, tough shit, because you're coming in anyway. I speak from experience, it's a bitch to deal with strep throat or something equally as annoying while performing." Levi warned them. "With that being said, practice is over."

~

"Don't you two stay up too late, it'll mess with your sleeping schedule." Carla told Eren and Levi.

"We won't, I promise." Eren said. "Goodnight."


"Goodnight, Mrs. Jaeger." Levi replied.

Carla exited the room, closing the door and headed off to bed, leaving the two boys to themselves. After they returned from practice, they spent most of the day with Eren teaching Levi how to play video games and then having Mikasa teach them how to really play those video games like a pro. After that, a cultural meal had been served. Levi kept complimenting Carla's cooking like the good guest he was and saying little things here and there in German, making Carla squeal with delight.

Now, they were just relaxing after a long day, turning off the lights and settling in, under the blankets. Eren thought back to guard practice. "How did Hanji get such strange flags?"

"Hm? Oh, those are called ghost flags. We don't use them often, because they don't usually fit with
the show and we only have one pair. But the audience always loves them, because they look 'pretty.'" Levi explained. He rolled over into his side, laying his arm across Eren's waist.

Eren turned to his side too, getting closer to Levi. The fact that their first performance was coming up so quickly settled back into his mind. "Should I be nervous for our first show?"

Levi shook his head. "Not really. Of course, I don't think you can help it. Try to be excited, because you won't want to forget it."

Eren breathed out, trying to calm his thoughts, saving the worry for another day. "I guess I am excited. I just don't know what to expect."

"When we get closer to our first show, I'll give you a run down of how it will go." Levi promised, giving Eren a kiss on the nose.

"Thanks. Let's go to sleep now." Eren cuddled closer, so that he was pressed up against Levi.

"Okay. Glad we can sleep like this." Levi hummed, holding Eren tightly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well that's the best part of being secretly gay. Your parents don't know, so they don't make you sleep in different rooms to prevent you from fucking." Levi chuckled.

Eren snickered. "Did your mom ever make you do that?"

"Nah, but I've heard of some parents who do that." Levi closed his eyes. "If yours do, we wouldn't know. Let's just get to sleep."

"Okay." Eren agreed, also closing his eyes. Now that he thought of it, he was very grateful for keeping his secret, for multiple reasons now. His parents wouldn't separate them, so hypothetically, they could do anything they wanted. He could have Levi however he wanted, if they were careful enough that is. The more he thought about it, the better it sounded. He knew he should try getting to sleep, but a little situation between his legs made sleep the last thing on his mind. He wasn't sure if Levi was asleep already so he settled for ignoring it, or at least trying to.

Levi yawned and readjusted, tucking Eren's head under his and bringing himself closer, if that was even possible. He lifted his leg, bringing it up unintentionally between Eren's and halted when his knee reached and unexpected hardness. Levi opened his eyes and pulled his head back, his gaze barling down questioningly at his boyfriend. There was too much amusement to be had when Eren looked away, mortified. "Eren Jr. Having a good time down there, is he?" Levi teased.

"Oh my god, Levi! Don't call it that!" Eren hissed. "This isn't funny!" He tried moving back to put some space between them, but Levi's arms wouldn't allow it.

"Does mon loup need me to take care of his little problem?" Levi used one hand to scratch behind Eren's ear and the other to travel down and squeeze one of Eren's round cheeks, making him tense up.

"Levi, we can't." Eren pleaded. "We don't have lube."

"We can do other things without it, you know that." Levi kissed his way down Eren's jaw line, urging him on.

"But, my sister's room is right down the hall, she could hear us!"
Levi backed off, pausing his movements. "Oh, that's right. I forgot you're a screamer."

Eren slapped Levi's shoulder. "I'm not that loud!"

Levi smirked and advanced on. "Then she won't hear you. Keep it down, and we'll be just fine. I'll take care of your little situation real quick and then we'll go to sleep."

Eren couldn't argue when Levi kept massaging his ass and playing with his ear. "Th-then just... hurry up."

"My pleasure, mon loup." Levi said with dark promise, guiding his hands over to pull down Eren's pajama pants and his boxers along with them, kissing him and allowing his tongue to venture through his mouth all the while to keep the noise down.

Eren helped Levi push down his pants just enough for Levi to be able to gently take a hold of him as low as he could and start fondling him in his hand. Eren tried stifling a moan, any noise that came out Levi drank up gladly. Eren grabbed onto Levi's shirt, needing to do something with his hands.

Levi moved his hand upward, wrapping it around Eren's erection, slowly and tantalizingly dragging his hand up towards the tip, and bringing it back down just as slow.

"Levi, please." Eren begged against his lips. "Faster."

"Come on, let me have some fun with you." Levi pulled back Eren's foreskin, allowing the precum to seep out. "Aw, babe. You're already so wet." Levi dropped his voice to a husky whisper, knowing it's drive Eren mad with desire. "Always so needy."

Eren whimpered quietly, trying to make as little noise as possible. Once Levi started stroking him again, he thrusted up his hips to gain more friction. He felt Levi's other arm snake away from him and fumble with something. Eren couldn't focus on it for too long. Not when Levi's other hand was driving him wild.

All of the sudden, Eren felt Levi's own length being pushed up against his. And soon, Eren could feel Levi's piercing rolling against him as Levi took both of them in his hand, working with them both. Eren looked up to Levi in surprise, to which Levi replied breathily. "What? It's hard to restrain myself when you look like that and make those cute noises."

Eren just about melted in Levi's embrace. He brought Levi in for another kiss and wove his hands into Levi's locks, purposefully scratching here and there. Levi groaned into Eren's mouth, gyrating his hips into Eren.

Eren let out a low moan and moved with him. He was taken by surprise when Levi stopped and pulled back. He made a noise of complaint and tried pulling Levi back to him. "It's not enough."

Levi breathed out. Eren looked at him with wide eyes, worried that he wanted to stop.

Levi took him by the shoulders, shoving him to lay on his back. Levi hoisted himself up to hover above Eren and pulled off his pants completely, then removed his own. He placed either hand beside Eren's head, settling himself between his legs. He started rocking his hips against Eren's, rutting their cocks together, making the bed faintly creak.

Eren felt so euphoric, this was a much better way, he decided. This way, all of Levi's weight was moving with him, sending his mind into oblivion. He stared up at Levi, grabbing his forearms, adoring the way his brows furrowed in pleasure and how his eyes shut and mouth hung open. Between his movements and his facial expressions, Eren came closer and closer to reaching his
Eren's breath hitched and his jaw dropped as he was ready to yell out for Levi. Luckily, Levi saw what Eren was about to do and instinctively covered his mouth with his hand to keep him from shouting, panicked that if he let any noise out, they'd be caught. After a moment, realizing that they were probably safe, he replaced his hand with his mouth, kissing him roughly and letting Eren play with his lip ring.

Levi sped up the pace and soon, they both reached their limit. As he rocked his hips harder and faster, the creaking of the bed became ridiculously loud. He figured that the bed must've been old. Levi brought both his hands to the side of Eren's face, and Eren attached his hands to Levi's shoulders blades as they both rode out their orgasms together.

Levi kept rocking his hips slowly until both of them had finished. He continued kissing Eren, only less intensely as before to help bring them down from their high.

After they'd calmed themselves, Levi sat back, looking at the mess he and Eren had made together. "Have anything to clean that up with?" Levi asked, chest still heaving.

Eren lightly laughed, staring up at him, dazed. "Yeah, on my desk... there's tissues."

Levi couldn't help but smile down at him before he got up, walking over to his desk, cleaning himself up an bringing some tissues over to clean Eren up as well. Something about how Levi did the tiniest of things to make sure that Eren was well taken care of made his heart skip a beat. Levi disposed of the dirtied tissues and laid back with Eren, helping him get dressed, even though he didn't think he needed the assistance.

Eren cuddled up to Levi, just as he had before. "Sorry I kept us from sleeping." Eren apologized insincerely.

"Hey, I'm not complaining." Levi said, rubbing Eren's back. He kissed the top of Eren's head a few times, breathing in his scent. "I love you, mon grand." Levi cooed into his hair.

Eren's heart ached with how strongly he felt for Levi and how special Levi made him feel. "I love you too, Levi."

"Let's go to sleep." Levi murmured, threading his fingers through Eren's soft hair.

Eren hummed to acknowledge him, but otherwise did not continue the conversation before they fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I'm just waiting for people who picked up on that to start screaming at me with rage. For those of you who know what I'm talking about, you just know, and I'm not even sorry. For those of you who don't know, consider yourselves lucky.

Translation: Vielen Dank. - Thank you very much.

I have to keep adding in sex scenes to keep my readers after the last chapter. I'm still sorry about the previous chapter's shitty quality. (Jk that's my excuse to keep writing smut, sin for the win.)
I might be starting a new fic soon, I'm excited about it and the first chapter is started! I'm not as excited for it as I am for this fic, but I'll never love any of my fics more than this one. Fact. (This fic is so self indulgent for me, holy shiet, it's my precious child.) So yeah, be on the look out for that fic (It'll also be a little self indulgent for me.)

Also, what do you guys want to see in this fic? I'm curious. I'm mostly writing this fic because I love this au too much and I can't be stopped, but it's for you guys too. (You're all too good to me, such lovely things you say.) I'd tell you what I'm looking forward to, but that'd ruin it.

Sorry for any errors, I don't edit! If you want to check out my tumblr, it's dr-s--art. (So many shameless plugs, I'm trash.) If you liked this, let me know with a comment or kudos! Thank you soooo much for reading! <3
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

The day of their first color guard competition comes along and Eren doesn't know what to expect.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to StormsOfLegends! (Please, for the love of god, someone teach me how to make a link on mobile) They commented the coolest color guard pun and it's used in this chapter with their permission. I've been waiting to put in several puns, (I have a pun obsession) and this chapter seemed just right for that. THEY ALSO MADE THE CUTEST ART FOR THIS FIC, LOOKY, IT MADE ME SO HAPPY http://stormsoflegends.tumblr.com/post/142089464644/dr-sart-i-have-no-excuse-for-this-garbage-other

(Again, tell me how to make real links)

I'm sorry for the long wait, so much has been happening. Without any further ado, I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Levi pried his eyes open slowly, not too thrilled with the idea of waking up. His gaze shifted around as he became more aware of his surroundings and something wasn't right. His pictures and posters weren't on the walls, in fact nothing was on the walls. These weren't his sheets, they didn't look like anyone's sheets with their lack of color and pattern. Nearly panicking, Levi tried rolling over, but immediately stopped after hearing a small whimper and feeling a solid mass underneath him. Levi looked down, seeing Eren, now wide awake, staring back up at him. Then Levi remembered, this was Eren's home.

"You're crushing me." Eren mumbled.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Levi hurried to get off of him. "How long have you been awake?" He rubbed at his eyes, willing away his exhaustion.

"Since you smothered me." Eren said, giggling and taking his turn to rub at his eyes.

"I'm not that heavy, I only rolled over." Levi tried convincing him that he was overreacting. "Are you calling me fat?" He started tickling the juncture between Eren's neck and shoulder, making him chortle uncontrollably.

"Levi-stop!" Eren begged, trying to wiggle out of Levi's vicinity to catch his breath, but he hadn't realized Levi's other arm was wrapped securely around his waist.

"Apologize for calling me fat." Levi didn't let up, attacking Eren, tickling him more. "I didn't know
you were so ticklish."

"Please-Levi, I can't... can't breathe!" Eren said in between gasps of air. Levi decided that he'd tortured Eren enough, so he let him go. He took a minute to regain his breath. "You asshole."

"Hey," Levi held up his hands in defense. "You're the one who called me fat."

"I never said you were fat! Even if you were though, you'd still be drop dead gorgeous." Eren defended, when Levi scoffed, he continued. "Have you looked in a mirror? You look like fucking Hercules."

Levi rolled his eyes. "I do not."

"Shut the hell up. You're jacked, pull up your shirt." Eren didn't wait for Levi to do as he asked and pulled his shirt up himself. "Just as I suspected, eight pack."

"Put that down." Levi pushed down his shirt, frowning. "You're forgetting that you have quite the body yourself, mon grand."

Levi worked his hands underneath Eren's shirt, feeling around his abdominal muscles then moving up to his chest, loving how Eren squirmed under his touch. "And my favorite part..." Levi brought his hands up to Eren's ass and squeezed. "So nice."

Eren chuckled, wrapping his arms around Levi's neck. "Why are you so obsessed with my ass?"


Eren let out a burst of laughter, rolling his eyes. "Well, I wanna move this perfect ass downstairs to get something to eat, so keep your hands to yourself until we're there."

Levi chuckled. "Fine. I'm feeling a little hungry too."

"Then let's go."

~

They worked their way downstairs into the kitchen to find Carla already making breakfast. They took a seat at the table across from Mikasa, who was sitting there patiently waiting while playing on her DS. Eren was the first to speak up. "What's for breakfast, ma?"

Carla turned around after setting a tray in the oven. "Chocolate chip muffins." She answered simply. "Good morning, Levi. Did you sleep well?"

"Yeah, I did, thank you." Levi replied politely.

"I slept well too. Thanks for asking mom." Eren said sarcastically, smiling over-exaggeratedly.

Carla sat next to Mikasa, across from the two boys. "Oh hush up," she joked. "You make it sound like I don't care how your night was."

"You didn't ask him." Mikasa added, not looking up from her game. "Come to think of it, you didn't ask me either. Is Levi your new favorite?"
Eren and Levi stifled their laughter, Levi doing a much better job as Carla glared at Eren, then back to Mikasa. "You watch it missy, or you're not getting any muffins."

"I'm getting muffins either way." Mikasa mumbled.

Carla sent her a look as she got up to tend to other things. "Tea, Levi?"

"I'd love some tea." Eren interjected.

"As would I." Mikasa added.

Levi huffed out amused breaths at Eren and Mikasa's antics, watching Carla become more and more agitated. "Will you two stop? I want to take care of our guest first, is that so wrong?" Carla sighed, now addressing Levi. "Would you like tea, dear?"

"Yes, please." Levi showed Carla mercy. Levi started listening to the quiet sound affects coming from Mikasa's game. "What are you playing?"

"Pokémon Diamond." She responded, still far too invested to look away.

"You're not going to get more out of her." Eren told Levi. "That game is her life. She won't communicate if she's in the middle of a battle."

Mikasa's head snapped up as she frowned at Eren. "I can still carry on a conversation, I'm not that obsessed."

"Prove it then," Eren challenged. "Keep up a conversation."

"Very well." Mikasa added, determined. Eren heard the sound affect coming from her game that signified that she had entered a battle. "Alright, I've got a conversation starter for you. I think we have mice. Or worse, maybe we have rats, I don't know. I'm not an expert on rodents."

Carla dropped what she was doing. "Mice? Are you sure? What makes you think we have mice?"

"I heard them last night." Mikasa replied, pressing buttons to attack her opponent. "In the walls." Now she held everyone's attention. No one else had heard mice. "At first I thought it was one of those dreams where you're dreaming you're awake and it was just a random noise, then I realized I was awake. And I'm pretty sure it was mice in the walls. It's the only thing I could think of."

"That's weird, I didn't hear any mice." Eren thought aloud.

"I didn't hear anything either." Levi agreed.

"Maybe we don't have mice. I could be wrong." Mikasa shrugged. "All I know is I heard this rhythmic squeaking. That's the only thing that keeps me from knowing if it's mice or not, it was timed. It was like a constant beat of squeaking."

Eren looked at Levi, furrowing his brows. "Were you awake longer than me? Are you sure you didn't hear that?"

Levi shook his head. "No. I don't think it'd be mice if it was constant."

"Right? It's so weird." Mikasa said. "It sounded a little like this." Mikasa made a quiet, high pitched screeching sound. A few beats of the staccato and suddenly everything clicked to Eren. His heart skipped at beat and the color in his face drained. He felt so lucky that Mikasa was staring at her DS, because he was certain his eyes were the size of saucers. Levi stared at him with a perplexed
expression for a moment, before he realized it too.

She had heard them. Well, not them, she had heard the bed. Squeaking as Levi rutted Eren into it. They tried remaining calm, even through their mortification.

"I don't think that's mice." Carla said thoughtfully. "Maybe a branch from that tree outside was scraping against your window."

Mikasa thought it over. "Maybe-

"Yes." Eren interrupted loudly. "The tree, of course!"

"That makes more sense." Levi agreed.

"The tree..." Eren kept going, perhaps overdoing it by now.

"The tree." Levi nodded.

"That would be it..."

"Mhm..."

"Glad we solved the mystery." Eren added awkwardly.

Levi kicked Eren under the table, signaling that he was now being a bit much. At this point, Mikasa had finished the battle and quirked an eyebrow. "Are you guys okay?"

"Yup, never better." Eren quipped hastily.

"Just fine." Levi said, a little more believable than Eren though.

Mikasa shook her head, giving up on attempting to understand them. The two sighed, relieved that they were now in the clear.

~

Carla took the muffins out of the oven, putting them on a plate to cool before she distributed them to everyone. Eren earned a smack on the back of the head after commenting on how they were better than her German dishes. Levi took the polite route and complimented her, receiving more brownie points as he went on.

Carla herself sat down to have breakfast with everyone else, enjoying the reward of food after working so hard to provide it for everyone.

They all heard heavy footsteps from the living room rushing around, retracing steps and moving all over the place in a hasty manner. "Who's that?" Levi asked.

"Oh, I forgot!" Carla exclaimed. "You haven't met Grisha, their father." She motioned to Eren and Mikasa. "He came home very late last night, he's a surgeon and works long shifts. He's probably getting ready to go to work now."

Eren visibly deflated, worrying Levi. He had hoped that Levi wouldn't have to meet his father at
all, not because he was scared, but because he knew that his father wouldn't like Levi. Levi sensed his uneasiness, grabbing a hold of his hand under the table. Eren let out a long breath as he felt Levi's hand, trying to calm himself down. Perhaps a miracle could occur and Grisha would be warm and inviting.

But to hope for such a thing would be asking for too much.

Grisha came into the kitchen, checking his watch and walked over to pour himself a cup of coffee, without sparing his family a glance. After he prepared his beverage, he turned around, paying attention to stirring in the sugar before lifting his gaze. "Carla, have you seen my- oh my lord!"

Grisha gasped as his eyes landed on Levi. He didn't even try to hide the fact that he was staring. "Um... Carla? Who is this... boy?"

Carla set down her muffin and glared daggers at her husband. "Why don't you ask him yourself, dear?" She spat bitterly and dripping with criticism.

Grisha looked to be thinking it over for a minute. Trying to decide if it was a good idea.

Levi knew that it would've been easier to just introduce himself and save everyone the trouble. "I'm Levi, Eren's friend." He sent him a smile, trying to be polite and show him that there was no reason to be nervous around him.

"Ah... hello." Grisha said timidly. He never relented with his staring. To him, Levi was like a dangerous animal that had worked its way into his home.

Carla rolled her eyes, she hated when her husband was like this, but out of fear of arguing in front of the children and a guest, she kept silent. She understood why he acted this way, but she knew Levi now and she didn't like how he just gawked at him.

Mikasa huffed an agitated breath as she continued on with her game. She thought that if she ignored him, maybe she wouldn't feel as embarrassed that her dad was being so rude.

Eren couldn't help the pure anger that boiled up inside him. He scowled at his father, hoping that he'd look at him and see that he was silently screaming at him to stop. He hoped that his eyes would tell him that he was sick of how he acted. 'Please,' he thought. 'Stop looking at him like a freak. For once in my life, can you treat someone who's different like they're a person. You can't keep doing this.' He felt his eyes burning. The first time his dad met his boyfriend, even if he wasn't aware of that fact, he had to treat him like a circus act. Through all of this Levi seemed so calm and that made Eren sick. Was he used to this? Why wasn't he as upset as he was? He couldn't stand this any longer. "Dad." He said firmly.

Grisha snapped out of his mindset, facing his son.

Eren cleared his throat. "You're going to be late." He stated simply.

"You're right." And just like that, Grisha went back to ignoring everyone, finishing up his daily routine.

Eren gripped on his glass, willing away the sick feeling in his stomach. How could he be so cold, so unkind to not realize what he was doing? He couldn't see anything, all that occupied his mind was how anyone could be so disrespectful towards Levi, his wonderful boyfriend who was nothing but warmhearted and considerate. He wanted to scream, he wanted to be anywhere but there. He actually didn't know what he really wanted to be perfectly honest, but it wasn't this.

"Eren," Levi's voice took him away from that train of thought. Eren looked at him, pain swimming
in his eyes and waited for him to say something, anything. "You're going to break the glass."

Eren looked at the glass of water that he held in his hand that was turning white with constant applied pressure. He loosened his grip, dropping the glass, letting it settle on the table. He lifted his eyes to see his mother staring at him worriedly and Mikasa glancing at him to confirm that he was alright and returned to playing her game. "Sorry." He mumbled.

Grisha swiped his car keys off the counter and left without a word. As soon as the door had shut behind him, Carla offered her apology. "I'm terribly sorry about that Levi. Grisha isn't very open around strangers, just give him time, he'll grow on you."

"That's okay, Mrs. Jaeger. I don't mind at all." Levi said.

Carla gave him a sad smile, happy that he put up with Grisha, but still upset that he had to put up with him at all. "Well, whether you mind or not, I'm going to have a talk with him. You should always feel welcome here."

"And I do." Levi promised.

"Good." Carla ended the conversation, attention going back to her breakfast.

Levi and Eren were quick to finish their food. Eren didn't speak for the rest of the meal, and was silent as he took up their plates and glasses to the sink. Not wanting to question Eren's silence in the kitchen, Levi waited until they were in the privacy of Eren's bedroom to talk with him.

Eren dropped himself onto his beanbag chair and Levi slowly sunk to his level, wrapping his arms around him, combing his fingers through his hair. "Are you okay?"

"No," Eren sniffled, eyebrows furrowing in anger. "The least he could do was treat you like a person, but he couldn't even fucking do that." He looked at Levi, eyes threatening to spill a tear or two. "I'm sorry Levi, I should've yelled at him. I should've stopped him, I-"

"Eren, no." Levi interrupted. "You didn't have to do anything. You don't need to apologize for your dad being rude, that's not your fault." He kissed Eren's forehead, trying to soothe him. "And I don't care if he did that, I usually get that reaction when people meet me."

"But that's not fair!" Eren shouted, causing Levi to start stroking the side of his face, trying to calm him still. "You shouldn't have to be used to that, it's not fair. He doesn't even know you. He doesn't know what you're like, he didn't even give you a chance." Eren took a long breath, focusing his thoughts. "Levi... you're perfect and you just let him treat you like you were less than that, and I hate it. I hate it so much, I should've done something. I don't want people looking at you like there's something wrong with you. I don't want people treating you like shit because of who you are."

Levi had lost count of all the times his heart would break for Eren. Something in his voice sounded like internalized fear. Levi knew that these were things that Eren was scared of happening to him and Levi didn't want to imagine how hurt Eren would be, should he come out and have people treating him the same way.

"Why can't everyone love all of you the way I do?" Eren asked rhetorically, resentment still lingering in his tone.

"Yes, why indeed?" Levi wondered. Why couldn't everyone love all of his Eren? "It's okay, Eren." Levi shushed him. "Not everyone is understanding. There will always be people who will be unfair and won't be kind. But you need to learn to not care, and that we'll be okay, because we're the ones
who know better." Levi kissed the top of Eren's head a few times.

"But it's not fair. You shouldn't have to deal with it." Eren whined, heart aching for Levi.

"I know it's not fair, but that's how things are." Levi whispered regretfully.

All Eren could do was listen to Levi and attempt to understand. Levi was right. Not everyone was as accepting as they could be and that was an unfortunate fact of life that he'd have to live with. "I'm sorry."

"No, you have nothing to be sorry for." Levi kissed Eren softly, promising to spend the rest of the day relaxing with him and make everything better.

~

It came. The day finally came. The day of their first color guard show had finally arrived. And Eren felt sick to his stomach.

Everyday that passed up until this point, he had only grown more anxious, even with Levi's words of encouragement. Levi repeated everyday the schedule they would follow, what would be expected from him, how easy it would be and all the fun he'd have. It only helped dissipate a fraction of his nerves. Eren still feared that he'd be made fun of, he'd screw up the routine causing them to lose, he'd faint on the floor, so many things could go wrong. He'd spent thanksgiving nearly having a heart attack the entire day as the competition was all he could think about. The thought occurred to him many times that he was merely overthinking the whole thing, but it wasn't long before the pessimistic thoughts wormed their way back. Which was why he was currently dressing himself in his guard shirt and jacket, getting ready to get going, failing to breathe properly.

Eren heard a knock on his bedroom door. "Eren?" His mother called. "Are you almost ready?"

"Yeah, almost." Eren hollered back. He made sure he had all his equipment in his flag bag, checked that his gloves and shoes were in the side pocket and made sure his uniform along with the sleeves were in their own bag. After everything was where it was supposed to be, he took a glance in the mirror, examining the team logo on his shirt, turning around to see the word 'Rogue' printed out on the back and exited his room.

He slid on the banister down the stairs, wanting to leave as quickly as possible. He didn't care that his mother would yell at him, the day already seemed hopeless. He was just about to open the door and walk over to the school, but he was stopped by his mother.

"Eren, hold on for just a minute." Carla came in from the living room, holding something behind her back. "I won't take up too much of your time."

Eren halted before the door, sighing with impatience. "I need to go." He told her. He just wanted to getting everything over with as quickly as possible.

"I know." Carla stepped closer. "I don't know if I'll be able to see you before you perform tonight, so I want to give you something now." She held out her hand, signaling Eren to do the same.

Eren held his palm out, letting his mother set something cold and metallic in his hand, feeling a lighter material follow. He looked at his hand, observing the brass key on a cord that rested there.
"What's this key to?"

"Nothing, really." Carla explained. "I found it years ago and I used to wear it around for good luck. Even if you can't wear it during your performance, I want you to have it to bring you luck as well."

Eren let his shoulders slump and allowed his body to become less tense. It helped that he was receiving support from his mother on such a stressful day. He smiled up at her, throwing on the necklace. "Thanks mom. I'll need all the luck I can get."

"Nonsense, you'll do great." She assured him. "Mikasa and I will be picking up Armin soon and we'll head over to the school. I have the directions, so I'll get there as soon as I can. I don't know if I'll see you again before you perform, so I just want to tell you to have fun. I can't wait to see it." She brought her son into hug and patted his back.

"Thank you, ma." Eren returned the hug and pulled back. He knew he shouldn't have asked, but he needed to. "Is dad going?"

Carla sighed. "Eren... he has work. His work isn't the kind he can just reschedule. You understand, don't you?"

Eren nodded. "I do." Of course, he harbored negative feelings for his father and even came to be infuriated with him most of the time, but he was still his dad. He wanted him to at least try to be a good father. Although, he couldn't blame him for not being able to come, he wasn't unreasonable. "I'll see you later."

"Good luck!" Carla waved goodbye as he closed the door.

~

When Eren arrived at the school, the entire guard had already busied themselves with packing everything up. Even Rico was present, helping with the preparations. It wasn't long before Levi grabbed him and assigned him with a job like everyone else. Eren was appointed to loading up the equipment into the bus. He took note of Hanji and Bertolt dismantling the background set pieces so that they'd be easier to put in the outside compartment of the bus along side the floor and equipment left there. After that, it was mentioned to the guard, by Rico, that they would each be responsible for their uniforms, lunches and any other personal items they brought on the bus. With that being made clear, the guard boarded the bus.

Isabel begged him to sit next to her, and he couldn't say no to her. Of course, Levi could offer more comfort in a time like this, so he made sure that he sat across from them. On the bus, Eren noticed that nearly everyone had brought purses and bags with them, filled with food and things to help pass the time. Eren hadn't been smart enough to think of bringing something, but now wasn't the time to get upset about it.

The bus stopped at the middle school to pick up around seventeen students and a few adults. Eren turned to Isabel to question her about it. "Why are these people getting on?"

"This is one of the younger guards." She answered. "They're competing too."

Eren couldn't help but get excited after hearing that, remembering the adorable children he'd met after accompanying Levi to their practice. "Are the little kids coming too?"
"Nah," Isabel shook her head. "Only the varsity and the junior varsity compete. The junior guard and little guard only perform in exhibition."

Eren deflated slightly, but soon became just as anxious as the bus headed off for the school they'd be performing at. He looked around and saw that the rest of the guard members were having the time of their lives. Laughing, happily playing music out loud, telling stories to the younger guard, Eren felt like the only one who wasn't having fun. He subconsciously clung to the brass key his mother had given him and took several deep breaths.

"That's pretty! Where'd you get that?" Isabel asked excitedly.

Eren raised a brow for a moment before realizing what she was referring to. "Oh, um, my mom gave this to me this morning for good luck."

"Aw, that was nice of her." Isabel marveled at the necklace. "We don't need luck though, we've got good members and that's all we need. Nice to have luck too, though."

"Well, maybe you guys don't need luck, but I'll need it to keep from passing out." Eren muttered.

"Are you nervous?" She teased with a lilt to her voice, nudging his shoulder.

Eren nodded sheepishly.

"Don't be nervous! Competitions are so much fun!" Isabel encouraged him. "You're going to have a great time, just wait until you get there and you'll see what I mean."

"Think about it this way," Levi butted into the conversation. "Unless you're getting ready to perform or if you're on the stage, don't think about it. You need to think about the fact that you're competing when you're getting ready so you're prepared. And it's obvious that you need to think about it when you're performing so you don't have your head in the clouds. But when you're not near the stage or on it, you have no reason to worry, just relax and enjoy yourself. It's your first show and you don't want to miss anything just because you're nervous."

Eren nodded, taking in his words. Levi was right, Eren didn't want to forget such a big event all because he was stressing over nothing.

"But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't focus when it's time to go on." Levi added. "If you're daydreaming as you get on stage, you'll mess up. And if you throw away this show, you're going to be ruining it for your teammates. So, don't let your guard down."

Eren let the advice sink in, just as another thing occurred to him. He fixed Levi with a funny look. "Wait... was that a fucking pun? But like... times three?"

Isabel snickered from the other side of Eren as Levi looked at him with his usual impassive expression. "Depends, did you get the message?"

"Yes." Eren answered.

"Then, yeah. Why the fuck not?" Levi shrugged.
Twenty minutes into the bus ride, a silence settled between Eren, Levi, and Isabel. The quietness didn't help Eren at all, it only gave him the opportunity to concentrate on his fears and worries. Thankfully, Farlan moved up to sit diagonally from him, taking him away from his bad thoughts.

"I noticed that you looked a little stressed out." Farlan began. "I asked Rico earlier and she said I'm allowed to play music with my speaker as long as it's not too loud. So, go ahead. Pick any song that'll help your mood." Farlan shoved his iPod in Eren's direction, insisting that he take it.

"That's a great idea!" Isabel chimed in. "We can all sing to it and it'll be so much fun! That's what we always do on the bus. Usually we wait until after the show, but you look like you can use anything to calm you down." She patted Eren's shoulder sympathetically.

Eren accepted Farlan's iPod and started scrolling. "Thanks." He said smiling as he searched for a song he was familiar with. After a couple minutes of not finding anything, he glanced at Farlan nervously. "Sorry it's taking so long."

"It's cool, take your time." Farlan dismissed his comment.

Eren kept looking for a few minutes and eventually, he ran out of songs. Embarrassed, he offered Farlan his iPod back. "I don't know any of those songs... or the bands."

"That's alri- wait, what?" Farlan stared at him, puzzled. "You didn't recognize a single song from this? What do you listen to?" At this point, Isabel had joined him in staring at Eren with a perplexed expression. Levi merely watched it all unfold.

"I don't really listen to music. I mean, I've heard the songs that everyone knows, but I just don't listen to it."

"Now you've done it." Levi muttered as he saw Farlan and Isabel's jaws drop.

"Are you kidding me?!" Isabel screeched.

"What do you do in your free time?" Farlan asked.

Eren felt like a fool for saying anything. "I don't know, watch parkour videos on YouTube... I don't do a lot in my free time."

Isabel and Farlan just stared at him like they had been put through culture shock. "So, you mean to tell me," Farlan started at an unreasonably high pitch, "that you don't know Placebo, Nirvana, Andrea Bocelli, Bruce Springsteen, Matt and Kim, OR Grimes?"

Eren was about to answer 'no' when Isabel grabbed his shoulder, turning him towards her. "You've never heard of The Dresden Dolls, Cyndi Lauper, The Dave Mathews Band, The Smiths, Jimi Hendrix OR OneRepublic?"

Eren started shaking his head, but was once again interrupted by Farlan. "What about Panic! At The Disco, U2, Johnny Rivers, Megadeth, Aretha Franklin or Imagine Dragons?" They were beginning to look desperate at this point.

"Smashing Pumpkins?" Isabel continued. "How about Gerard Way, Alice In Chains, Chuck Berry, Simple Minds, Queen, Twenty One Pilots, Men Without Hats or Nicki Minaj?"

Eren snapped his fingers, pointing at Isabel to signal her to stop. "I know her."

Isabel sighed in frustration. "Well, everybody knows her, so that doesn't count."
"Not to sound stupid, but all those people don't sound like they're even the same genre." Eren pointed out.

"They're not." Farlan said. "We have a very eclectic music taste. Are you sure you haven't heard of any of them?"

Eren thought over the few names that he actually caught. "You said Queen, right?" They both nodded affirmatively. "I know them... sorta."

They both breathed out a sigh of relief. "Well at least that's something." Isabel mused. "We have to show you some real music, asap." She took Farlan's iPod out of his hands and started scrolling through the options. "Farlan? What should I play for him first?"

"Hmm." Farlan comically scratched his chin. "Eren, do you prefer simple music or more intricate music?"

Eren stared dumbly for a moment. "Uh... the second?"

"Right then." Farlan nodded. "You look like a Misfits kind of guy. Isabel, let's have a little Saturday Night playing, please and thank you."

"You got it!" Isabel chirped. She searched for the song he'd suggested and pressed it, eyeing Eren for his reaction.

The guitar came streaming through the speaker, and if Eren was completely honest, it was better than everything he'd ever heard. He expected them to play a slow, comforting song, but the rough instrumentals on their own were enough to distract him. Much like all the other songs they'd played for him, it was unlike anything he'd ever heard.

Once the low, wails kicked in, Eren decided that he was going to enjoy this song very much.

"Turn it up!" They heard Ymir tell from the back. Farlan obliged, increasing the volume and patting on his knee along to the rhythm.

Eren couldn't prevent himself from smiling madly as Isabel started singing along to the song and soon he was emerged in the music.

~There's 52 ways to murder anyone
~One or two are the same
~And they both work as well

Eren was a bit taken aback by the lyrics, but couldn't find it in himself to mind. He looked over to Levi and saw that Levi was already staring back, baring a small grin. Eren took a moment to appreciate how he felt such a new sense of happiness. The elation of hearing a new song and being surrounded by his favorite people. It was truly something foreign, but amazing as well.

~ And the cops won't listen all night
~And so maybe, I'll be over
~Just as soon as I fill them all in

As if for no reason at all, Eren started laughing. Levi quirked an eyebrow at him, smirking, whereas Isabel and Farlan just sang louder at noticing his mirth, each of them grabbing his
shoulders and swaying with him to the song, which only made him laugh harder of course.

~And I can remember when I saw her last

~We were running all around and having a blast

~But the backseat of the drive-in is so lonely without you

~I know when you're home

The ridiculousness of it all, how Eren was so high strung and it all melted away with a little song. It had Eren believing that maybe the night wouldn't be so bad.

~They were playing our song

~Crying on a Saturday night

Eren couldn't believe it, maybe it was just because he lived a closed off life, but as if by magic, plenty of other people on the bus started singing along, all familiar with the words. It didn't surprise him that Hanji was the loudest and most off-key. Though, he didn't care much, or at all.

The bus ride was spent with them all listening to The Misfits and having a laid back, enjoyable time.


After waking up with such a bad attitude, Eren didn't think he'd be this excited. He didn't have time to stop and look at everything on the walls, the trophies in their cases, the strangers passing by. Rico was leading them all down a hallway to get to a destination that Eren wasn't sure of its location.

Eren knew he wouldn't get lost, as long as he stayed with the people wearing the same team shirts and jackets that he wore. But just in case, he stayed close to Levi as he attempted to take as much in with his eyes as he could. The crowd was buzzing with energy and flowing in all directions. They passed a few teams that also had yet to get in their uniforms, as well as a few stray members from different teams wandering about the halls.

Eren almost collided with Bertolt as the whole team came to a sudden stop. He hadn't looked where he was going, and therefore didn't realize that they were at a desk with people taking money and marking things down on sheets of paper. Before he knew what was happening, Farlan pushed him to the front where the woman sitting at the table asked him to hold out his wrist. He did so without asking questions and let her stamp on a blue circle. He assumed it was for them to tell that he was already admitted and didn't need to pass through again.

As quickly as he was rushed to the center, he was pulled back and the guard kept moving. It was all too much all at once.

They ascended a flight of stairs and weaved through different hallways, eventually stopping at a classroom. Rico opened the door and let them all pour inside. Eren studied the room, figuring by the posters with graphs and equations that they were in a math room. Eren wondered why they were there in the first place.
"Listen up!" Rico called the attention of both guards. "This is the room we'll be staying in for this show. Remember, you're all representing our school so be on your best behavior and keep this room clean. If you don't want to have your personal items taken, leave them in here. No one can come in here but us. Now, the varsity doesn't go on for several hours, and we don't need to get ready for two hours. Junior varsity you need to be back in one hour. Until then, you're welcome to wander around the school, but you will be back here at one o'clock for the junior varsity and two o'clock for varsity." She instructed them with a tone of finality.

Levi faced Eren once Rico was done with her speech. "Want to go look around and grab something to eat while I tell you the schedule?"

"Yeah, sure." Eren agreed enthusiastically.

~

Levi easily navigated through the hoard of guard teams and crowd members, making his way effortlessly to the cafeteria like he went to school there. As they found their place in line, Eren started scanning the area like a child in a toy store. His eyes landed on five or so people, all dressed in black, glittering, one piece uniforms, wearing short, pink wigs. Eren could tell from a distance that they were all girls and it hit him that he hadn't seen a single male color guarder.

Levi and Eren both ordered a salad and soda, finding an empty, round table to sit at. Eren couldn't get the thought out of his head, he needed to bring it up. "Levi, I haven't seen a single guy on any of the teams."

"Just wait," Levi responded, taking a bite of his salad. "You'll see some." When Levi didn't receive a response, he looked up to see Eren staring at his food with a frustrated expression. "Is everything alright?"

Eren looked up at him. "Guys aren't usually in color guard, are they?"

Levi sighed. They had made so much progress from the bus to the school. Levi knew that Eren was dealing with insecurities and worried that people might find out his secret. "There are plenty of guys in color guard. Has Ymir told you the history of color guard? How it used to be all men?"

"She has, but I'm talking about now. It doesn't seem like it's normal for a guy to be in color guard. I haven't seen a single guy on another team." Eren pouted. "What if people get the wrong idea? I mean... it'd be the right idea, but you know what I mean."

"Eren, there are lots of straight guys in color guard. Like on our team, there's Farlan and... I still can't figure out what Bertolt's sexuality is. Hmm." Levi furrowed his brows, deep in thought. "I mean he's never told us and I don't want to pry. Sometimes we just wonder though-"

"Levi." Eren kept him from getting off track.

"Right, sorry." Levi excused himself. "My point is, people aren't going to make assumptions about you for being in color guard. If anything, you'll attract the unwanted attention of girls."

Eren snorted at hearing that. "Really?"

"Yeah." Levi sat back. "Some of them will go as far as to bother you and flirt with you. It can get
"Has that ever happened to you?"

Levi rolled his eyes. "More times than I'd care to admit."

Eren snickered, imagining all the lovestruck girls batting their eyelashes at his boyfriend, trying to get him to notice them. "I bet you have a lot of fangirls waiting for you today." He teased.

"Ugh, the worst part is that's kind of true. It's like Marco and I are being stalked, they've learned our names for fucks sake." Levi groaned. "They look for us every time."

"Isn't Marco gay, though?" Eren asked, finally starting to eat his food.

"Pfft, they don't care about that." Levi scoffed. "As long as you're hot and don't drop, they'll come after you."

Levi took Eren through a winding path, reaching the gymnasium at the end of their journey. The first team was scheduled to perform in four minutes and they wanted to see if they could spot their mothers in the meantime. Eren was surprised to see such large bleachers almost completely filled. He vaguely noticed a few groups of people in matching team shirts, but didn't let his gaze linger on them long enough to guess their genders. He was still mildly worried about people finding out about his sexuality based on stereotypes. They walked along the front of the bleachers, scanning the crowd thoroughly, until Eren saw Mikasa waving her arms, trying to flag him down.

Eren caught Levi's attention, making his way up to Mikasa. As they got closer, they noticed Armin sitting with her, along with both of their mothers.

"Eren," Carla called out as the two boys approached. "When is your team going on?"

"Not for a few hours." Eren answered.

"A few hours?" Armin echoed.

"There's a lot of teams competing today." Levi explained. "The junior varsity teams are going first, then it's the varsity."

"I don't have a problem with that." Mikasa said. "It'll be fun to watch everyone."

"I can't wait to see your teams performance!" Kutchel beamed, digging through her bag. "I brought my phone, my video camera and my regular camera to capture it all." She proved her statement by pulling out each device.

"Maman, how do you plan on using all those at once?" Levi asked, chuckling.

"Well, Carla agreed to record it on my phone and Mikasa said she'd record it on my camera while I take pictures." Kutchel clarified happily. Carla and Mikasa nodded, showing that they were doing it voluntarily.

Levi ignored the ridiculous lengths his mother went to and sat down next to her, letting Eren take a
The announcers began. "It is my pleasure to welcome you to the twenty third annual Shiganshina color guard competition. Please welcome our first guard." The crowd erupted with all sorts of whoops and hollers, filling in any shred of silence that the applause couldn't cover.

Eren watched as the particularly young guard members folded out their floor and placed their equipment where it all needed to be. The floor differed from their own by being white and a thin rectangular shape rather than a large mass. Their spot in the crowd allowed them to see them very well. Eren watched them set up in their frilly, yellow dresses, bright pink leggings and curled hair.

Levi leaned in to whisper in Eren's ear. "Be grateful Hanji and I didn't settle on uniforms like that."

Eren gulped at the thought. That would be a nightmare for him.

Just as he suspected, every member on the team appeared to be female. It was at that point that he mentally reprimanded himself and told himself to stop worrying about it. Levi said there were plenty of straight men in the guard and he believed him. Not only that, but he knew that if he kept focusing on such a petty thing, he wouldn't enjoy his first show.

The guard took their places and the announcer sounded them off, signaling the song to start. "The judges are ready. Dauper Middle School, is your guard ready?" The team struck a pose signing their preparedness. "Dauper Middle School Color Guard, you may take the floor in competition." An old Madonna song started playing and a large portion of the crowd gasped in delight whereas Levi sighed in annoyance.

The performance was rather simple compared to their own routine, but it definitely wasn't bad. It was actually enjoyable for them to watch. Levi would've preferred to hear a different song, but he could tolerate it as he watched their performance. At certain points in the routine, they all heard people in the crowd cheering on individual members by name.

The performance ended sooner than Eren expected it to and he watched them clear the gymnasium as the crowd applauded and the announcer repeated their school's name.

Eren felt a sharp pain in his side and turned to face Levi, who had been glaring at him subtly. "What?" Eren asked.

"Clap for them." Levi commanded him sternly.

"It was just one performance, I think they can deal without one person clap-"


Eren complied, but not without sending him a confused look. "Why is it such a big deal?"

"Think about it like this," Levi seized clapping as the rest of the crowd did. "How would you feel after all the hard work and suffering you put into your routine and after you worked your ass off on stage after all that stress that built up before the show all just went unnoticed? You're not clapping for what you just saw. You clap for all the blood sweat and tears they put in to make that show possible. You clap for all the time and practices they had trying to perfect those moves. You clap for every second spent, every catch, every step and every breath it took to get here. You never take in these performances for surface value. You should never take in anything for surface value."
Eren sat back, trying to take all that information in at once. But he had a point. The thought that these girls went through the hell that he went through never crossed his mind. "I didn't think about it that way." He admitted. "So I clap for every show?"

"Yes." Levi said.

Eren felt a tad guilty of course, but now he knew better and that's what mattered to him. He was very grateful that Levi was helping him learn how to be more empathetic.

~

Eren was stunned with all the different performances he saw. He loved the performance given by their school's junior varsity, with their oval, white floor, sky blue uniforms and their song 'You Spin Me Round.' Levi was right, the younger teams had so many eighties songs. After quite a few junior varsity teams competed, they moved on to the varsity. He felt a little intimidated with the teams they were up against. He couldn't have been more impressed with what he saw.

Levi looked at the time on his phone and told Eren that they could squeeze in two more performances before they had to get back to the room. Just as he told him this, they recognized Hanji coming in and dashing up the bleachers to sit with them. "Hey guys!" They sat between Levi and Eren.

"Hi Hanji." Eren greeted them.

"Hey." Levi grunted less enthusiastically.

"Who's up next?" Hanji asked, shuffling things around in their bag.

"Just listen." Levi said.

As if on cue, the announcer's voice rang over the loud speaker. "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mitras High School Winter Guard."

"Oh, isn't this that really rich school that has all the nice equipment?" Hanji asked, grabbing a camcorder out of their bag.

"Yeah." Levi muttered bitterly, watching as the guard came through the doors with a sand colored floor, wearing tan and gold uniforms that were designed very intricately.

Hanji turned on their camera and started recording. "Wow, Levi, wouldn't you say those uniforms are very... avant guard?" They drawled out in a mischievous tone.

"Well... reGUARDless of what they wear, I'll only judge them based on their performance." Levi rolled his eyes, but replied nonetheless.

Eren looked at them both like they each had two heads. "What are you guys doing?"

Hanji and Levi faced him with straight faces. "I don't know what you're talking about." Levi shrugged.

"Me neither." Hanji added. "I'm just... taping the show." They started snickering uncontrolably and Eren could've sworn he saw Levi smirking amusedly.
Eren frowned. "Why are you putting emphasis on random words?"

"I guess your lack of understanding makes you the... butt of the joke." Levi added.

"Now now, Levi, he's just keeping his... guard up." Hanji chuckled.

"I mean," Levi started. "It's really a... toss up between him... catching the joke and ... dropping the act."

Hanji couldn't stifle the laughter that bubbled up after hearing Levi's puns. Levi also had a hard time keeping himself from huffing out amused breaths. Eren just looked completely lost.

Hanji turned around their camera, switching the view lens and threw their arm around Eren's shoulders. Eren stiffened, raising a brow as he stared confusedly into the camera. "He doesn't get it, he's the new guy I told you guys about." Hanji spoke to the camera.

"What- who are you talking to?" Eren questioned.

"My subscribers!" Hanji answered. "I have a YouTube channel. Half of my videos are vlogs and the other half are color guard videos. Sometimes I teach how to do different tosses, other times I show them around a color guard show."

Eren had to admit he thought that was interesting. "How many subscribers do you have?"

"Around fifteen hundred."

Eren's eyebrows shot up. "Seriously?"

"Oh yeah." Hanji nodded. "I like to show people the color guard experience. Lucky for us, we get to live it."

Eren grinned. "Yeah, we are lucky."

~

Miras High School's performance was extremely impressive, leaving the three feeling nervous for their possibilities of winning. Next up was the Homeland Winter Guard. At the mention of the school's name, Hanji gasped excitedly, looking around the crowd. "What is it?" Eren inquired.

"This is Bertolt and Annie's old school! I'm trying to see if they're here to watch... yes! There they are!" Hanji pointed over to Bertolt and Annie, sitting next to Annie's father as well as Reiner.

Eren searched the guard to see if he could spot the two people he met at Hanji's party. Through the green and silver, mismatched uniforms, he eventually found Hitch and Marlo. Eren thought about how he should've known better before, knowing that Marlo, a boy, was on one of the teams. Of course he had seen plenty of other males on teams before this point once the varsity teams came on, but he kicked himself for worrying before.

"The judges are ready," the announcer declared. "Homeland High, is the guard ready?" One member fell to their knees, laying in a way that they could easily grab their saber. "Homeland Winter Guard, you may take the floor in competition."
A low violin sounded over the loudspeaker and the guard began the dance portion of their routine with melancholic motions. After a considerable amount of time, it became clear that their song was entirely instrumental. Eren liked all the differences between the guard's music choices. Some songs were somber pop songs that always played on the radio, there were a few instrumentals, some instrumentals with monologues accompanying them, which Eren liked and there had been a few songs as intense and upbeat as theirs.

Eren was rather disappointed that it ended so soon. As soon as the applause started, Levi, Hanji, and Eren stood up (still clapping of course) and tried to move out.

"Levi!" Kutchel pulled him into a hug before he could get past her. "Good luck, mon fils, I can't wait to see your show!" She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek and offered the same good luck to Hanji and Eren.

"Good luck, Eren!" Carla said, also giving her son a hug.

"I have all the luck I need right here." Eren told her, pulling the key necklace she'd given him out from underneath his shirt.

Carla smiled brightly, giving him a thumbs up. As he passed through, Armin and Mikasa wished him luck as well, telling him how excited they were.

~

They returned to their team's room and Eren almost wished they hadn't. Half the people there were changing out of their clothes and Eren started to panic. He grabbed Levi's arm and hid behind him. "What are they all doing?" He hissed under his breath.

"Changing...?" Levi squinted at him, confused.

"In front of everybody?" Eren widened his eyes.

"Yeah, we can't change in the bathrooms, there's not enough room. And they won't let us change in the locker rooms. Why, are you shy?" Levi teased.

"No!" Eren retorted stubbornly. "But... aren't they uncomfortable with it?"

"Those uncomfortable changing in front of the others have a couple people hold up a towel. Do you need someone to do that for you?" Levi asked, more seriously this time. "I'd be glad to."

"That's alright, you don't need to do that. I just didn't know we had to do it this way, it's okay." Eren shrugged it off.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, it's okay."

Eren got to changing, trying not look in Levi's direction. These uniforms wouldn't hide any arousal, should it come up. He slipped into the uniform and worked on putting his shoes and gloves on. He briefly glanced around, seeing a couple people already fully changed and noticed Annie and Marco holding up a towel for Nanaba. He wondered why she didn't want to change openly and hoped that
it wasn't because she was self conscious about her body, aware that it was quite possible that she suffered from dysphoria still.

Bit by bit, Eren noticed a slight change in attitude with everyone. It seemed as though the more time passed, the more stressed everybody became.

He heard Hanji sigh from his side. "It's a shame the sleeves cover up my tattoos. Oh well."

Eren was about to comment on that, but was interrupted when Sasha timidly approached the two of them. "Um... Eren, Hanji? Could you two..." She held up a towel in their direction. "Could you...?"

"Sure!" Hanji jumped up, taking one end of the towel and Eren followed shortly after.

"Thank you guys so much." Sasha let out a breath she had been holding in. She waited until Eren and Hanji were holding up the towel high enough and she started changing.

As she changed, Eren continued looking around, watching everyone slowly become more frantic. Petra was scrubbing off dirt on her elbows, Marco used a lint roller on his uniform, Ymir was dusting off her shoes and Christa had even brought a hair straightener to fix her hair.

Sasha thanked them again after finishing up and immediately started working on her hair.

Eren walked up to Levi as he observed the havoc going on around him. "What's going on? They were all so calm a minute ago."

"Pre-show jitters. It always happens before our first and last show." Levi and Eren just stood back and watched the madness.

"My hair won't stay down!" Christa shouted, catching a bottle of hairspray that Petra threw to her.

"Oh god, my left shoe feels loose." Marco hopped on one foot, inspecting his allegedly off-fitting shoe. "Is that normal?" He asked to no one in particular. "Guys, if it's loose, am I gonna trip?!"

"The tape keeps falling off my rifle!" Isabel panicked.

"Where the fuck even is my rifle?" Ymir groaned.

"Marco, it's not just you. My left shoe feels loose too." Nanaba whispered, scared.

"Fucking hell, I'm out of bobby pins." Annie mumbled.

"I CAN'T FIND MY CONTACT LENSES." Hanji shrieked.

Levi sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "For shits sake, Hanji. They're in your fucking hand."

Hanji looked down a their hands, still frazzled. Upon realizing that Levi was right, they lifted their head back up, calm as ever. "I'm gonna put them on now." They said, deflated.

Amongst all the chaos going on, the door opened, revealing Rico carrying a plastic bag. "I have the makeup, come and get it."

Eren snapped his head to face Levi. "Makeup?!"

"Don't worry," Levi hushed him. "It's not the kind of makeup you're thinking of. Think of it as... war paint."
Eren tried to calm himself, he'd seen plenty of people wearing over the top, 'feminine' makeup and even some makeup that looked draggish. He hoped that it wouldn't look too bad.

Rico passed out pans of red, blue, and purple face paint along with, makeup brushes, setting powder and even rolls of tape. Levi ushered Eren to sit down as well as other people doing the same. "Sit still." He instructed. Eren didn't move a muscle. Levi took the tape, placing it on a high point of his nose, cheeks and a straight line parallel to the others on his forehead. Swiftly, he took the red face paint, placing it in between the tape. "Close your eyes." He barked. As quickly as he could, he filled in the makeup and placed the setting powder over it, carefully removing the tape afterwards. "Take a look."

Eren asked Christa if he could borrow her mirror, to which she said she'd gladly allow. He gazed at his reflection, and was happy with what he saw. A red bar placed across his eyes, leading into his hair. "I look like a super hero." He chortled.

"That you do!" Hanji yawped. Eren looked over to see them now wearing their own purple makeup that was identical to his and aiming their camera towards him. "Doesn't he look awesome?" Hanji posed the question for the camera. Eren couldn't help but laugh. Hanji turned the camera around to face themself. "As you guys already know, it gets pretty crazy as we all get ready for the show." They then pointed their camera at Farlan. "Farlan! How's your first show making you feel?"

Farlan simply screamed at the camera, continuing on with putting on Ymir's makeup, earning some laughs all the while.

Hanji turned the camera back. "Can't really say I disagree with that."

"Levi, pass around the hair spray paint to those who want it, will you?" Rico asked, handing him spray cans.

Levi accepted, tossing the red spray to Sasha, not bothering to give Hanji any as they had already dyed the tips of their hair purple with semipermanent dye. Levi borrowed a mirror and started spraying blue onto his hair, lightly and quickly.

Eren watched as he did this, noticing how his undercut was growing out the tiniest bit, now appearing in a solid black. Levi left only enough blue in his jet black hair to the point where it looked like it had a blue shine to it. A beautiful optical illusion, Eren thought.

Once Sasha finished the tips of her hair, she offered the can to Eren. He didn't plan on using it at first, but after seeing how nice it looked, he asked Levi for help. Levi sprayed the tips of Eren's hair with bright red, giving the illusion that his hair shifted color in the light.

"Eren! Take a picture with me!" Christa waved him over. Eren complied happily, most of the other members may have been freaking out, but he was having a good time. "Smile!" Eren leaned down to be in the picture with her, as she snapped a photo on her phone. "This is for my Instagram, I want a picture with everybody." She told him. "Are you okay with me posting this?"

"Yeah, go ahead." So much was happening so fast, his mind was racing. If he was unsure if he was friends with all these people before, there was no doubt in his mind that they were now.

Rico informed them to finish up, so they could leave soon. Eren collected all his equipment and made sure he had everything he needed. Just as he mentally checked off everything, he remembered he was still wearing the key necklace his mother had given him. He pulled it out from his uniform and stared down at it sadly. He figured he probably needed to take it off.
"Oo, that's pretty." Eren looked up to face the person that the voice belonged to. Rico seemed to be rather interested in his key. "Will you be wearing that during the show?"

"Oh, uh..." Eren stammered. "Am I allowed to? My mom gave it to me."

"You can, as long as you tuck it in your uniform. Wouldn't want it to fly into your face or get lost, now would we?" Rico said.

Eren smiled at her appreciatively. "Thank you." He hid it safely under his collar.

~

As the guard traveled to an auditorium in the school, Levi gave Eren the run down of how the night would go. "After we finish practice, we go to the gym. Don't stop to wave at your family or your friend, that ruins the audience's perception of us. If you get nervous, just imagine it just like any other practice only you're working twice as hard." Eren nodded at each instruction. "This is how it'll go. You get into the gym an set down your equipment to help pull out the floor. Once that's done, you place your equipment where it's supposed to be and then we do the show, it's that easy. Once the show is over, help fold up the floor, get your equipment and get out and wait for Rico. Again, don't wave to your family even after we're done. Need me to explain anything again?"

"No, I got it." Eren nodded confidently. "Doesn't sound too hard."

"That's because it isn't. As long as you don't overthink it, you're all set."

The team stopped just outside the school's auditorium. After a couple minutes, the team that was currently practicing in the auditorium came out with uniforms that looked more like everyday clothing from the 1950's. The girls came out in button up shirts, long skirts layered with tulle underneath and had bandanas in their hair. Whereas, the boys came out in slacks, suspenders and slicked back hair. Eren wished he could watch their show, but he knew he'd be busy by the time they went on. As the two teams passed, the opponents gave them their best.

"Good luck!"

"Good luck!"

"Good luck!"

Every team member from that team wished luck to Eren and his team. As a natural reaction, Eren's team wished them luck back. Both teams smiled at each other, sending kind words to one another and just being overall friendly. Eren was caught a little off guard that the competitors were treating them so nicely.

Eren didn't have time to process the events going on as he was whisked away into the auditorium.

~

They warmed up, stretched and practiced just like they normally would, only for a much shorter
amount of time. At one point, Rico worked with Levi, Hanji and Sasha on their solos and Eren was happy to finally see Sasha's amazing work.

Afterwards they rushed to get all their equipment together and hurried out of the auditorium. Rico informed them that the floor was already waiting at the gym's entrance and she, along with some friends of hers would set of the set pieces and bring out the turning wheels.

As they left, another team went in straight after them, all wishing them luck and had their well wishes returned to them. Eren felt giddy, everyone was so polite to them.

Levi hovered a little too close to Eren for a few minutes of their journey to the gymnasium. He briefly looked around, confirming that their team was the only one in sight and that the hall was otherwise completely empty. Once he and Eren lagged behind the team, Levi took Eren by the wrist and pulled him into a vacant hallway.

Eren was about to ask what was going on when Levi grabbed him by the neck and pulled him down into a quick kiss. It didn't last for long, but it was long enough for the texture of Levi's lips to leave an impression on Eren's. "For luck." Levi whispered fondly. "Are you ready, mon grand?"

"As ready as I'll ever be." Eren whispered back breathlessly.

"Good, let's go." Levi rounded the corner and speed walked to catch up with the guard.

Just as they got back up to their group, another team of all men dressed in two piece, black and orange uniforms passed them baring bright smiles. 'Good luck's were sent from every member and everyone from their own team sent them right back.

When the other team made it out of sight, Levi leaned in to Eren's side. "See? That's a whole team of just guys. You have no reason to worry."

"Didn't expect to see a team like that." Eren thought aloud.

"And that's not even the team from the all boys school." Levi added, helping Eren's confidence increase even more.

Eren smiled to himself. He really didn't have a reason to worry.

~

They all waited with baited breath outside the gymnasium. As the team before them exited, again wishing them all luck, their team told them 'good job' countless times, and they waited to be called on stage. Rico was halfway through the door, watching for signals from the judges and turned to face their team. "Go guys. Get ready, my friends and I have the set pieces, go go go."

"Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Trost High Winter Guard." The announcer's voice came, followed by roaring cheers and applause.

As soon as they entered, they all heard Levi's mother over the rest of the crowd, cheering on her children by name. They could even pick out Annie's father cheering for his daughter and Reiner right beside him, cheering for Annie, Marco, Nanaba, and Bertolt. Annie and Bertolt were even supported by their friends Hitch and Marlo screaming their names. Eren picked up almost every
one of his teammate's names being shouted just before he heard his mother, sister and Armin hollering 'Go Eren!' as loud as their lungs would allow. He smiled to himself, but kept in mind what Levi had told him about waving at his family.

They all hastily set their equipment off to the side, and ran to start pulling out the floor. Once that was done, they placed their equipment where it needed to be and allowed Rico and some other strangers set up the extra pieces. As the preparations went on, Eren discovered that he didn't carry an ounce of anxiety. He was excited, surprisingly. Eren felt confident in the routine they had put together and was anxious for the crowd to see them perform. All his concerns had faded and he only felt like nothing but fun would await them in this experience. His heart was racing, adrenaline was pumping through his veins, nothing could take him down from his high. All the time they spent changing the routine and perfecting it had led up to this moment. He hid behind the black set pieces along with the rest of the team, minus Hanji. He couldn't wait to have their hard work pay off.

"The judges are ready, Trost High, is your guard ready?" Came the voice over the loud speaker.

Hanji, stood out in front, unraveled their two flags, pounding them on the ground twice, mimicking the beat of their song.

"Trost High Winter Guard, you may take the floor in competition."

Soon, their music sounded off and Hanji herded them out as they pounded their flags to the beat.

~ Put on your war paint

Everybody found their place, ignoring all the encouraging cheers coming from the bleachers, dead set on staying focused. They prepared for the lyrics to kick in.

~ You are a brick tied to me that's dragging me down

Starting with drop spins, they guard broke out into a triple toss on the fourth beat, sending their flags into the air, their iridescence catching the light brilliantly. The catches were flawless in technique, the guard started their migration to their mirrored side at a snails pace.

~ Strike a match and I'll burn you to the ground

The guard swept their flags against the floor, giving the illusion of striking matches. The ripple of their flags created the sound of a flame igniting.

~ We are the jack-o-lanterns in July, setting fire to the sky

Spinning their flags at a threatening velocity, their approach to each other's side became more of an act of offense.

~ Here, here comes this rising tide, so come on

Just as they were about to cross territories, they retreated back. The red side tossing down their flags to the floor, collapsing to start their ground work, beating the ground with their fists along with the drum. They began what Eren referred to as their 'choreographed tantrum' as the blue side gently set down their flags doing dance work in place of the saber work they changed. All the while, Hanji worked with their two flags in a fluid way that looked like they were provoking each side.

~ Cross walks and crossed hearts and hope-to-dies
Hanji circled around the red side, pounding their flags at them, getting them to get their flags back, rising to their feet. Hanji came around to do the same for the blue side.

~ So we can take the world back from a heart attack

~ One maniac at a time, we will take it back

The calm before the storm, each side faced each other, sweeping their flags behind their backs in an alluring manner.

~ You know time crawls on when you're waiting for the song to start

~ So dance alone to the beat of your heart

The facade was broken as they stomped towards each other, only cut off by Hanji spinning their flags at their sides, using the spinning wheels as a pathway to get through the center.

~ Hey young blood, doesn't it feel like our time is running out?

The guard tossed their flags horizontally, letting them spiral back down into their awaiting hands. They let the bottom of the flag poles perch on the napes of their necks, pushing them just hard enough for them to splay out their silk as they fell back into their grips.

~ I'm gonna change you like remix

~ Then I'll raise you like a Phoenix

Flags went soaring row by row, bringing color further to the crowd as each few people tossed their equipment. With all the blood rushing through his veins at incredible pressure, and all the adoring members in the crowd cheering just for them, Eren felt like he could quite possibly be on fire. And he didn't want it to end.

~ Wearing our vintage misery

Each pair of members face each other, barely a foot separating them. They looked upon each other with rivaling stares.

~ No, I think it looked a little better on me

Each pair made a circle, rotating around each other while doing consecutives with their flags. Something Eren thought to be rather difficult, especially when staring into Levi's eyes.

~ I'm gonna change you like a remix

~ Then I'll raise you like a Phoenix

The flag portion ended as the blue side gracefully traded their flags for rifles. Whereas the red side set down their flags, going into cartwheels and grabbing their rifles when their hands made contact with the ground. As a parkour enthusiast, that was Eren's favorite part, even though it was extremely simple compared to what he normally did. Hanji reemerged from the back, spinning a rifle with both hands, something particularly challenging as opposed to using one hand. They marched on, pulling another rifle out from underneath the floor.

~ Bring home the boys and scrap scrap metal the tanks
~ Get hitched, make a career out of robbing banks

Once more, each side differed in routine, the blue side having a more sophisticated composure and the red side looked threatening with their movements.

~ Because the world is just a teller and we are wearing black masks

~"You broke our spirit, " says the note we pass

The guard executed a four toss, catching their rifles effortlessly, while Hanji seemed to be spurring them on again. They did consecutives as they approached the other side once more, only to be halted by Hanji in the middle.

~ So we can take the world back from a heart attack

~ One maniac at a time, we will take it back

The two sides crouched down, spinning their rifles continuously as they inched back.

~ You know time crawls on when you're waiting for the song to start

~ So dance alone to the beat of your heart

Building up fire in their movements, they pounded the ground with their rifles, throwing them up in the air only to catch them behind their backs.

~ Hey young blood, doesn't it feel like our time is running out?

Another horizontal toss left the crowd hollering and clapping. Hanji stood at the front of the floor in the center.

~ I'm gonna change you

They began consecutives with their right hand.

~ Like a remix

Leaving their right hand still they switched to consecutives with their left hand.

~ Then I'll raise you

More cheering sounded when they proceeded to do consecutives with both rifles simultaneously.

~ Like a Phoenix

They tossed watched rifle, one at a time at the last to syllables of that line of the song, Earning more appreciation from the audience.

~ Wearing our vintage misery

Spinning into their own spots, everyone took their rifles, keeping hold of the straps, snapping them to the side and bringing them back to their beginning position.

~ No, I think it looked a little better on me

Each designated pair stormed up to each other putting their rifles up against the others in an 'x' shape.
I'm gonna change you like a remix

Then I'll raise you like a Phoenix

They separated going into tosses, catching their equipment as their fell to the ground.

Put on your war paint

The guard crawled to the edges of the floor where their other flags with flaming patterns were hidden. They laid still in a position of defeat.

The war is won, before it's begun
Release the doves, surrender love

Hanji switched their rifles in for their ghost flags, maneuvering over to the blue territory and spinning the flags in a mesmerizing pattern before stopping on their knees.

The war is won, before it's begun
Release the doves, surrender love

Levi arose with his saber, not missing a beat. He used his special technique of handling the saber backwards, catching the attention of the audience. He spun in around his neck, balancing it on the muscles before releasing it into a seven toss. The crowd erupted in applause.

The war is won, before it's begun
Release the doves, surrender love

Hanji repeated their solo only mirroring their moves over to the red side of the floor.

The war is won, before it's begun
Release the doves, surrender love

Sasha began her solo, hesitantly doing a six toss. When the audience boomed with cheers, she realized she had caught it, but did not rejoice immediately, focusing on her task. She put her rifle to her side, doing a more complex form of consecutives, raising her leg to go around the rifle at a time when it wouldn't get hit, drawing more noise from the audience. She turned around, keeping the rifle spinning behind her back, catching it diagonally, perfectly executing her solo.

Hey young blood, doesn't it feel like our time is running out?

As soon as the music kicked in again, the guard emerged with their flaming flags. This time, when they came close to the other side, Hanji didn't stop them. They all spun their flags, aligning with each other and moving past the person they mirrored.

I'm gonna change you like a remix

Three of the pairs stepped up to the spinning wheels, setting one foot on and grabbing their partner's hand, using their weight as they spun. This part always brought back memories for Eren from when he was still nervous to come in contact with Levi.

Then I'll raise you like a Phoenix

The guard exchanged flags by tossing them to each other, catching them with one hand on the pole and the other on the silk, immediately throwing them into the air.

Through the last verse, they performed with their sabers. The song had broken down to a less
intense rhythm as they finished everything off. Hanji, wielding both their sabers, herded everyone back behind the set pieces.

~ Put on your war paint

Hanji finished off the performance with a toss of each saber, catching them on the final beats of the song, facing the crowd with their head tilted downward.

Eren had never felt more pride for himself than when he heard the audience roar with excitement from behind the set pieces.

~

Back at the classroom, the guard was still beaming with joy after their performance. Rico stood before them with her arms crossed, face giving away no indication of her opinion on the show. "Well," she started, silencing the dull murmur that existed between the members. "I have to say, based on what I saw and how the audience reacted..." She paused, gaging their anxious expressions. "You all did wonderfully. You should be proud."

A sigh of relief left the majority of the members, and as for the others, they smirked, acting as if they expected such a good response to their performance.

"Okay, now the awards aren't being handed out for quite some time, so you can watch the other performances, get something to eat, whatever you want. You can stay in your uniforms or change into your other clothes. Except for whoever's accepting the award, you guys have to stay in uniform. Decide who those people are and go on your way. Meet back here at eighty thirty." She nodded at them and left the room.

Levi met up with Eren in the corner of the room. "So, how was your first performance?"

Eren smiled at him. "It was really fun." He admitted. "Are you going to change out of your uniform?"

"No." Levi shook his head. "It was already decided who's accepting the awards this time. It'll be me, Hanji and Sasha. So, I can't really change."

"Do the soloists always accept the award?"

"No, it changes every time." Levi explained. "Well, what would you like to do? It's been awhile since we've eaten, so do you want to get some food then watch the rest of the shows?"

"Yes," Eren breathed out. "I'm starving."

~

Eren and Levi received plenty of compliments on their show along with stares from people too shy to talk to them. Eren would nudge Levi's side excitedly every time someone said something nice to him, making Levi grin from seeing his boyfriend finally happy about the sport.
"Feel like a celebrity yet?" Levi joked, quirking his eyebrow at the brunet.

"Kinda." Eren gushed. "I know you said we'd get a lot of attention, but I didn't think I'd get any. I don't know how to feel about it."

"Just enjoy it, mon grand. It only lasts until we go home."

They found their way back to the cafeteria, which was a bit more busy than before. Eren and Levi both brought plain bags slung over their shoulders to keep their phones and wallets on them, as their uniforms were pocketless. Levi reached into his to find his phone after he felt it buzzing. He looked at it, finding a text from Isabel, asking for money to get food.

"You get in line, I have to get Izzy some money. I'll meet you back here in a few minutes." Levi waved goodbye to Eren and went back to the room.

Eren stood in line, grabbing a tray and waiting patiently to progress forward. He absentmindedly started tapping at his tray, waiting for the line to budge. He didn't mind the wait, he was just hungry.

Eren couldn't escape the feeling that the closeness of the person to his left was much less acceptable than the person to his right. He turned his head to see the person on his left and saw a girl with dyed black hair, staring at him expectantly. Eren looked at her perplexedly. "Can I help you?"

"You were on one of the teams that performed recently." She replied, biting her lip. "Trost High, right?"

Eren straightened up, realizing that she was a 'fan' of his. "Yeah, that's us. Did you like the show?" He asked excitedly.

"I absolutely loved it, you guys were terrific!" She said, bouncing on the balls of her feet. "You, though. You did particularly well in my opinion." She inched closer.

"Thanks." Eren smiled at her. "This was my first time, I'm new to color guard."

"No, I don't believe it." The girl feigned shock.

"No, really. I've never done this before." Eren went on. "It means a lot that you liked the show."

"Well, for your first time, you were very... entertaining to watch." She chose her words carefully.

"Thank you so much! That's so nice of you to say." Eren beamed. He felt so popular. Receiving so many compliments made his ego skyrocket. After being so nervous about the night, it was good for him to hear such positive feedback.

"Oh, it's no trouble." The girl waved him off bashfully. "So, what's your name?"

Eren slid to the right as the line moved a bit, but otherwise kept his stance. "I'm Eren." He introduced himself politely.

"That's a nice name." She commented. "Suits a guy like you."

Eren knitted his brows together, finding that an odd thing to say, especially to a stranger.

Levi returned, scanning the line for Eren when it landed on him and a girl that was hovering a little too close for his comfort. Levi discreetly snuck over to stand behind them, close enough to hear
them, but far enough where they didn't notice his presence.

"So, Eren," the girl clicked her tongue. "How do you get so tan?"

Levi felt his blood boil, but waited to see if Eren could handle the situation on his own.

"Uh... it's not a tan... I'm part Turkish." Eren told her.

The girl let out a burst of laughter, slapping his shoulder, making him flinch. "Eren, you're so funny!" She cackled in an annoying tone.

Eren shrunk into himself, more cautious of this stranger. "It wasn't a joke, I really am Turkish."

"I know, it's just the way you said it." The fakeness dripping from her voice was enough to make anyone uncomfortable. "Would you like to hang out with me maybe? After we get our food?"

Levi didn't care what Eren's reaction was, he needed to be the one to stop this mess. He crashed between the two, shoving the girl out of his way. "Hey babe." Levi purred only loud enough for Eren and the girl to hear. "Decide what you want to eat yet?"

Completely oblivious, Eren answered normally. "I was thinking about getting soup, but I'm too hungry to have just that. I'm not sure what else I want." He hummed.

"Well, you can have whatever you want, Eren. I'll pay for everything, babe." Levi leaned up to give him a kiss on the cheek.

"Levi," Eren whispered, feeling his cheeks flush. "We're in public." He glanced around for a second to make sure no one they knew was around, though he couldn't hide a faint smile. "And you don't have to do that, I have my own money."

"Oh, we're fine. And I don't mind paying, it's my treat for my perfect boyfriend." Levi said. He turned his head to face the girl who now had no color left in her face. "Eren, who's this?" Levi asked as calmly as he could.

"Um, she never gave me her name." Eren answered. "She loved our show, though! What's your name, ma'am?"

The girl put her tray back, borderline panicking at this point. "I have to go, right now." She exited the line and went straight out of the cafeteria.

Eren frowned. "That's weird, I thought she was going to get food."

Levi looked back at Eren, almost pained. "Let's just get our food and sit down."

~

At a table, Eren happily dug into the food that Levi had gotten him, while Levi took his turn refusing to eat, just as Eren had earlier. While chewing on a bite of his sandwich, Eren looked at Levi, worried. "Is everything okay?"

Levi resisted grimacing at how his boyfriend talked with his mouth full. "Did you notice how that girl was talking to you? Did you feel weird about it? At all?"
Eren furrowed his brows in thought. "She said some odd things, but I just figured she was that kind of person. Just odd." He shrugged, taking another bite of his food.

Levi felt his stomach turning. He couldn't look away from Eren, he wanted to freeze his face in his memory. "Eren, she was flirting with you." He blurted out. "You didn't find that weird at all? Did you even tell her you have a boyfriend?"

Eren paused, fixing Levi with a strange look. "What?" He scoffed. "She was flirting? With me?" Levi didn't say anything, only waited for his next words. Eren laughed. Laughed of all things. "Joke's on her, I guess."

Levi frowned. "Is that funny to you?" He muttered.


"But you didn't do anything about it." Levi accused him.

"Well, for one, I didn't know she was flirting with me. Second, I'm gay, so what does it matter?" Eren defended.

The latter sentence brought Levi back to his logical state of mind. He shook his head, looking down at his food. "Right, you're right. I just... wasn't thinking. You're right." He said more to himself than Eren. He stirred his soup without actually having a purpose for doing so. He was trying to feed the truth back into his thoughts, before his own paranoia ruined him.

Eren stopped eating all together. "Levi...? Did you actually think I would've done anything behind your back?" He set his hand on top of Levi's.

Levi let out a deep breath, shutting his eyes. "I don't know." He murmured.

"Come on, Levi." Eren encouraged him with a soft, reassuring tone. "I'd never do that to you. I'll give you a few reasons why." Levi looked at him, eyes filled with hope. "First, I'm gay, so I'm not going to hook up with a girl, period. Two, that was a stranger, I'm not giving you up for a stranger. Third... I'm yours. And you're mine, remember? I love you and I don't want anyone else."

'Heard that all before.' Levi wanted to say, but he thought better of it. "I know, I know all that. It's just..." He let out another deep breath. "I'm worried for no reason. I know I am. But I can't help it. I trust you, I believe you, but... I can be a pessimist at times."

Eren smiled at him sadly. "I can't change that about you. But I promise, I'll never hurt you. I'll never do anything you don't want me to do. I love you and I don't want anyone other than you."

Levi may have heard all those promises before, the only thing Eren said that he'd never heard was that Eren didn't want anybody else. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry, it's okay." Eren said.

Levi gave Eren an appreciative smile. "I love you too, Eren."
The rest of the teams were all so captivating. Eren watched the rest of them in the second row with Armin, Mikasa and the majority of his team. It was truly an amazing night, one that he’d never forget. His attention was always occupied and he never found himself bored.

The last team had just finished their routine and the announcers voice rang over the loud speaker. "It's time for the award portion of the night, let's welcome back all teams that performed today."

The teams were individually called out and arranged themselves in a line across the gym floor. Eren kept an eye on both teams from his school and waited for the announcer to continue.

"For the junior varsity, in twenty-eighth place is..." Of course, he had to pause for dramatic effect. "Quinta Middle School!"

The crowd gave them around of applause. The team mentioned had two girls representing their school, who curtsied, having one girl walk up to the table that held the plaques. She shook one of the judges' hands, accepting the award and returned back to her spot.

The announcer went through all the junior varsity teams, declaring that Trost Middle School's guard was in seventh place. Eren didn't think that was too bad, considering they were up against twenty-seven other guards. Then, the announcer continued to list off the awards for the varsity. Eren became extremely apprehensive. There was a total of thirty-five varsity teams and the closer they got to first place without naming his team, the more optimistic he was.

"And in sixth place, for the varsity winter guard, we have..." Another unnecessary delay. "Orvud High School Winter Guard!"

'So close,' Eren thought. 'So close!' He was sitting on the edge of his seat, nails digging into his knees.

"In fifth place, for varsity winter guard, we have..." Eren couldn't wait this long. "Trost High Winter Guard!"

He rose from his seat, clapping his hands together, just as the rest of the team had. Even Armin and Mikasa stood to celebrate. Sure, they didn't get first place, though it would've been nice. But Eren knew that realistically speaking, they were incredibly lucky to have gotten such a good placing. He watched Levi and Sasha dramatically separate to reveal Hanji coming through to walk up and accept their award.

~

Back up at the room, both guards were still aflame with accomplishment and pure joy. It had been a successful night overall and no one felt the need to complain. Except over something minimal.

"I want to carry the award home!" Isabel whined in the room of people changing out of uniform.

"No, I want to do it!" Hanji pouted back childishly.

Leave it to Levi to be the babysitter of the guard. "You two, stop fighting." He came between them. "Hanji, you've taken it home plenty of times before, let Izzy have a turn."

Hanji stormed off, while Levi rolled his eyes, walking over to Eren who was still changing. "Can't
Believe I have to settle their problems for them like they're a bunch of toddlers." He groaned.

Eren chuckled at Levi's misfortune, buttoning up his pants, having nothing else on but his key necklace. Taking up the opportunity to make Eren shy, Hanji whistled from across the room, pointing finger guns at him. Eren's cheeks flushed as a natural reaction, but wasn't embarrassed. He smiled timidly, but didn't mind Hanji fooling around.

Levi, on the other hand, glared daggers at Hanji. "Don't stare, you're making him uncomfortable." He barked.

Hanji immediately widened their eyes, feeling guilty, convinced that they had made a mistake. "Oh my gosh, I'm sorry Eren!" They shouted from across the room. "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable!"

Eren slipped on his shirt. "Don't worry about it, you didn't make me uncomfortable!" Eren subtly turned his head to Levi. "But did it make you uncomfortable?" He whispered.

Levi avoided his gaze. "I'm sorry."

Eren giggled. "It's okay, just relax." He reminded him.

~

On the bus ride home, Eren sat with Levi, knowing that he needed some reassurance and he gladly gave it to him, holding his hand the whole time.

The red emergency light being the only source of light on the bus somehow made the bus ride more enjoyable. The darkness made everyone more hyper, influencing them to have a more wild time. Annie and Marco told scary stories to the younger team, perhaps freaking them out a little too much. Eren and Levi listened in, whispering to each other which stories they believed and which ones they thought were fake. Farlan took a deck of cards out of his bag, showing the junior varsity a few simple card tricks, succeeding in confusing them, despite how easy they were to perform. Petra sat in a seat diagonal from Eren and Levi, braiding Sasha's hair from across the aisle. Some people from both guards had fallen asleep. Regardless of what kept them occupied, everyone was enjoying themselves.

Levi at some point had asked Eren to spend the night. Eren texted his sister, telling her to ask their mother if it was okay. He received an affirmative reply and he told Levi he'd gladly spend the night.

The last thing Eren remembered before he too fell asleep, was listening to several songs from The Misfits, as he had requested it from Isabel and Farlan. He let his eyes fall closed with a smile on his face, the sound of everyone gleefully singing Astro Zombies together lulled him into a peaceful slumber.

Chapter End Notes

I tried to do color guard shows justice, I really did. But it fell short. I can't describe
how magical color guard shows are. There's no rivalry, everyone's in good spirits. It's not even a rule, everyone tells each other good luck and you can be bummed out about not getting first place but you never hold it against the other teams, you're just happy for them. And sorry I suck at describing performances too.

Again, I apologize for this being late. So much is going on in my life and this chapter was hard to write. It brought back so many memories of my old color guard days (gosh I sound like an old geezer) and I was trying to recall how the competitions actually went, but it's been so long since I've been to one and my memories of competitions are fading, so I had to stop writing to keep from getting sadder because it upset me that I couldn't remember. And to make this more reminiscent, it occurred to me that my school also had a Fall Out Boy song one year.

And things are going on in my life that are keeping me from writing. My friend is going through such a tough time and I want to be there for her. I have these school projects to work on, like nine scarves to make, a book to finish reading so I can return it, and I've got places to travel to soon. As if that all wasn't enough, it's almost funny that my school is considering bringing back color guard for the marching band and the band teacher told me to come back. This is so huge for me, it's been so long, I miss it so much I'm so excited. And by pure luck, because I'm a color guard veteran and because of my age, I was asked to be an instructor and I never had that chance before. It's so funny that color guard is working its way back into my life in so many ways. And so many other things are going on and I'm just a big (actually small. I'm not even five foot. And no, I'm not twelve.) ball of conflicting emotions and writing is weird for me right now.

Sorry for all that, I'm rambling. Anyways, for updates on fics, fic progress and my art, feel free to check out my tumblr, dr-s--art. Sorry for any errors, I don't edit. If you liked this chapter, please let me know with a kudos or comment! Thank you so much for reading! <3 (plz help me make links on mobile, I'm hopeless)
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Eren and Levi reminisce about old times and they go to watch Isabel and Farlan's concert.

Chapter Notes

I have no excuse for the low quality of this chapter. I just wanted write cute things, it's been a tough week.

I would've dedicated this chapter to my best friend, but she's being a difficult bean at the moment. (Jk she rocks)

Translations at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren frowned at the falling snow as he watched out the window while cuddling with Levi in the middle of the afternoon. Snow meant no more rain until the spring. He grumbled and cursed at the snow, mad at Mother Nature for allowing such a beautiful thing to come to an end only to bring in something so cold and bitter. "Stop making that face, mon grand. It'll stay that way." Levi murmured, drawing circles onto Eren's shoulders as he laid on his stomach.

"Fuck the snow. I hate snow." Eren complained, faced smushed against Levi's abdominal muscles.

Levi poked between Eren's eyebrows. "Quiet, you. I like the snow."

"Why?" Eren huffed out. "It's cold, you can't go outside with it, it's ugly, it gets your feet wet, you can't wear the clothes you want. Snow is stupid."

"I don't think it's ugly. And I can't still wear the clothes I want. The rest, I can get over." Levi hummed, weaving his hand into Eren's hair, scratching near the base of his neck. "Snow's great, embrace it."

"How? Snow's boring."

"You're so difficult." Levi flicked Eren's ear, making him toss a glare. "When we get enough snow, you should come to one of the snow ball fights Izzy and I have. We always do that around my birthday, her and I."

"I just got done saying how much I hate it, why would I want to fight you guys with it?" Levi had to laugh at that, Eren had a point. "Maybe I'll try it for you, though. When's your birthday?"

"The twenty fifth. But I was joking around, you don't actually have to do that."

"But I want to give it a shot." Eren persisted. "And twenty fifth? Of...?"
"December." Levi yawned.

"Christmas?!” Eren sat up, staring down at Levi with his hands supporting him at either side of Levi's head. "Do you know what that means?" He asked with a dopey grin, not letting Levi answer. "It's like you're Jesus! My family will love it if I'm dating our lord and savior!" He joked.

Levi couldn't hold back his laughter, throwing his hand over his eyes. "Holy shit, you're such a dork."

"I'm your dork, though." Eren settled on top of Levi, gazing up at him dreamily.

"That you are." Levi agreed happily. He lazily started petting Eren, watching him stare back.

"Now that we're on the subject, what do you want for your birthday?" Eren inquired.

"Nothing." Levi yawned again. "I don't want anything."

Eren scowled at him. "You have to want something. It's your birthday and Christmas, so I'm getting you two things. But I can't get you anything if I don't know what you want."

"Well, I don't want anything and you're not getting me a present, let alone two." Levi shot back.

"Come on, Levi!" Eren whined. "Let me do this for you, you deserve something nice. Everybody should get a present on their birthday, especially you." Eren snuggled up closer and started scratching behind Levi's ear. "You always work so hard and you're such a good person. Why can't I get you something?"

Levi involuntarily leaned into Eren's touch. "Because I said so, you brat. Don't get me anything."

Eren lightly nipped at his cheek. "I will, and you can't do anything about it! And if you deny my gifts, I'll be sad. You don't want to make me sad, do you?"

Levi sent Eren a dirty look. "... No."

"Then it's settled, I'm getting you the best present you've ever gotten. Now... what do you like?" Eren asked hesitantly.

Levi snorted. "You don't even know what I like? We've been dating for more than three months."

"I know what you like!" Eren defended. "Just not enough to get you a good present. I know you like The Cure, color guard, languages... goth clothes. I don't know what to get you based on all that."

Rolling his eyes, Levi flipped their positions, staring down at Eren. "Then don't worry about it. I don't care what you get me as long as you don't go out of your way for it."

Eren huffed agitatedly. He thought over his conversations with Levi from the past few months. Come to think of it, he couldn't recall Levi ever hinting at things he wanted. Levi was a closed off person from what he gathered. Eren's face contorted into a frustrated expression when he realized he didn't know much about his own boyfriend.

"What's with that look?" Levi ran his thumb across Eren's cheek bone. "Something wrong, babe?"

"I just realized I know nothing about you." Eren sighed.
"What do you mean? You know plenty about me." Levi tried consoling him.

"Not really. I mean, I know about your personality, but I don't know about the other stuff. Like, what you were like when you were a kid, how long you've lived here, what you think about most of the time, random things that happened you. I know who you are, but I don't know about your life."

Levi thought over Eren's words and wondered what Eren wanted from him. "What do you want me to do?"

A massive grin arranged itself on Eren's face. "Tell me a story." Came his childlike reply.

Levi rolled his eyes, letting himself fall to Eren's side. He snaked his arm under Eren's waist and brought him closer. "I don't know any stories. Sorry to burst your bubble."

Eren frowned at his boyfriend.

"I'm sorry, I don't know what to tell you." Levi shrugged.

"Just tell me... tell a story about when you were a little kid. Something you remember really well." Eren decided.

Levi searched his memories for anything worth sharing. He took a few minutes, trying to think back to his youth and find a situation that would be easy to retell and interesting to hear. When he couldn't come up with anything exciting, he relented with a sigh. "I can't think of anything you'd like to hear."

"I want to hear all of it." Eren argued. "I don't care if it's an amazing story or not. Anything you remember, I'll listen."

Levi smirked at his eagerness. "Alright." He focused on remembering a specific event that he had a hard time forgetting. "Okay, I got a story." He nodded to himself.

Eren threw his arms around Levi's shoulders, facing him fully to show that he was ready to give him his full attention.

Levi cleared his throat, beginning his story. "I was six years old..."

~ eleven years ago ~

Levi stood on a stepping stool in the kitchen, barely tall enough to be at eye level with the counter. He attentively watched his mother mixing the ingredients for sugar cookies in a large bowl and wondered how she could remember the exact measurements of what to put in. He raised himself onto his tip toes and rested his head on the counter.

"Levi, be careful." Kutchel warned him. "You could fall. Either get down or sit on a chair, okay?" She said in a warm voice.

Levi puffed out his cheeks and knitted his brows together, but stepped down regardless. He didn't want his mother to be mad at him. Kutchel smiled, happy that he was taking her advice and being safe. She could hear the patter of his tiny feet as he made his way to her other side and tried climbing on top of the chair. "Do you need help?" Kutchel asked, seeing him struggling to get his
leg up on the seat. She reached out for him, only to have him swat her hand away, frowning in
determination. She couldn't help but chuckle at the cuteness of her son's persistence.

Once he got himself up, he sat watching his mother just as closely as before. "Can I have some,
maman?" He asked, staring up at her.

"When I'm finished adding everything in, you can have a taste, but not too much. These aren't for
us." Kutchel told him.

"Who are they for?" Levi asked.

Kutchel added a teaspoon of vanilla extract and stirred it in. "We have a new neighbor who just
moved in. We're bringing him some cookies to welcome him."

Levi raised a brow at her. "But we don't know him. Why does he get our cookies?"

Kutchel snickered. "Well, if you moved into a new town, wouldn't you like it if someone made you
cookies?"

"... Yeah." Levi answered.

"Once these are done and have cooled down, we'll take them over and you and your brother and
sister will get to meet him. Won't that be nice? You could make a new friend." Kutchel opened a
drawer to get out three small spoons.

"Can Jenkins come with?" Levi asked with hopefulness in his voice.

"Of course he can." Kutchel smiled, taking a small bit of batter on each spoon. She handed them to
Levi, waiting until she was sure he had a firm grip. "You can have one, take the others to Farlan
and Isabel, please."

"Okay, thanks maman." Levi took one in his mouth as his mother helped him down off the chair.
He ran into the living room to find his siblings.

There, on the floor, next to the couch, sat Isabel and Farlan, playing with plastic animals. Isabel
held an elephant and Farlan had a panda bear in his hands. The three siblings preferred the animals
one would find at a craft store, as they looked more realistic than actual toys.

Levi sat to the side, out of the way of where they were playing. "Maman gave us cookie dough."
He held out each spoon for them to take.

His siblings grabbed the spoons excitedly, dropping their toys and waisting no time in eating the
batter. "We get cookies?" Farlan asked.

"No, they're for our neighbor." Levi explained.

Farlan frowned. "But we don't have a neighbor."

"He's new." Levi said curtly. That seemed to be enough to silence his brother. He turned to face
Isabel. "Do you like it?"

Isabel bounced up and down in her joy. "Mhm!" She nodded frantically.

Levi stood up, sprinting back to the kitchen. "They liked it, maman."

"Good." Kutchel was now putting balls of batter on a tray that she would later put in the oven. "If
you all clean up your toys in the next couple minutes, we can watch Thundercats while we wait for them to bake."

Levi went running back to tell his brother and sister.

~

"Don't start without me!" Levi yelled, running down the stairs with his stuffed bat Jenkins in his arms. He trotted over to the couch to take his seat on the end.

"We wouldn't start without you, Levi." Kutchel said, pressing play on the VHS player.

"Jenkins wanted to watch too." Levi stated.

"Well, we wouldn't start without him either." Kutchel walked back to the couch, picking up Isabel, setting her on her lap and sitting between Farlan and Levi. The two boys both leaned on their mother as the show started.

They always watched this show together, every Saturday morning. It had been a tradition since Kutchel had found her old tapes in her closet and asked her children if they wanted to watch her favorite show from her childhood. She felt a wave of nostalgia hit her as she watched the outdated animation on their television. However, it wasn't the same as when she watched it as a little girl, because now she was watching it with her three precious children.

"Wilykit!" Isabel happily pointed as her favorite character had her first few seconds of screen time.

"That's right." Kutchel beamed, hugging her daughter closer.

They continued watching half way into another episode before the timer sounded, signaling that the cookies were ready to be taken out of the oven. Kutchel set Isabel down in her place and tended to the baked goods.

After the cookies were out of the oven, they all watched several more episodes of Thundercats while they waited for the cookies to cool. When they were finished, Kutchel turned off the television and put the cookies in a plastic container, putting three aside for her children. Once the treats were given out to them, she told them to get ready to leave to visit their new neighbor.

Kutchel helped Isabel and Farlan pick out their clothes, handing Isabel a long sleeved, purple shirt with a pair of faded shorts and giving Farlan a white shirt with dark blue jeans. She helped them tie their shoes and offered Levi assistance with getting his clothes together, but he insisted that he was a big boy and could do it by himself. Of course, Kutchel had no problem with letting her son take an independent role. Awhile later, Levi came out of his room, wearing black shorts and a Nightmare Before Christmas shirt (both of which he had also picked out all by himself when he went shopping with his mother.) He even showed her how he could tie his shoes without her help, albeit messily. Kutchel praised him for his competence, telling him how proud she was.

Levi grabbed Jenkins, and made his way downstairs with his family. The bat was big enough to take up the space of one arm rather than a hand, so he stumbled carrying it every so often. He didn't mind, though. Jenkins' fake, blue fur was soft to the touch and was comforting for him to hold. The realistically structured bat face provided him with a face to talk to, never being able to interrupt him and having large bat ears to listen to all he had to say. And most importantly to him,
it smelled like home. Jenkins was a great hugger for when his mother was at work, a wonderful companion at preschool when he sat in the corner, avoiding the other children, and a great excuse to tell his mother why he didn't need any more friends. Levi would bring Jenkins everywhere.

"Now," Kutchel addressed the kids, slinging the bag holding the container of cookies around her shoulder. "You have to be on your best behavior. Be kind and polite to him, after all, he will be living next to us for who knows how long. So, we have to make him feel welcome. Understood?"

The three nodded. "What's his name, maman?" Isabel spoke up.

"His name is Oluo." Kutchel answered.

"Aaaloo-oh." Isabel tried out the word, not having it fit right in her mouth.

"Oluo." Kutchel repeated, chuckling.

"Oh-lowoo." Isabel tried again, frowning.

"Oluo." Kutchel said, slower this time, laughing a little more. "If you're all ready, we can go see him now." They all signaled their readiness and she picked Isabel up on her hip, picking up Farlan into her other one, motioning for Levi to follow behind.

They exited their home and walked across the lawn, Levi trailing closely behind, grabbing onto Kutchel's skirt as they went. Luckily for them, their new neighbor was sitting on his porch reading a book. They maintained a respectable distance as they approached.

"Excuse me, sir." Kutchel called.

The man looked up from his book, sending them a polite smile. "May I help you?"

"We're your neighbors." Kutchel introduced them. "This is my daughter Isabel, my son Farlan," she stepped out of the way to expose Levi, who only stepped back behind her, peaking out to look at the man from his safe zone behind his mother. "And this young man is my oldest, Levi. My name is Kutchel, it's nice to meet you."

"Well, this is a pleasant surprise." He stood up. "I'm Oluo, it's nice to meet all of you." He walked to the edge of the porch and down the steps to speak with them properly.

"We brought you some cookies to welcome you." Kutchel explained, adjusting to show her bag.

"Oh, how kind of you." Oluo grinned. "If you have the time, we could all go in my house and have a chat over them. Perhaps I could make some coffee or tea as well?"

"That would be a wonderful." Kutchel followed him into his home, Levi shadowing her all the while.

~

As his mother and new neighbor talked about stuff he didn't care to listen to, Levi kept hiding behind his mother. He barely listened enough to know that Oluo was very young (for a grownup) and was starting his new job at the school as a music teacher. Levi was vaguely intrigued to find out that music was a subject taught in school, but wasn't interested enough to keep listening.
"Oh, he's just very shy." He heard Kutchel say.

At that statement, Levi tuned in to their conversation. He peeked around Kutchel's chair to look at Oluo, ducking back slightly once he saw Oluo looking back. "You know Levi, you can have a look around the living room if you'd like."

Levi looked up at his mom, asking for permission silently. Kutchel nodded at him. "It's okay, go ahead."

Levi scanned the room, noticing that his siblings had already began their exploration. Farlan was sitting on a sleek, black bench in front of a grand piano and Isabel was trying to climb on top next to him. He hesitantly starting walking away, taking in every sight he could. This man had an interesting home. Levi eyed the old, vintage posters from the early twentieth century, advertising shows for people he couldn't quite read the names of yet. In frames on the walls hung sheets of music, such odd things to hang up in one's home in Levi's opinion. As he looked, his eyes fell on one special piece of music. He didn't recognize the notes, but he was very familiar with the title at the top. "Maman!" He called for his mother. "C'est ta chanson favorite!" Levi pointed at the sheet of music frantically.

"Ah, vraiment?" Kutchel switched her attention from Oluo to her son. She stood, excusing herself and meeting Levi before the framed music. As she laid her eyes on the sheet, she lit up in excitement. She faced Oluo. "You like Édith Piaf?"

Oluo seemed a little surprised at their sudden transition of tongue, but was delighted nonetheless. "Of course, she was one of the most influential singers of all time. I draw a lot of inspiration from her."

Kutchel gasped. "Édith was always my favorite growing up. She still is, it's funny that you have my favorite song of hers hung up. Do you speak French?"

Oluo came over to stand by them. "Unfortunately, no. I've only memorized certain songs in other languages, I don't actually speak them." He admitted. "But even though I don't quite understand that song, it speaks volumes to me."

Kutchel held a hand over her heart. "Same with me. This song has gotten me through so much. Well, all of her music has, but this song is something else. Do you know how to play it?"

"Yes I do."

"Oh, could you please play it!" Kutchel begged.

Oluo shrugged modestly. "I'm not sure if I could really do the song justice."

"Nonsense, I'm sure you'll do wonderfully." Kutchel pressed on.

After a few moments of thinking it over Oluo agreed. He waltzed over to the piano, chuckling as Farlan and Isabel hastily pushed themselves off the bench. Oluo sat himself down and waited to begin, noticing Kutchel gathering her children to take a seat on the couch.

The low notes of the piano came first, followed by Oluo's voice singing the lyrics that the family had heard plenty of times before.

Kutchel grinned wildly, loving that she had the chance to hear a live rendition of her favorite song. She easily became lost in the sounds that she had heard hundreds of times before, only on an old cassette tape. It was refreshing to hear it loud and clear. Levi watched, intrigued in how Oluo could
produce the sounds he always heard coming from his mother's cassette player. His mother never sang along, but would hum in delight when it played. Isabel watched and listened in awe. It wasn't often that she had the luxury of hearing a live performance, regardless of how professional it was. Farlan was transfixed with how Oluo's hands moved on the keys, without pause or being abruptly halted to calculate his next note. He wondered how he just knew what keys to hit without thinking about it.

The song wasn't any longer than it always was, and ended fairly quickly. A small round of applause sounded after Oluo finished and stood from his bench, thanking them for their praise. As soon as he stood, Isabel and Farlan came running to the bench, despite Kutchel's protests.

Isabel stood at Oluo's feet, jumping up and down. "Je veux le chanter! Je veux le chanter!" She chanted, speaking in the language of her family. After hearing Oluo sing in their tongue, it didn't register to her that he couldn't understand her. Oluo simply watched her amusedly.

Farlan climbed onto the bench, reaching for the piano. "I want to play it, teach me to play!"

Kutchel got up and went over to collect her children. "Farlan, don't do that. You didn't ask him." She picked him up, turning around to reach for Isabel. "Isabel, don't shout. It's not polite." She smiled sheepishly at Oluo. "I'm sorry, they're very easily excited."

Oluo waved dismissively. "Don't apologize, I don't mind at all. But, what was she saying to me?"

"She said, 'I want to sing it, I want to sing it.'" Kutchel said, chortling.

Oluo chuckled. "It seems that your kids have an interest in music. If you're okay with it, I'd be happy to teach them a few songs."

"Please, please, please!" Isabel begged, squirming in her mother's arms.

"Yeah!" Farlan joined in. "Maman, can we learn? Please?"

Kutchel didn't take long to make her decision. "I don't have a problem with it. But only if you're sure you don't mind, I'd pay you, of course."

"Don't worry about it. I'm always happy to share the joy of music, free of charge." Oluo promised.

Levi sat on the couch, watching the exchange of conversation and decided that he liked his new neighbor.

~ Present day ~

"That's so cute." Eren mused, snuggling up to Levi more. "I can picture you bringing your bat everywhere."

Levi rubbed his eyes drowsily. "I think my mom has it in the attic somewhere." Levi felt the vibrations in Eren's chest as he laughed lightly. He fixed him with an insincere, annoyed look. "You go."

Eren raised both eyebrows in confusion. "I go where?"

Levi rolled his eyes. "You tell me a story. I went, now it's your turn. Tell me a story from when
you were little."

Eren sighed, trying to come up with something worth retelling. He had plenty of stories, but he wanted to start with a really good one. "Okay, I've got the perfect story."

"I'm all ears." Levi kissed his forehead, waiting for him to begin.

Eren set the scene. "I was five years old and coming home from the park ..."

~ Twelve years ago ~

Carla dragged her son along, holding his hand. "Eren, you can't keep getting into fights with the other kids. One of these days, you could get really hurt or you could hurt someone else, do you want that to happen?"

Eren pouted at the ground with furrowed brows. He muttered quietly, in the hopes his mother wouldn't hear him. "If the other kid is asking for it, then-"

"Eren." Carla said firmly, giving her son's hand a light tug. "You don't hurt anybody, is that understood?"

"Yes." Eren spat back, kicking a rock. He glanced up at his mother, noticing how she no longer appeared angry, but exhausted and worried. She stopped reprimanding him completely. Eren felt guilty for upsetting her and yanked on her hand. "Mom... ma!"

Carla looked down at him, sighing. "What is it Eren?"

"... I'm sorry I hit him." He nearly whispered, gazing up at her apologetically.

Carla's visage softened at the sincerity of Eren's voice. "Just don't do it again, okay?"

Eren nodded. Silence fell between them for a few minutes and Eren just had to ask, "Do you hate me?"

Carla stopped in her tracks and knelt down to his level in the middle of the sidewalk. "Eren, sweetie. I could never hate you." She grabbed his shoulders, staring into his eyes. "I love you. I'll always love you no matter what. I'm just worried about you. I don't want you to do bad things and get hurt or hurt someone else. I'm a little upset about what you did, but I don't hate you, Eren. Don't ever think that."

Eren looked down at his shoes. "I won't do it again." He promised.

Carla smiled at him for the first time since they left the park. "That's my good boy." She kissed the top of his head, taking his hand and standing back up, resuming their walk home.

They walked into their home not too much later. Upon seeing a familiar figure sitting on the couch, Eren ran into the living room. "Dad!" He shouted, jumping onto the couch, by his side.

"Hey," Grisha smiled, patting his son's shoulder. "What are you two doing home so early?"

"I could ask you the same thing." Carla said back. She set down her purse on the table and walked into the living room, setting herself down in her chair. "Eren got in a fight today." She crossed her
Eren swung his legs in the shopping cart, actively searching for the perfect present. "And I drew
her a picture of fish in the sea.” He went on and on, telling his mom how he was helping to get things ready for his new sister.

"You'll have to show me sometime." Carla reminded him, pushing the cart along. "Now, this is your present that we're looking for, so you get to choose what it is. What would you like to get her?"

Eren thought for a minute, trying to decide. "... I don't know yet." He mumbled.

"That's alright, we'll find something." Carla assured him. She passed by a few aisles of dolls and game boards. "Would you like to get her a toy?"

While peering into the aisles as they passed through, Eren decided against it. "No, I wanna give her something different."

They weaved through aisles as they went, Eren shaking his head at everything his mother suggested. He just wanted something that he was sure his new sister would like. He turned down toys, candy, games, nearly everything they crossed. Eventually, they worked their way over to the front of the store in a small section that had belts, purses, wallets, hats and other accessories. Carla only barely glanced at the shelves, but Eren told her to stop. He observed a wall that had various objects hanging from it. Noticing his interest, Carla pushed the cart over to the wall. "See something you like?"

Eren didn't answer, he only focused on picking the perfect present. "That! That's it!" He pointed to the lower half of the wall.

Carla bent down to retrieve the deep red scarf he had been aiming for. "Is this it?"

"Yes! I wanna give her that!" Eren reached out for it, accepting it from his mother. He felt the soft material in his small hands, admiring the texture. He wrapped it sloppily around his neck, testing it out and determined that this was the gift he wanted to give.

~

The day came when they would finally be picking up their new family member and bringing her home. In the car, Eren couldn't possibly sit still. He kept bouncing in his car seat, looking out the window and singing to himself ‘I get a sister, I get a sister!’ In the front seat, Carla simpered at the adorableness of her son's excitement and also couldn't keep her heartbeat from racing at the soon to be reality of having a daughter. Grisha was no different, he couldn't drive the car fast enough, he wanted to see his new child already.

Carla craned her head around to look at Eren. "You remember to be polite when you meet Mikasa, right?"

"Yup!" Eren confirmed, kicking his legs.

Carla smiled happily at him. "Good." She turned back around, watching the road as they decreased the distance.
"Alright, we're here." Grisha announced.

The two parents hastily unbuckled themselves and exited the car, Carla going around to open Eren's door and buckle him. She helped him get out of the car and held his hand so he wouldn't go bounding off into the building like an animal.

"Come on!" Eren practically dragged his mother into the building. "She's waiting for us!"

Carla and Grisha laughed. "Eren, she's not going anywhere." Grisha told him. "She'll still be there if we're a few seconds later."

After entering the building that Eren thought looked more like a house, Carla took Eren up in her arms so he wouldn't go off and get in trouble. Carla and Grisha took a considerable amount of time to fill out forms upon forms and sheet after sheet. Eren couldn't stop squirming in his mother's arms, they were taking too long. Eren wouldn't have believed them if they told him that this wasn't the first time they had to fill out so much paperwork.

While he waited for them to finish, he looked around the room they were in, examining the people there. He glanced at someone making copies of forms, two couples sitting at the waiting section, the man speaking with his parents. How could they all be so calm when he was just about to see his sister? He stared into space, waiting for anything to happen when a door at the end of a hallway opened, revealing a little girl with dark, olive skin and black hair who was being escorted by another lady. 'That must be my sister!' he thought. "Mikasa?" He called for her. His parents instinctively looked where he was facing, seeing the young girl with the woman keep walking, not sparing him a glance. Carla and Grisha both looked at each other amusedly and kept filling out the paperwork. Eren kept watching and felt disappointed when another couple greeted the girl who he thought was his sister.

At long last, Grisha and Carla finished the paperwork and sat down in the waiting area. Eren sitting on his mother's lap, trying to wiggle his way off. "Maaaaa, when do we see her?" He whined.

"Soon." She promised. "We just have to wait now." To distract him, she handed him the purple bag that contained the scarf he had for her. "Keep this on you, so you can give her your present after we meet her."

Eren held the bag to his chest, dead set on keeping it safe and secure. He wouldn't want anything to happen to it before he gave it to Mikasa. "Daaad," Eren complained. "Is it almost time? I wanna see her now."

Grisha chuckled. "Soon, Eren. She'll be here any minute."

Just as he spoke the door down the hall opened and Eren tried getting off of his mother, only to see a blond little boy come through with the same lady from before, guiding him. Eren deflated, sitting back. He watched with a heavy heart as the boy went over to the couple sitting across from them. They immediately started crying with joy, pulling the boy into a warm hug. Where was his sister? He wanted his sister. The woman who escorted the boy set out two small suitcases that were left unnoticed as they family celebrated their meeting with more happy tears. They left over to the counter again to finish some last business before leaving with their new son.

Eren frowned, crossing his arms and holding the bag tighter. He didn't even get his hopes up when
the door opened again. Out came a little girl with long, black hair and fair skin, seeming timid as the same woman led her out rather than following her. A glimmer of hope settled in Eren's heart as he looked up at his parents who just seemed awestruck and nodded at him. This time, Carla couldn't hold Eren back as he pushed off her hands and ran over to his new sister.

"Mikasa!" He shouted, gripping her in a warm embrace. Mikasa widened her eyes in surprise as she was brought into a hug by a boy she had never met. Eren pulled back, looking at her. "I'm your new big brother! I'm Eren!" No one dared interrupting the moment to tell him that she was his big sister, being a little over a month older.

Mikasa simply stared at him, then looked at Carla who had tears in her eyes as she approached more calmly, and Grisha as he covered his mouth, unable to control his happiness. The two knelt down to see her at her height. The woman left to retrieve Mikasa's bags and the family was left to themselves.

"Hello, Mikasa." Carla choked out with watery eyes. "We're your new family."

"Hello," Mikasa breathed out, still nervous about the situation, but not apprehensive. She took her time observing each person and deciding on what she thought of them.

Eren was so caught up in his excitement that he forgot about her gift and offered it to her as soon as he remembered. He picked up the bag and handed it to her, drawing a laugh from both their parents. "This is for you, it's your welcome present."

Mikasa was hesitant at first, but accepted it. She looked at her parents to check and see if it was okay and they both gestured to the bag, saying it was alright. She reached her hand in and pulled out the red scarf, studying it in her hands and enjoying it's soft material. She looked up at Eren with the tiniest ghost of a smile. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, I'll help." Mikasa raised a brow as Eren took an end of the scarf and started wrapping it around her haphazardly. He layered it over and over, it being too long for a child and was wrapped around loosely up to her mouth.

Carla and Grisha giggled at the sight, relieved that their energetic son was getting along so well with their daughter. Mikasa pulled the scarf down just enough to feel it in her hands and reveal her mouth.

"Do you like it?" Eren inquired.

Mikasa looked at him with the first real smiled she had worn since she came out. "Mhm, I love it." She looked to her side when she saw her suitcase being set down.

Carla rested a hand on Mikasa's shoulder, grinning. "Let's go home." She stood, grabbing her hand and started walking towards the counter.

While Carla and Grisha finalized everything, discussing check up dates and other things to remember, Eren grabbed Mikasa's hand and started gabbing to her. "You'll love our home! We have a big backyard, lots of toys, mom always makes dessert, there's a park close to us, you get your own room, we can draw on the sidewalk. Which reminds me, I made you a picture at home. We get birds, there's a slide in the backyard, I'll share my soccer ball with you, mom makes sweaters, we have game night every Friday-"

"Game night?" Mikasa asked.

"Yeah! We have board games and drawing games and guessing games and-"
Mikasa smiled at the images going through her mind. She had a feeling she would really love her new family.

~ Present day ~

Levi just smiled madly at his boyfriend. "Okay, now that's adorable. You were even a restless little shit when you were a kid."

"Hey!" Eren smacked Levi's arm, both of them chortling.

"No, but seriously." Levi persisted. "It's cute how you were so excited to get a sister." Levi continued to comb his fingers through Eren's hair as he talked.

"Yeah, she's still my best friend. Other than Armin of course." Eren added quickly.

Levi raised his pierced brow. "What? I'm not your best friend?"

Eren laughed. "Okay, I have three best friends. Happy?"

"Very." Levi came in, connected their lips in a sweet kiss. Eren knew by now to open his mouth a tiny bit to allow Levi entrance. Levi always preferred to kiss that way, having full access to the warm cavern of Eren's mouth, taking him in all at once, exploring every inch. Eren kissed back enthusiastically, slipping his tongue past Levi's as well. Once Eren's guard was down, Levi took the opportunity to capture Eren's tongue and slightly suck, a motion that drove Eren wild. This way, he could feel Levi's tongue ring and he was completely engulfed by his love and that was the best feeling in the world to him.

They separated, breathing each other's air and looking deep into each other's eyes. It was moments like this when they both remembered just how madly in love they were with each other. It was astounding how close they were after having known each other for such a short time. But that's how love is sometimes.

"I love you so much, mon grand." The sincerity and emotion behind Levi's voice whenever he said that never failed to make Eren's heart skip a beat.

"I love you too, Levi." Eren returned his feelings. Levi could never believe that someone as magnificent as his Eren could love someone like him. But he did, and that was enough for him.

"I'd hate to ruin the moment, but we should get ready to go." Levi forced himself to say.

"I know. Should I bring money?"

"No," Levi unwillingly parted from Eren. "Admission is free and they don't sell anything there." Levi went to his closet and picked out a plain, black v-neck, with a long, button up coat and a long, black and gray striped scarf. The pants he was wearing would have to suffice as he didn't plan on changing them. He put on some dress shoes and began changing into the clothes he picked out.

"Put on your coat." He instructed Eren.

Eren was wearing a warm, blue sweater, jeans and dress shoes, as he was told by Levi to dress up a little. His cross necklace and key necklace clanked together as he threw on his coat along with the messy scarf his mother made him. He looked back at Levi who was now bundled up and he pushed
the thought away of how Levi still looked stunning without a speck of skin showing. He looked rather sophisticated as his coat was neatly buttoned and his scarf was expertly tucked in.

Levi threw on some fingerless gloves for extra measure and walked out his bedroom door with Eren trailing closely behind. Just as they made it to the stairs, Isabel pushed past them, shoving them to the wall. "I need my folder!" She yelled. As she passed, they noticed her orange dress and black bolero jacket and Eren even thought he saw her wearing one shoe. Just one.

Eren chuckled as they descended the stairs. "Do they always get like this?" He asked.

"Yeah, they're always excited for their concerts, especially their holiday concert." Levi made it down stairs, turning into the living room to see Farlan sitting up from the piano bench and gathering his sheet music.

"Gotta find my trumpet!" Farlan hopped out of the room to search for his instrument. He was dressed just as well, with his white dress shirt, black slacks and shining shoes.

Kutchel came through the hallway, wearing a sky blue skirt that went down to the floor and a white sweater. She tried putting her hair up as she looked for her cameras on the coffee table. "Levi, Eren, are you both ready to go any time now?"

The two boys responded affirmatively and waited for everyone else to gather their things. Farlan came out of the hallway with his trumpet case, guitar case and his music folder. Isabel came stumbling down the stairs, barely catching herself from falling as she reached the bottom. "I found my music folder." She huffed out.

And with that, they were ready to leave.

~

At the school, Isabel and Farlan parted from Levi, Eren, and Kutchel. Kutchel led the two boys into the auditorium and started looking for the perfect seat when she realized she wouldn't be the one making that choice.

"HEY! OVER HERE!" Hanji's booming voice came from the center of the auditorium.

The three immediately made their way over to where Hanji's voice came from. As they approached, Eren noticed that the entire color guard was in the same area along with some other friends. Kutchel sat next to Hanji, pulling out her video camera and a fold up tripod.

"I'll take videos so you can focus on their concert." Hanji said, pulling out their phone.

"Thank you, Hanji." Kutchel beamed. "You're always so considerate."

While they conversed, Eren leaned over to whisper to Levi. "They really come to every single event for people in the guard, don't they?"

"The guard is your family, of course they do. Teamwork is important and all, but support matters just as much." Levi explained. "When Nanaba went to go get her top surgery, we escorted her to the hospital and took her out for lunch when she was released. Every year when Petra enters her flowers in a county fair, we go to watch. When Marco came out to his grandparents, we went along
to make sure nothing bad happened to him. We care about our members."

Eren sat back, taking all of that in. "Wow... that's amazing."

"We're everywhere." Levi stated. "Like a gang."

Eren snorted at that. He almost jumped out of his seat when a hand came down on his shoulder and a voice followed. "It's true, we're everywhere." Sasha hissed eerily. Eren only laughed harder when he realized who it was.

Another hand piled on his other shoulder. "Like ninjas." Connie whispered creepily.

Eren couldn't calm down from his laughing fit. Eventually he had to as the band came out with their instruments, taking their seats on the stage. Oluo followed them out, addressing the audience.

"Welcome to our band and chorus holiday concert. Our full band will be performing first. I hope you enjoy." A curt introduction, but Oluo always tried to keep his words short, as his mind worked faster than his mouth. He spun around and silently counted off the band.

The sounds of 'Winter Wonderland' filled the auditorium. Eren sought out Farlan and found him playing the piano in the pit with Oluo conducting to his side. Eren peeked over at Kutchel, who looked to be the happiest, proudest mother he'd ever seen. She took a few pictures every once in awhile, but spent most her time enjoying the show.

Their second song required Farlan to abandon his piano and rush backstage to acquire his trumpet. After he had his trumpet and corresponding sheet music, he took his plate in the front row, delighting Kutchel. This way, she could take pictures of his face.

'The Russian Dance' from the Nutcracker was the next song, much faster and excited the audience.

The last piece was a song that was unrecognized by the majority of the crowd. It was a slower song and once again, Farlan had to swap instruments. He exchanged his trumpet for his guitar and served as the only string instrument in the band. The somber tone of the song made a peaceful environment and calmed the crowd from their previous piece.

When the full band portion of the concert was finished, it was time for the jazz band to perform. Farlan stayed in sight, but moved back down into the pit to play the piano.

Jazz band consisted of less members, which made sense, because it was composed of the harder working students. The next group was the full chorus. Oluo announced them and they walked out in single file onto risers in the pit. Isabel, being a short alto, was placed in the front row on the right. Kutchel had to adjust the video camera on her tripod to angle it towards Isabel more.

On Oluo's mark, the altos started snapping, the men section patted their legs and the sopranos began rubbing their hands together. The sopranos descended the scale, singing 'do's, allowing the altos to join in with slow, pulsing 'do's. Oluo hand a vibraslap in one hand and a cylindrical rattle in the other, playing the rattle constantly, waiting to use the other instrument. The song progressed and Eren had the impression that the song sounded extremely similar to the rain. That being said, he was very fond of this piece.
The chorus reached a point in the song that sounded like pounding thunder. Oluo shook the vibraslap, adding to the thunderous symphony. Eren went wide eyed, entirely captivated in the music. It ended all too soon, and the chorus proceeded to grab the music folders at their feet and prepare for their next song as the audience applauded.

They moved on to a song that Eren knew very well. Hallelujah. And for this song, Kutchel had tears in her eyes, seeing her daughter walk up to a lone mic stand. She had her own solo.

The song was performed as an a cappella with Isabel singing the actual words. Eren had heard her sing before, but never with such strong emotions and mournfulness in her voice. It was truly something he felt blessed to hear.

Again, a sense of disappointment came over the audience when the song came to an end. That feeling didn't last long when their final song 'Carol of the Bells' began. It seemed to be a favorite amongst everyone.

~

Select choir was after full choir and as expected, Isabel was in that as well. Their songs were 'Sleep,' a hypnotizing ballad, 'I Am in Need of Music,' and 'Banks of Doon.' When everyone was convinced that the concert was over, the band came out to join the choir and the rest of the chorus returned on stage.

Oluo faced the crowd one last time. "We have one last, special piece to perform for you all. Thank you all for coming."

They couldn't have ended with a better piece. The perfect song to send everyone home with and remain in their minds. Peace on Earth. And it was absolutely beautiful. Eren briefly looked over at Kutchel during the middle of the song and a glistening tear escaped, but the only emotion he could detect was joy. Eren looked at Levi, who had the faintest smile on his face, but it held so much elation behind it. Eren wondered if this would be a story that Levi found worth telling some day.

Chapter End Notes

That ending felt rushed as hell and I'm sorry.

All the songs that the chorus sang except Carol of the Bells were songs in my chorus, but Carol of the Bells is my favorite Christmas song. (I'm not even Christian but I'm a sucker for Christmas music) The first song is a song called La Lluvia, which is this beautiful song that you all have to listen to and here's a video if you'd like to hear it. (It's not my chorus) https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oqoDAL6UBmI If you appreciate choral music, you'll love this.

I've wanted to write these flashbacks, even though I'm not good a making flashbacks. But I've wanted to write those two parts for a long time. I just wanted tiny, poker faced Levi and active, loud, little Eren. Sue me. But just on how this was executed, I don't like this chapter. I wish I could've done better.
(And this is completely irrelevant but my old color guard coach is giving me all the old awards because otherwise, they'll get thrown out. All of them. Three huge boxes. My walls are going to be so decorated by the end of the week, oh god.)

One last warning: It'll be quite awhile before the next chapter comes out because it's Levi's birthday/ Christmas chapter and it's going to be so. Fucking. Long. I'm going to guess and say it'll be uploaded within the next two weeks, we'll see. But while you're waiting, and if you haven't read it yet, the first chapter of my new fic is up, yay!

Translations:
C'est ta chanson favorite! - It's your favorite song!
Ah, vraiment? - Ah, really?
Je veux le chanter! - I want to sing it!

If you'd like to check out my tumblr, it's dr-s--art. Sorry for any errors, I don't edit. If you liked this, please let me know with a comment or kudos, thanks so much for reading!!! <3
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

The boys celebrate Christmas and Levi's birthday!

Chapter Notes

I'M SO SORRY FOR THE LONG WAIT, FORGIVE ME. Holy shoot, this chapter is long. I've been writing in all my free time, and I literally mean all of it. I'm even updating it in my spare time, I'm not even completely out of my tux from prom yet.

Fabulous news! I now have a beta, who is, by the way, just about the coolest person ever. Follow them on tumblr, they're stormsoflegends. They post the cutest fan art I've ever seen. So, thank them for being a kind hearted, helpful bean!

I'm not completely happy with this chapter. I think it's dull and rushed, but somehow too long at the same time? The smut isn't overly great, but yeah. I hope you enjoy this regardless!

Translations at the bottom.

Another color guard show came and went and it was just as exhilarating as the last one. Eren was just as amazed with all the different performances he saw. He could definitely get used to this kind of routine. Now, the team was on the bus home; Isabel and Farlan taking requests for songs to play as they rode. It was almost Eren's turn and he wasn't sure what he was going to pick. The ride to the competition was spent with Farlan and Isabel introducing him to different bands and genres so they could get a good idea of what his music taste was. They discovered that his favorites were indie bands like Of Monsters and Men, The Killers, and Modest mouse, and even more so, punk bands like The Circle Jerks, The Damned, and The Misfits. Eren was still new to it all, so he was unsure of what to request. He turned to Levi, who was currently holding their third place award with care, as it was a trophy rather than a plaque this time. "What are you going to ask them to play?"

Levi faced Eren. "Probably something by The Knife." He shrugged. "Something to keep me awake so I don't drop the trophy."

Eren chuckled. "Isn't it Hanji's turn to bring the award home?"

"Hanji dropped their food in the cafeteria twice, I don't think handing them an award to carry on a bus ride is the best idea."

Eren let out a small laugh. "Yeah, that's probably for the best." Before he knew it, it was his turn and Farlan was shoving his iPod in Eren's direction. He still hadn't decided his request, and he didn't want to play something they'd already heard, risking the possibility of annoying other people
on the bus. "I'm not sure what I want to pick."

"That's okay," Farlan assured him. "Would you like some help deciding?" He continued once Eren nodded. "Alright then, do you want to hear more songs from one of the earlier bands you liked, or do you want to have a sample of a new band?"

"New, please," Eren said.

Farlan briefly scrolled through a playlist, ignoring Ymir's shouts to 'hurry up and play a song already.' "Wanna try listening to Bad Religion?" He noticed how Eren visibly flinched at the name. "Heard of them?"

"Yeah, I've heard of them."

"Don't like 'em?" Farlan assumed.

"No, I've never heard their music," Eren corrected. "It's just that I'm not allowed to listen to them. My dad told me about them and told me not to listen to them, because they're influential in a bad way."

Isabel had tuned in at this moment and joined Farlan in staring at Eren perplexedly. "Sooo, you're not going to listen to a band because your dad said no?" Isabel questioned.

Eren nodded affirmatively. "Mhm. They're bad, aren't they?"

Farlan and Isabel shared a look and did what they could to keep from laughing. "Not exactly." Farlan treaded carefully. "I think he just told you that to scare you. But yeah, there aren't really any bands, that I know of anyways, that are a bad influence. You take what you want from music, so if you choose to listen to it just because you like the sounds, that's fine too. So, what do you say? Wanna give Bad Religion a shot?"

Eren tossed around the idea in his mind, weighing out the pros and cons. If he didn't tell his dad that he listened to them, there wouldn't be any cons, he figured. "Sure, why not?"

"Nice! I'll play 'Infected.' It's a classic." Farlan didn't take long to search for the song before he played it.

Farlan and Isabel had a knack for guessing Eren's taste in music, so it didn't come as a surprise when he enjoyed the song as it played through Farlan's speaker. Eren covered his mouth to hide his laughter as he noticed Isabel head-banging to the music.

Farlan took a bit longer to notice. "Izzy's got the right idea!" Soon he had joined her in head-banging. "Come on, Eren! Do it with us!"

"I don't know..." Eren said hesitantly. "It looks dangerous."

"This coming from the guy who climbed the side of a building and crawled into a window on the second floor to get to class," Levi commented from Eren's side.

"It's not dangerous!" Isabel countered. "It's fun! You have to try it!"

Eren couldn't argue with any of that, and besides, it did look fun. Before the song could slow down, Eren joined the two siblings in their activities, finding the action to be very liberating. He started laughing, causing the others to do the same, not even caring how ridiculous he may have appeared. Something about that music just freed him from his constraints and restrictions. He abruptly came
to a halt when he heard Levi snickering. He looked over his shoulder to find Levi holding his phone out to record him. "Hey!"

"You're too easy sometimes." Levi put his phone away.

~

Eren entered his home to see his mother sitting on the couch, going through the videos she had taken from the show on her phone. She greeted him tiredly, and he couldn't blame her for doing such as he walked upstairs drowsily. He briefly wondered if his father was home or if he had yet to arrive.

It had been a long day and he planned on getting to bed very soon. Leaving his equipment in the corner of the room, he searched around for pajamas to change into. Finding pants and a shirt rather quickly, he went back downstairs to get a glass of water before heading off to bed. He descended the stairs, yawning all the way down. Once he reached the bottom he instinctively paused at the sound of an agitated voice coming from the living room.

"Don't you want to see it? I took plenty of pictures as well if you want to look at those." Carla's voice carried over to Eren's ears. Apparently his father was home.

"No, I don't want to see them." His father's harsh voice followed.

"But Grisha, you can't ever make it to his shows. Don't you at least want to watch his performance? I thought it was very good." Eren determined that they were talking about his most previous color guard show.

Mikasa made her presence known as she stood by Eren, listening in. She looked at him sadly, having walked down early enough to catch the conversation being had between their parents. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

"I don't care to see it," Grisha spat out. "I don't want to see his 'performance', I don't want to see him with all those freaks, and I certainly don't want to see my own son in a ridiculous costume."

Eren felt a pang in his chest and a hand on his shoulder. Mikasa tried pulling him away to save him from hearing worse things, but Eren's feet wouldn't budge.

"And why's that? Why don't you want to see? What's the matter with you?" Carla shot back in an accusing tone.

"Because I don't want to be more disappointed than I already am!"

A disturbing silence fell over the entire family. Eren felt a weight falling over his lungs.

He was a disappointment.

A pause came before Grisha continued in a much quieter voice, but it held just as much venom. "It's bad enough I have to live with the knowledge that my son is in a pathetic dance class for girls. I don't have to see it to know how embarrassed I'd be."

Carla took a moment before responding with, "Grisha, he's our son. You can't even act the least bit
supportive for Eren? This isn't about you."

"I'm not going to be supportive of something so wrong." Grisha's cold tone carried through to Eren, tearing up any hope he had left for his father.

Mikasa tugged on Eren's arm, gaining his attention. She nodded her head at the stairs, suggesting that they go back and get out of the distressful situation. He followed her silently up to his room. She went in with him and slung her arm around his shoulder as they sat on his bed. "I'm sorry, Eren," she murmured.

Eren shook his head, feeling his stomach turn and eyes sting. "It's okay." He breathed out, scrunching his eyes shut to will away the tears. He tried keeping his emotions in check, but the anger was building up so quickly, it was hard to restrain himself. "What the fuck is his problem?" The bridge of his nose and the area between his eyebrows crinkled and his hands curled into fists as the rage bubbled up.

"It's nothing you did, Eren," Mikasa reminded him. "That's just the way he is, remember?" She took his hands and pulled them out of fists and laid them back on his lap: something she had learned would calm him down.

"I know, but I hate it," Eren gritted out, feeling the tears starting to recede.

"I know you do. Mom and I hate it too," Mikasa reassured him. "But there's not much we can do about it. We can't change him, no matter how much we'd like to."

Eren took several stabilizing breaths before responding with, "Is it bad that I wish he wasn't our dad?"

Mikasa held his hand: her heart breaking because she felt the same way. "It's not bad that you think that way about him; it's bad that you have to think that way about him. It's not bad that you're angry with him; it's bad that he's done something so horrible to make you angry."

Eren nodded. That made sense to him and comforted him. Bit by bit, his heart rate decreased in speed and the numbness took the place of his recent anger. "Should I drop out of color guard?"

"No," Mikasa answered quickly. "Don't make decisions for him, make them for you. Plus, you need it to graduate, so that's not the smartest idea." She felt somewhat relieved when Eren huffed out a small laugh. "Eren...? Do you like color guard?"

Eren thought over his answer. He remembered how, not too long ago, he never would've admitted that he actually enjoyed the sport. But he could be honest with his sister, and he didn't see the point in lying anymore. "I do."

"Then don't let him ruin it for you." Mikasa patted his shoulder. "Everything will be okay."

Eren sent her a fraction of a smile. "Thanks, Mikasa."

~

"I can't believe he said that." Levi grimaced. "There's nothing wrong with you being in color guard. There's nothing wrong with you, period!" Levi pushed his hair back with one hand, frustrated by the story that Eren was relaying to him.
"It's fine, Levi," Eren said, laying at the foot of Levi's bed as Levi paced around the room. "It's not a big deal."

"If it's making you upset, then it is a big deal. God, that makes me fucking pissed. What a piece of shit." Levi kept grumbling as he stomped around. "What a real fucking piece of—" Levi cut his rant short when he heard a whimper from Eren. He looked over to his boyfriend who was laying on his side, gripping a pillow to his stomach in pain (Levi figured it was an emotional pain of sorts), and staring at the ground. Levi walked up to him and kneeled on the ground to be face to face with him. He started petting Eren's hair and kissing his forehead. "I'm sorry, baby. It's not fair that your dad is like that."

Eren just gripped the pillow harder and took a deep breath. "Don't apologize, it's not your fault."

"I know, but it makes me sad that you don't have the father you deserve."

Eren shook his head. "I don't need a good father. I have people better than that. People like you."

Levi grinned. "That's the spirit, mon grand. Focus on the good things."

"I just need to be distracted for now."

~

Levi happened to be very good at distracting him. Eren asked for him to give him random things to talk about and look at; anything that would keep his interest for a few seconds. Levi started by pulling out old t-shirts after Eren said he wanted to try some on. He found some old shirts that he used to wear for guard practice, but that didn't wear much anymore. After seeing Eren wearing them, Levi said that they belonged to him now, which made Eren feel guilty for taking them, but he was eventually convinced. Eren threw on a loose shirt with the band Placebo's logo on it. Levi said he thought he'd looked particularly nice on him with it hanging off one shoulder. Hearing that made Eren eager to please his boyfriend. To make him even more comfortable, Levi offered him a pair of black pajama pants. He let Eren rummage around in his closet and on his desk, having a good laugh from time to time when they found obscure items. Levi pulled a drawer out of his desk and set it on the bed, inviting Eren to pick out anything he wanted. Eren pulled out an old photograph of Levi and Hanji practicing with their rifles. He flipped it over to read the back that had 'Levi, Hanji and Lolita, age 14' written. "Who's Lolita?" Eren asked, puzzled.

"That's what I named my rifle," Levi said. "Have you named your rifle yet?"

"No, not yet." Eren hummed. "Haven't given it much thought, really."

"You can name it whatever you want, as long as it's not after someone you know. That's bad luck," Levi helpfully informed him.

"Okay." Eren giggled, putting the picture back and pulling out a tube of lipstick. He inspected it for a moment to confirm that it was what he thought it was. "Why do you have lipstick?"

Levi shrugged. "Because it's black and I wanted it."

"You seriously have black lipstick?" Eren raised an eyebrow amusedly.
"Yeah, doesn't everyone?"

"... Sure," Eren replied sarcastically. He contemplated returning the tube to its box, but he had another idea in mind. He held it out for Levi to take. "I wanna see what it looks like on you."

Levi eyed it with a smirk. "I'd rather you wear some red lipstick."

Eren rolled his eyes, shoving it into his hands. "Just put it on."

Snickering, Levi took the lipstick and strutted over to his desk, pulling out a small mirror. Eren waited on the bed without peeking, wanting to be surprised when Levi showed him the finished product. After a minute, Levi set down the mirror and turned to Eren, walking back over to the bed with his lips painted skillfully and entirely in black.

Eren felt his cheeks heating up, though didn't make any attempt to stop staring. Levi only smirked as he sat next to him, taking in his shocked demeanor. "You like it, mon grand?"

Eren bit his lip, now feeling a bit vulnerable. Levi looked striking with the black makeup applied so precisely, contrasting with his fair skin. "Yeah... I like it a lot," he whispered.

Levi let out an amused breath before it transformed into a full-out laughter. Eren was captivated by his lips spreading as he chortled, the corners of his eyes crinkling, and just Levi's natural beauty in general. He was absolutely stunning, and honestly Eren never wanted to look away.

"Wow, it doesn't take much to have you drooling," Levi commented, wiping a stray tear away.

Eren furrowed his brows before he realized that he was indeed drooling slightly. He jumped to wipe away the corner of his mouth, reveling in Levi's laugh all the while. After the saliva was gone, Eren smiled at Levi sheepishly. Levi just stared into his eyes and rested his hand on top of Eren's, and his heart swelled with all the love he saw in his boyfriend's eyes. Levi sent him the most adoring look he possibly could, hoping that he could understand just how much he loved and cherished him. And as happy as Eren looked, Levi couldn't help but feel the fear that he wasn't providing Eren with everything he needed to be the happiest he could be. "Eren?" He almost couldn't bring himself to ask, afraid to hear the answer.

"Hm?" Eren hummed, still gazing into Levi's stormy eyes.

"Am I making you feel better?" Levi asked hesitantly.

"Yes, thank you so much." Eren threaded their fingers together, tightening his grip on Levi's hand. Levi wasn't satisfied with that. "Am I enough?" He nearly regretted asking.

Eren cocked his head to the side; his smile fading but still present. "Of course you do," he promised with the same smile he held earlier. "Other people have made me happy but... not the way you do. I don't know how to explain it." Eren shook his head, deep in thought. "Before we started going out, I really hated who I was. And I couldn't tell anyone. But now that we're together, even though I'm still scared to tell anyone, I don't hate being gay." He let out somewhat of a humorless laugh. "I'm still scared, but I'm not unhappy all the time. You make me feel so loved, and I really need that. I need that when I can't tell anyone else who I am. You
make me the happiest I've ever been."

That made a tremendous weight lift off Levi's shoulders. He was so desperate to keep Eren by his side. He'd lost someone he loved once, but he loved Eren so much more and he'd do anything to make him the happiest person alive. "Good. I love you, Eren." He pushed himself to get out the rest. "More than anything. If there's anything you want, just say the words and it's yours."

Eren's words were true, Levi never failed to make him the happiest he'd ever been. "I love you too, Levi. You're too good for me."

"Don't say that." Levi silenced him. "You're an angel, I can't be too good for you."

Eren gushed at the compliment, unaware that Levi wasn't exaggerating his words. He leaned closer and planted a kiss on Levi's cheek, mindful of the possibility of getting lipstick on himself.

Levi lifted his pierced eyebrow at him. "What, no kiss on the lips?" He joked.

Eren chuckled. "I don't want to get makeup on me."

Levi saw this as his chance to take their activities back to something less serious and make Eren smile. "Is my makeup not good enough for you?" He watched Eren's confused, yet amused expression and continued before he could protest. "Are you calling my makeup dirty, huh?" Eren started scooting back, he recognized that tone as Levi's 'trouble's about to start' voice.

Levi pounced, attacking Eren by tickling his sides and straddling his hips. "Huh? Is that what you're saying?"

Eren barked out his laughter, trying and failing to throw Levi off. "N-no! I didn't-" His laughter kept cutting him off whenever his heavy breathing didn't. "Stop, I can't breathe! Levi!" His cheeks were beginning to hurt due to his constant smiling.

Levi attempted to lean forward, puckering his lips comically, only making Eren laugh harder. Eren started playfully swatting at Levi, trying to get him to back away so he didn't get his lipstick on him. It was times like this when Eren felt lucky to quite possibly be the only one to see Levi so carefree and mischievous. Eventually, Levi seized tickling Eren in favor of pinning his arms down to place a long, heavy kiss on Eren's cheek, exaggerating the smooching noise as he sat back to study his work. Eren hadn't stopped laughing the entire time and Levi couldn't get enough of the sight of his boyfriend beneath him, giggling uncontrollably with a huge, black lip print on his cheek.

Levi squinted his eyes at him and lowered his voice to a mocking, bitter tone. "That's what you get for making fun of my makeup, punk."

Still in his happy fit, Eren whined back. "I didn't say anything against your makeup!"

Levi grinned down at him. "Well, whatever the case, it's all over you now." He shrugged, hoisting himself off of Eren and sitting by his side.

Eren looked up at him, still laying down. "Hey, you ass." Levi looked at him with raised brows and he took that as a cue to continue. "What do you want for your birthday?"

Levi leaned back on his hands. "I already told you, I don't want anything."

"But Leevi!" Eren pulled on Levi's arm. "You have to give me some idea of what you want, it's only fair."
Levi considered his answer for a moment, simpering at his childish boyfriend. "I want your love and affection for my birthday."

Eren glowered up at him. "No, something you don't already have."

Levi's heart melted at that. He laid down beside Eren and cuddled up to him. "I'll think of something."

~

After removing the makeup, Levi took Eren downstairs to get something to eat. "I'll make us some sandwiches," Levi announced as Eren took a seat at the table. Levi took out various things to put their lunch together and engaged in casual conversation. "So, what does your family do for Christmas?"

"What most families do, I guess. Exchange gifts, hang out all day, pray before dinner and have a lot of food." Eren shrugged. "Why?"

Levi placed a plate in front of Eren while he answered. "Just wondering. I was going to say that if your family wasn't too invested in it, maybe you could come over, but I guess I should've known that your family would be really into celebrating."

Eren thought about it, taking a bite of his sandwich. "Maybe I could." He liked the idea of visiting Levi on Christmas. It would be nice if he could give Levi his presents on his birthday and see his reaction. "I can't spend the entire day here, my parents would throw a fit, but maybe I can visit later in the day. If I'm lucky, I can stay the night if you want."

"You can stay the whole week for all I care," Levi admitted. "Tomorrow's my last day at work until winter break, so I'd have more time to hang out with you, which would be nice." Levi sat himself down next to Eren. "Well, except for this Wednesday. Starting tomorrow until Wednesday is a holiday for Hanji and they asked to celebrate with me on Wednesday. But aside from that, I'm free."

"What are you guys gonna do?" Eren asked, taking another bite.

Levi sat back, relaxing in his seat. "Usually, what we'll do is walk around in the snow-covered woods. After that, Hanji will do a tarot card reading for me, we'll exchange gifts, and then we'll marathon documentaries about penguins, polar bears, and other animals like that." He paused to eat his sandwich, not wanting to speak while his mouth was full. "We do that every year, it's like a tradition. Yule is the only holiday when Hanji doesn't invite all their friends and whoever else over for a party after they do their private celebrations."

Eren smiled around his food. "That sounds like fun." He ignored Levi's grimace at his chewed food. "You guys seem really close."

"Yeah." Levi bared a small grin. "We've been friends since we were kids. They can be a handful sometimes, but I don't mind much."

The two finished their food in silence. Levi fetched a glass of apple juice for both of them and they sat quietly, enjoying each other's presence. It occurred to them that there was a faint murmur coming from the living room, but it wasn't loud enough to be distinguishable. They shared a look
and Eren turned around when he heard a familiar laugh. He rose out of his chair and strode into the living room with Levi trailing close behind.

Eren would be lying if he said he wasn't surprised by what he saw. "Mom?"

On the couch, beside Kutchel, sat his mother, cutting paper on a small table that was set out in front of them. Carla looked up from her work, smiling ecstatically while pointing down at the paper. "Eren, I'm scrapbooking!" Carla didn't even think to greet him properly, she was too excited with her activities.

Levi stared, entertained that the Jaeger family was monopolizing their home.

Kutchel took a cotton ball and an ink pad and called for Carla's attention. "And if you take an off white paper and put distressing ink around the edges, you'll have a paper that looks like it's been aged."

"That's so clever!" Carla mused, watching Kutchel's example.

Eren furrowed his brows as he watched her work. "Ma, when did you get here?"

Carla began mimicking Kutchel's technique as she replied, "Around an hour ago." She stated simply. "Kutchel invited me over. I'm making a page of you, Mikasa and Armin on Halloween when you were ten. I can't wait until you see it when I'm finished!"

Eren had to admit, he couldn't wait to see the finished product. He stepped forward to take a peek of her work and like a child, his mother threw her arms over the page. "Not yet! I'm not done!" She panicked.

Eren stepped back, putting his arms up in defense, snickering. "Fine, I won't look!" He thought it was funny that his mother could be as immature as him some times when it came to her hobbies.

Kutchel set down the cotton ball in exchange for a stamp. "Eren, Levi, after I finish helping Carla with this page I'll be starting dinner. Could you please set the table for me, mon fils?"

"Of course, maman," Levi answered, ushering Eren to come with. When they were in the privacy of the kitchen, Levi let out the laughs he'd been holding in as he took out the plates from the cupboards. "I'm sorry, but that's funny."

Eren helped Levi set the table, grabbing the silverware from drawers. "Yeah, she's been looking for a new hobby for ages. Guess she won't be knitting as often anymore."

~

The next day at school, Eren received a text from Farlan, asking him to skip his private lesson with Levi in favor of going with him and a few others to go birthday shopping for Levi. Eren couldn't refuse.

Eren told Levi that he needed to help Mikasa with some project, so he wouldn't gain suspicion. He waited until Levi and his siblings drove home, so he could walk Mikasa to the side-walk and wait for Hanji to pick him up in their van. He stood out in the bitter cold, shaking and using his numb fingers to pull up his scarf that his mother made him to cover the lower portion of his face.
Fortunately, he didn't have to wait for long. Eren watched as Hanji's eccentric van pulled up and
noticed that no one was occupying the passenger's seat, so he opened the door and rode shotgun.
"Hey, Eren!" Hanji greeted him.

"Hey." He breathed out, buckling up and reveling in the warmth that the van was producing.

"Are you excited to find a present for Levi?" Came Petra's voice from behind him.

Surprised by her presence, Eren turned around in his seat and sent her a smile. "Yeah. I'm not sure
what to get him, so I might need a little help finding something."

"We'll be glad to help!" Hanji said. "We understand the struggle of getting him a gift, he can be a
real grouchy when you ask him what he wants. But we've never gotten him anything he hasn't loved.
We know him well enough." They turned off onto a new road as they drove. "There's a few people
we need to pick up, so we're not going straight to the mall right away."

Eren hummed in acknowledgment, but otherwise remained quiet during the ride. He pulled out his
phone to text his sister to tell their mother where he was and when he'd be home.

Soon, they all arrived at Scouts, which confused Eren only slightly. Hanji honked the horn a
couple of times and out came Mike, removing his apron and Erwin came trailing behind him. Eren
did a double take when he noticed Mike beginning to sprint for no reason, bounding ahead of
Erwin. Mike threw open the van door, leaping inside and slamming the door behind him. Sitting
up, he buckled himself in and locked the door. "What's good, guys?" He asked, out of breath.
Everyone in the van burst out in laughter at his antics.

Erwin stood outside the door, lightly tapping on the window and staring at Mike, unimpressed.
Mike rolled down the window and fixed him with a calm look. "May I help you?" He drawled out.

"Open the door," Erwin said with a sigh.

Mike shook his head. "No. Get in the back, I'm not sharing." No one bothered to make him give
Erwin access.

"Come on, Mike. It's cold, we're wasting time, please just let me-"

"Get in the back, fucko," Mike spat, making the rest of them erupt with laughter. "You know the
rules, you were too slow. Now move it, eyebrows."

With a relenting groan, Erwin rounded the van, opened the back door, and crawled inside. "I
always have to ride in the back, I'm sick of this."

"You love the back!" Mike argued.

"Yeah, but sometimes I'd like to have a real seat," Erwin grumbled, resting against the back seats.

Through snickers, Eren turned around while Hanji pulled out and started driving. "There's another
seat between you and Petra, why does he have to sit in the back?"

Erwin was about to state that he didn't know, but Mike beat him to it. "Because it's the principle!
Between the two of us, if I make it to the van first, I get a seat. If he makes it first, he gets a seat," he explained. "It's a rule we had ever since Hanji got the detailing on the side of the van."

Erwin just sat with a frown on his face, not objecting to Mike's statement. They rode down the
street at a slower speed than normal, due to the icy roads and persistent snow coming down. Eren
tuned out the chitchat going on between the others while he watched out the window, gazing at the snow. Maybe Levi was right; maybe the snow wasn't so ugly. He inspected the individual flakes as best as he could before they flew by. The snow on the lawns that they passed was perfectly laid down, shimmering the light that it reflected. The purity of the untarnished ice and the whiteness that coated the scenery reminded him of Levi's skin.

Just as that thought crossed his mind, they pulled into the driveway of the Ackerman's home. Out came running Farlan, carefully treading over the ice to get to the van. Mike unbuckled and scooted over to make room for him. "Hey, guys," Farlan said breathlessly, shutting the door. "I told Levi that I'm going to a lesson with Mr. Bozado, so he's not suspicious."

"Good work, Farlan!" Hanji praised him. "Isabel's not coming?"

"Nope, she already got Levi his presents," Farlan said.

"Fair enough." Hanji started up the van. "Now, off to the mall."

~

Eren was happy to be in a warm building again and out of the cold. The bright lights coming from the interior of the mall were also refreshing after being under a dreary sky. Hanji led the group to their first stop, which was a small shop for alternative clothing that, in all honesty, didn't get much business in their area compared to the other shops.

Hanji stood by Eren's side to discuss matters with him. "Just so you know Eren, we're having a surprise party for Levi on Wednesday at my place. I'll text you all the details later, when we're not busy. So, get him whatever you like, if you need help finding something, just ask one of us. And don't be afraid to ask me if you need any extra money!" They patted his shoulder and went off in their own direction to start looking for a gift.

Eren started looking around, thinking that everything he saw, Levi would've liked. There wasn't a single item that wasn't black or edgy. Eren situated himself to a wall of jewelry, confident in the fact that he couldn't guess Levi's size of clothing. He felt a bit intimidated, with all the collars and cuffs on the wall that could easily be used in a less casual situation. He walked a bit to the side, trying to find something less... suggestive.

Eren considered buying him a collar, due to the fact that he wore them all the time and seemed rather fond of them. He briefly thought about getting him a bullet belt, and then remembered he already had one. He cast a look at the others to see what they were looking at. Hanji seemed to be checking sizes on jeans, Farlan grabbed a couple of bottles of black nail polish, Petra was examining a few shirts, and Erwin was glaring at Mike who was suggesting a pink corset. At least Eren wasn't the only one who was lost.

Eren gravitated towards Farlan. He was his brother after all, he must have had some clue as to what he should get. "Hey, Farlan." Eren grabbed his attention. "I'm not sure what I should get for Levi. Could you help me?"

"Yeah, of course." Farlan beamed. "Keep in mind, this isn't the only store we're stopping at." Farlan led him over to a wall with arm bands and gloves. "Levi can never have enough gloves, so get him whatever you like. Just remember, he already has black and white striped ones, fake leather ones,
studded ones and lace ones with actual laces. Anything else is fair game." Farlan nodded to the wall.

Eren tried to take that all in at once. "Right, thanks." He was about to let Farlan walk off, but another question occupied his kind. "Oh, wait. What's going on with that surprise party?"

Farlan stood back next to Eren. "Everyone is going to Hanji's house. Levi thinks it's just going to be him and Hanji, but we're all going to jump out and surprise him! After, we all leave, he'll stay at Hanji's place, but the party will last awhile." Farlan held up bottles of nail polish and some eyeliner. "I'm gonna go pay for these, let me know if you need more help."

"Thanks." Eren turned his gaze back to the wall and guessed what he thought Levi would like. The gloves weren't going to be his main gift, he wanted to get Levi something special for his birthday. He'd find something, he was sure of it.

Eren ended up getting gloves with spider web patterns, a pair made out of fishnets, and one with buckles. After the group had paid for their things they set off to find a place to eat. Sitting at the tables in the food court, the group pulled out what they bought to show each other. Petra, being exceptionally excited about her purchase, went first. "He's going to love it, he'll laugh so hard!" She rummage around in her bad and held up a muscle t-shirt that read 'Lookin bi, lookin fly.' She grinned wildly with her choice. "What do you think?" She asked no one in particular.

"Oh my gosh, that's perfect!" Hanji clapped their hands together. "I can't believe I didn't see that." The entire table shared a laugh, all very impressed with what Petra bought. Petra carefully placed the shirt back in the bag, and turned to Hanji. "What did you get for him?"

Hanji sat up straight, fixing their glasses and fishing oh what they bought. "I got him something that he's been wanting for a long time, but too modest to ask for, of course." A unanimous hum of understanding went around the group. They held up a pair of black pants with straps on the back of each leg attaching to the opposite leg. "A nice pair of bondage pants!"

Eren started coughing, gasping for air as he choked on his drink. Bondage pants? What the hell were those?

Everyone tore their attention away from the clothing article in favor of asking Eren if he was okay. After he'd regained his normal breathing, he assured him that he was just fine. "Sorry," he coughed. "Bondage pants? Um, I'm not one to judge, but he's into that kind of stuff?" He started thinking that if Levi wanted those, maybe that was a little thing he'd forgotten to mention to Eren that he wanted regularly out of their sex life.

Hanji furrowed their brows, unsure of what he meant. "What do you— oh. Oh, I see." It clicked in their head. "Well, I don't know if Levi actually likes that kind of thing, but these pants aren't for that. The straps are just for the aesthetic, I don't think they hold up very well in that kind of situation."

"I would like to change the subject," Farlan rushed to say. No one really blamed him for not wanting to discuss his brothers personal habits, so Hanji pulled out their other purchase.

"Right, so..." Hanji revealed a box from their bag and showed off its contents. "I also got him some platforms that he's had his eye on!" They held up a pair of pointed boots with ridiculously large bottoms, which reminded Eren of the seventies. The material of the top portion of the shoes was black pvc, reflecting whatever light came its way.
"Can Levi walk in those?" Eren mused out loud. He had to admit he thought that they looked very cool, but the bottoms of the shoes looked to be about five inches off the ground, not including the heels.

Hanji snickered at Eren's comment. "Trust me Eren, he has a pair of pumps that he wears when he's feeling fancy, these'll be a walk in the park for him." They put the boots back in the box. "He loves these kinds of shoes; they make him feel tall."

The table shared a laugh and Eren mentally reminded himself to ask Levi about those shoes later. After the laughs had died down, Petra elbowed Eren. "What did you get?"

Eren sheepishly brought out the gloves to show everyone. "Uh, I haven't known him as long as you guys, so I guessed on what he would like." He laid out the three pairs and waited for everyone's thoughts.

"Oh, he'll love those," Erwin commented. "He's always wearing gloves, so those were a good choice."

The group gave him their approval, Farlan sending him a thumbs up, and he felt comfortable with his choice.

Farlan went next, pulling out the little items in his bag. "Our mom said to get the last few things for stocking stuffers, so I bought him eyeliner, nail polish, and a Bauhaus CD." He splayed out each item so everyone could see them properly. He didn't think there was much to look at, so he moved on. "Did you get anything, Mike?"

Mike sat up straight and cast Erwin a judgmentally cold stare. "Well..." He cleared his throat, bringing his hand to his mouth. "I DID find these lovely fuchsia gogo boots, but Erwin here, said that it was a terrible idea," Mike parroted him with a mocking tone, using air quotes for good measure. "So, when it comes time for Levi's surprise party, you're gonna have to explain to him why he didn't get the best gift ever." Mike crossed his arms, setting one leg over the other, not breaking his stare with Erwin. Eren couldn't stop laughing. He was a grown (extremely large as well) man acting like a twelve year old child with a grudge. "So, I'll just have to get him something in one of the other stores."

"I also have to get him something from another store." Erwin put an end to the tomfoolery taking place.

~

A few shops later and they ended up at pop culture, media store. Eren still hadn't found the perfect gift for Levi. He wondered if it would be best to just make him something, but then again, he wasn't very crafty.

Eren searched around in the DVD section, not finding anything that stood out to him. He would've easily picked out something in the CD section that Levi would've liked, but he didn't know which ones he already had. Once again, he found himself asking Farlan for help. Eren shuffled over next to him as he looked at a wall of t-shirts. "Hey, Farlan?" He cleared his throat. "Sorry to bother you again, but I can't think of anything to get for Levi. Nothing that he'll really like, anyways."

Farlan thought for a second. "Is there anything specific you have in mind?"
Eren shook his head. "We're... really good friends now, so I want to get him something really nice, you know?"

Farlan nodded, taking a step back. "Yeah, I get what you're saying. It's pretty hard to get stuff for Levi that he'll get excited over. He doesn't tell anyone what he actually wants," he mused aloud.

Faint worry settled into Eren's mind. Of course Levi would be grateful no matter what he got for him, but that wasn't enough for Eren. "Has he ever gotten a present that he went crazy for?"

Farlan took a moment to look back in his memory for a time when Levi was over enthusiastic for a gift. "I remember what he says was the best present he ever got." Farlan offered. At Eren's attentive watch, he elaborated. "When he was sixteen, our mom got him the completed collection of stories and poems by Edgar Allan Poe. He's obsessed with his writing, but he's very private about it."

Eren recognized the name easily. "Isn't he the guy who wrote that poem 'The Raven'?"

"Yeah," Farlan answered, adjusting the bags in his grip. "That's his favorite one, too. It's been awhile since he's recited it, but I think he had it memorized."

"That's cool." Eren couldn't even recite a one lined poem, he found that to be very impressive. "Does he like poetry, or is it just an Edgar Allan Poe thing?"

"I think it's just a Poe thing," Farlan said regretfully. "Sorry, I couldn't help you much."

"It's alright, thanks anyway." Eren shifted into another direction. Perhaps he could make use of that information. He pulled out his phone from his pocket and used it to search 'The Raven' online. He read through the lines, scavenging for any word or phrase or thought provoking hint that could assist him in thinking of something he could find, or even make, for Levi. As he read through, he also attempted to understand why Levi loved the poem, he was actively aware while reading that this was Levi's favorite poem, which drove him to understand the text. Admittedly, he enjoyed the poem, but barely understood it. Eren read through it several times, but nothing had grasped his attention, although it did remind him of freshman English class when it was part of required reading.

He pocketed the device, haven given up on finding anything useful. Crestfallen, Eren watched as the rest of the group encountered little to no struggles with finding gifts. It was then that he decided that he would figure something out after he returned home. Maybe Levi was sentimental and would prefer a handmade gift.

He informed Hanji that he would be right back and headed out of the store to find a bathroom within the mall. Eren became aware of the jingling near his chest and he flicked his gaze down at his key and cross necklaces. He huffed a humorless laugh, thinking about the irony. 'So much for Jesus and luck.' He thought to himself. As he wondered, looking for the restroom, he took a moment to notice every booth he passed.

He avoided making eye contact with the people from the cosmetic booth who were giving out free samples of hand lotion. He felt pity for the person running the phone company stand, the poor girl had no business and appeared to be hating life currently. It came as no surprise that the man at the toy stand was being overrun with customers, Christmas time was hell. Before Eren got far from the store, his eyes landed on an engraving booth. He almost walked past it, but perhaps there was hope for him there. Maybe he could get something personalized for Levi.

It was the same as any other engraving booth he'd ever seen; an endless amount of blank leather bracelets, dog tags everywhere, woven necklaces in need of personalized beads. It was nothing
special. "Can I help you there, son?" The friendly voice of the bearded man from behind the counter pulled Eren back to earth.

"Um, I'm just looking for now," Eren said with a little smile.

"Just so you know," the man continued. "All rings are buy one get one half off."

Eren nodded to show that he heard him and began looking. The dog tags didn't interest Eren. He wasn't sure if Levi would want one, let alone wear one. He could buy him a woven bracelet as a joke, but that idea flew by, forgotten. He was on a mission to find a wonderful gift, there was no time for gag gifts. He moved on to the other side, which consisted of flat pendants in the shapes of everyday things. There were hearts, cats, flowers, circles, squares, stars, soccer balls, footballs, and even crosses. It occurred to him that he didn't have time to just look, his friends would wonder what was keeping him.

The thought struck him like lightning. It was on a complete whim, but he might as well have given it a shot. He was running out of time and ideas. And to be honest, he wasn't going to question his luck with thinking of such a great idea. "Excuse me?" Eren raised his voice to acquire the man's attention. "You don't happen to have any of these shaped like a raven, do you?"

The man scratched his jaw in thought, raising himself to look over the counter and down at the pendants. Immediately, his eyes moved to scan a specific section of the layout and a few seconds later, his rough, dry hand came out to point at a few pendants. "I'm not sure if those are what you're looking for, but they kinda look like a raven or a crow. Heh, you decide." He seated himself back in his chair.

Eren swiftly placed himself where the man had pointed and looked at three identical birds with outstretched wings. There was no mistaking them for anything other than ravens. They only differed in material, but otherwise looked exactly alike. There was no way he could have been that lucky. "Thank you, Jesus," He mumbled to himself. He looked back up at the man. "How much are these?"

The man sat straighter as he answered. "Well, it depends on which metal you get. I suggest the stainless steel, doesn't rust, doesn't bend. Lasts a long time. That one's ten dollars, the others are eight."

'Not too expensive.' Eren thought. "And how much for the engraving? Or does that depend on what I want?"

"Six dollars. It's all the same and you can get whatever you like. As long as it fits."

Eren couldn't pass it up. He gambled and hoped to god that Levi would like it. "I'll take it." He pulled out his wallet and handed the man the money.

"Alrighty, now just pick out the chain, it's free." The man gestured to the selection and then handed him a sticky note and a pen. "And write down what you want it to say."

Eren took his phone out again to search up the poem. He couldn't fit an entire line on, so he looked for a word or two that stood out. Quickly, he scribbled down the word 'Nevermore.' He almost handed it back, but thought better of it. Yes, it was obviously a reference to the poem, the entire thing screamed Edgar Allan Poe. But it was also a present to show Levi how much he loved him and 'nevermore' didn't quite say that. He looked back at his phone searching for something else. Something that could be used as an affectionate saying. The poem may have been gloomy, but the words jumped out and hit him. With the new words, it was still obviously a gift themed after the
poem, but it could also be taken in a much more loving perspective. Eren crossed out the original word and handed him the paper, marked with 'For Evermore.'

Eren handed him the pendant and the chain of his choice. "How long until it'll be ready?" He glanced back at the store he came from.

"Around ten minutes." The man said, picking out the letters to hammer in.

Eren couldn't be gone that long without anyone asking why, he had already been gone too long for a normal bathroom break. "Is it okay if I get back to my shopping and come back when it's ready?" He asked tentatively.

"Of course." The man smiled, putting on glasses to see his work better.

"I'll be back in ten minutes!" Eren stammered as he jogged back to the store.

~

Eren stood anxiously next to Mike as he paid for a vampire key chain. He put on his best acting face and groaned. "God dammit! I left my cell phone in the bathroom." He huffed to Mike.

Make accepted his change and started walking with Eren. "Do you want me to go with you to get it?"

"Oh, no." Eren waved him off. "I'll be right back, if anyone asks where I went, tell them I went to go get my phone." Eren slipped past him and out the door before he could protest further.

"I'm back!" Eren announced as he stopped back at the booth, out of breath from running.

"There you go." The man handed him his necklace in a tiny paper bag. "Are you happy with it?"

Eren removed it from the bag and inspected the work. There, carved beautifully on the pendant, read 'For Evermore.' Eren smiled widely. "Yes, it's perfect. Thank you so much."

~

Eren sat in the back of the van with Erwin. Mike was too slow to the van and complained in the back during the whole ride. Eren's heart never stopped racing, he hoped his present was good enough to make Levi happy. He became paranoid that his gift wasn't special after all, anyone could go to the same engraver and have it made. With great effort, Eren pushed those thoughts away, hopeful that Levi would love it. By the end of their trip, Eren ended up with the necklace, the gloves, an eyebrow piercing with pointed studs, and a box of mint tea. He even bought a few things for Levi's family, his own family, and Armin while he was out.

He stared out the window for the majority of the time, wondering on which days he would give which gifts. He knew he'd save the necklace for Levi's birthday, along with two other gifts, but he'd give him the last at his surprise party. He pondered over which would be most appropriate for the party with everyone there. Eren couldn't wait to see the look on Levi's face when he saw everyone
ready to celebrate his birthday. Levi would walk in to hang out with Hanji for their holiday, completely oblivious.

That reminded him. Didn't Levi say it started that Monday? "Hanji, happy... uh." Eren wanted to wish them a happy holiday, but he couldn't remember the name of it. "Happy..."

"What was that, Eren?" Hanji asked, vaguely checking the rearview mirror to glance at Eren.

Eren furrowed his brows, trying to remember. "Isn't today your...?" He motioned with his hands, attempting to explain what he meant.

Petra fortunately saved the day. "He said 'happy Yule.'" She informed Hanji.

Hanji grinned wildly. "Thank you so much, Eren! It's so nice of you to remember." They were nearly at his home. "Sorry I don't have one of my regular parties for this sabbat, but I think having a surprise party for Levi will make up for it."

"I'm excited," Eren said as they parked in his driveway. "Thanks for bringing me along, guys. See you all tomorrow." He grabbed his bags and left the van after everyone said their goodbyes.

Eren knocked the snow off his shoes before he entered his house and was glad to be back in warmth, even if the cold walk out from the van to the house was rather brief. He said hello to his mother as he passed her in the kitchen and darted upstairs. In his room, he set down the bags of presents near his desk and took a minute to just sit and absorb the heat of his home.

It wasn't long before his mother called him down for dinner. Eren left his room, following Mikasa down the staircase and not bothering to slide down the banister. The smell of a well seasoned, cultural, and a lightly burnt meal awaited them at the table. Eren didn't even mind that it was not of the best quality, it was hot food and he was shivering and hungry.

Carla sat herself down and began filling everyone's plates. Grace didn't need to be said, as it was said the previous night. "Did you find a lot of good things while you were out today, Eren?" Carla handed him his plate.

"Mhm." Eren hummed, taking a bite of food. He didn't waist time with waiting until he'd swallowed to continue talking. "I finished getting gifts for everyone I wanted. I got whatever was left."

"Did you get me anything?" Carla joked with a teasing smile.

Eren smiled back. "I got a present for you and dad last week." Eren turned his attention to Mikasa. "I did get you something though." He pointed at her with his fork.

"What is it?" Mikasa asked.

"I can't tell you, that's cheating." Eren shrugged at Mikasa's glare.

Mikasa sighed and left the topic. "Did you get Armin a present yet?"

"Yeah," Eren replied, taking another bit of food onto his fork. "I got him that Jules Verne book collection. It was sixty percent off, can you believe that?"

Mikasa hit the table. "Dammit! I was gonna get him that!"

Carla exhaled, exhausted from forcing herself to repeat her reprimands. "Mikasa, language."
"Sorry, ma," Mikasa halfheartedly apologized. "Well, that rots. What am I gonna get him?" She pushed around her food on her plate, grabbing her glass to take a drink.

Eren shrugged. "Get him something Star Wars-y." Just as he finished his sentence, the cold air returned when his father entered, the winter wind following him in. Eren's stomach dropped. He hadn't seen his dad since Saturday night, with his late schedule and all. The last thing he heard from him was how he was a disappointment.

Grisha set his coat on the coat rack and put his keys on the table. "Dinner smells wonderful," He commented, pulling out a chair and serving himself.

"You're just in time," Carla began. "It just got out of the oven, so it's piping hot."

After that, the table kind of fell into silence. No one ever had much to talk about with Grisha around, not even Carla. Soon, the only noise cutting through the quietness was the occasional sound of silverware hitting the plates. The strangest part was that this wasn't an awkward silence, it was so normal that no one felt the need to break it.

"Mikasa, Eren," Grisha's voice came through. "Have you both decided what you want for Christmas?"

Mikasa paused with eating. "You guys are going last minute shopping again, huh?"

Carla and Grisha shared a glance. "Yes," Grisha answered. "I'm sorry, but we're both just so busy. It's the only time we have to get you things."

"That's alright," Mikasa said. "All I really want are those two new Pokemon games for my DS. Oh, and Mortal Kombat for the Xbox." She kept her list short, then went back to eating her dinner.

"That sounds doable." Carla hummed. "What do you want Eren?"

Eren never asked for much around Christmas or his birthday. There wasn't much he wanted in all honesty. But this year, he had a few ideas. "Um, I'd like a couple CDs. One from The Misfits and another from The Killers. I don't mind which albums."


Eren shrunk into himself, realizing his mistake. "Yeah, they're just bands." He tried to play it off so that his parents didn't get the wrong idea about the music he listened to. "Never mind, I don't really want anything." He went back to eating his dinner, wanting to take the attention off of him and drop the subject.

"No, no, we can get you those." Carla assured him, earning a confused and nervous look from Grisha. "It's just that those bands sound... I don't know how to put it. They just sound like they could be influential in a bad way. 'The Killers' don't sound like very friendly people," Carla explained hesitantly. "And... 'The Misfits' don't sound too nice either."

Eren sighed, irritated with how overprotective his parents could be. "They don't sing about bad stuff, those are just their names. And even if they did sing about bad things, I'm not some kid who doesn't know enough to not do stupid shit."

"Eren," Carla said firmly, looking pointedly at her husband to send the message to Eren. "Language."
Eren frowned at his mother, but she ignored it and continued with the conversation. "Alright," Carla huffed. "We'll see what we can do."

Eren wasn't satisfied with that answer, but it was the best he would get. He wouldn't eject himself from the conversation just yet, he needed some more information. "Also... I wanna know if I can go to my friend's house on Christmas." Eren bit his lip, he wasn't confident that his parents would let him leave on such an important holiday for them.

Grisha was taken aback by the request. "You want to leave your family? On the holiest day of the year? What has gotten into you lately, Eren?"

"Nothing," Eren replied, trying to remain calm so they'd grant him permission. "Christmas is my friend's birthday, and I want to go visit him to give him his presents."

Carla gasped, delighted. "A Christmas birthday? How special." She faced Grisha, placing a hand on his. "Grisha, it's the boy's birthday. He probably doesn't get a lot of attention or presents since its Christmas. I think we should let him go."

Grisha looked at Eren's pleading eyes pensively. Then, he cast his gaze over to Carla, who appeared just as desperate. With a heavy sigh, he relented. "Fine, you can go. But only after noon, no earlier. Stay the night if you'd like."

Eren said his thanks and made sure to be grateful, but he couldn't escape the feeling that his father was happy to have him leaving.

~

"Eren! You came!" Hanji greeted him as he came through their door. They pulled him in by his sleeves and shut the door. "Levi will be getting here in a few minutes, I'll show you up to my room to hide!" Without letting him get in a simple 'hello,' Hanji pushed Eren through the living room to reach the stairs.

It was odd for Eren to see the house in normal lighting after having only been there once for an upbeat party. There were decorations that weren't specifically Christmas themed, but looked very wintry and had a lot of glass that was made to look like ice. Candles were set up everywhere and Eren thought they were the source of the fresh line scent. He barely had a glimpse of the tree set up in the corner of the living room before Hanji shoved him up the stairs. From what he saw, the tree was decorated with ornaments that resembled pieces of nature, like bird nests, ice sickles, walnuts, and things of the like.

Eren nearly dropped his presents as he reached the top. Though, he couldn't feel anything other than excitement and elation at the time. Levi was about to be surprised with all of his friends and he was going to be showered with gifts and love from everyone. The thought tickled Eren pink and he couldn't wait to see the look on Levi's face.

Hanji shoved Eren through a door to be met with the entire color guard, along with a few of Levi's old friends. "He's here!" Petra declared gleefully.

The room, that was larger than Eren would've expected, held everyone and erupted with joyful welcomes. Hanji took Eren's gift carefully. "I'm putting this under the Yule tree so it's safe. Have someone introduce you to my bearded dragons whilst I'm gone." And with that, they left.
Eren turned around, and before he knew it, Isabel whisked him away to a different side of the room. Eren also took the time to observe Hanji's room while Isabel led him away. The walls of Hanji's room were decked in all sorts of photos, posters, odd decorations and even notes. As Eren and Isabel reached a terrarium, Eren's attention was first caught by the small table next to it that had charts of the stars, stones, and minerals all over it.

"Here they are," Isabel announced, pointing to the creatures inside the terrarium. Eren bent down to look at the lazy bearded dragons basking in the light of their heat lamp. "The one on the log is Sawney, and the one drinking is Bean."

Eren thought those were very peculiar names, but he wasn't about to judge them. The two reptiles vaguely eyed him then went back to their lazy activities.

Hanji returned soon after Eren had become well acquainted with their pets. "Guys," they said, catching everyone's attention. "I just got a text from Levi, he left his house and he'll be here soon."

A dull murmur picked up, everybody started whispering excitedly amongst themselves. Hanji decided to stay and chat while they waited for Levi to arrive, which, according to them, wouldn't take very long. Eren decided to strike up a conversation with Hanji, who was standing near Ymir and Christa. "Hey, Hanji. Is your holiday supposed to be like Christmas?"

Hanji straightened their glasses, ready to engage in conversation. "Well, a more accurate way to put it would be Christmas is supposed to be like Yule. Yule came before."

Eren tilted his head in confusion. "Huh?"

"Christmas was designed after Yule." Hanji explained.

Eren stared blankly. "I don't get it, Jesus was born on Christmas." As he spoke, he noticed Ymir fidgeting and shifting her weight into her other foot.

Hanji chuckled. "I would explain what I'm trying to get at, but Ymir over here looks like she's about to explode and—"

Taking a huge breath, Ymir cut in. "Yule was the celebration of the winter solstice, created by the pagans to celebrate the birth of their god. They created all the traditions that have been since appropriated by Christianity, such as exchanging gifts, hanging mistletoe, and bringing in a Yule tree. The Yule tree was used to bring nature inside during the cold winter and also stood as a physical representation of the saying 'as above, so below.' Jesus was actually born in the summer, but since Christianity was just starting out, they needed to make it easier to get people to convert so they made the birth of their god coincide with the birth of the pagan's god and took their traditions, claiming them as their own. Other pagan holidays were stolen to aid with the spread of Christianity and are now known as Easter, Halloween and Valentine's Day." Ymir inhaled heavily after having not taken a breath in the entirety of her rant. Then, she tilted her head, cracking her neck. "Man, that felt GOOD."

Eren, Hanji, and Christa laughed together, amused over Ymir's love for historical fun facts.

The room silenced when the door bell sounded from upstairs. Hanji shot up and went to the door. "Everybody shhh! Get ready to yell surprise!" They hissed quietly. They slammed their bedroom door on the way out and their footsteps could be heard by the group.

Eren huddled up with the rest of the guests as they all crowded near the door. Farlan stood next to him with his phone out and recording, for their mother, no doubt. Nanaba started giggling from
somewhere in the back, and Eren recognized Connie's voice as he tried shushing people.

Hanji's voice barely reached past the door, but it was still distinguishable. Everyone waited eagerly as they recognized Levi's voice coming through behind Hanji. He sounded bored and not attentive to what Hanji was saying, all the better for when he saw everyone. An unsuspecting victim is the best victim.

"... have to show you something real quick." The group heard and stood on their toes.

The door opened, revealing Hanji first, then Levi. The second he was in their sights, 'surprise!' was shouted at him, coming in like thunder and making him jolt back and stare wide eyed. The mob came out of the room and attacked Levi with 'happy birthdays' and hugs. Levi stood in the center of the love fest, scanning around confusedly. The reality hadn't quite hit him yet. "... What?" He asked to no one in particular.

Hanji cackled and slapped him on the shoulder. "It's your surprise party, muffin!"

Levi remained perplexed over the situation. "But... Why would you all—"

"Because we love you, Levi!" Mike cut in, bringing Levi into his arms and lifting him off the ground.

The initial shock of being hoisted up passed and Levi started squirming and kicking his legs to get out of Mike's grasp. Chortles filled the air as Mike released Levi and he continued to look around like there must've been some kind of mistake. He thought it was a joke, why would anyone throw a surprise party for him?

"Is this some sort of prank?" Levi treaded carefully.

"This isn't a prank!" Hanji said, laughing all the while. "Everyone here really appreciates you, so we all decided to throw a party for your birthday." Certain people nodded and agreed verbally to emphasize that the party was, in fact, not a joke.

The smallest of smiles worked its way onto Levi's face and he tried to force it away, but it was there to stay. "You guys are ridiculous," he murmured.

~

Everyone sat in the living room, in somewhat of a circle, with some people on the ground leaning against the furniture. After an hour of just chatting and enjoying everyone's company, Hanji decided that it was time to bring out the cake. Some moved to sit on the ground (including Levi) to be at level with the coffee table for when the cake came out.

Levi placed a pillow where he sat, not wanting to sit directly on the floor. Eren sat to his side and Farlan was placed on the other, taking photos and videos still.

Hanji came out of the kitchen to make their announcement. "Alright everybody, start singing!"

With that, Gunther and Isabel came out holding a large, white frosted cake with lit candles. The room was filled with cheery voices singing 'happy birthday' and Levi used his hand to cover the faint smile that was cracking onto his features.
The bright, gleeful faces staring at him was almost too much. He didn't think anyone cared enough
to throw him a party, let alone be excited to be there. The cake was placed in front of him and he
tried harder to keep from letting his smile show when he read 'Happy Birthday Levi' written in blue
icing. The song had finished and his friends all waited patiently for him to blow out the candles.

"Make a wish Levi!" Marco reminded him, grinned just as widely as he was.

Levi sent a quick look towards Eren and leaned forward to blow out the candles. Applause
followed the tiny flames going out and Isabel came in to start cutting the cake.

Eren scootched closer and whispered to Levi, "What did you wish for?"

Levi smirked. "I can't tell you or it won't come true." He flicked Eren's shoulder. "You know the
rules."

Eren pouted insincerely, but didn't push his luck. They both switched their attention back to the
cake being cut and served. Levi was delighted to see the chocolate underneath all the vanilla
frosting.

"Christa and I made it," Isabel informed him. "I hope you'll like it." She let him pick the piece that
he wanted and gave him his plate.

Levi took a quick bite and waited to reply until his mouth was no longer full. "It's delicious, thank
you so much," he said to both of them.

Isabel beamed and Christa did the same after hearing Levi from the other end of the coffee table.

Everyone was given their own slice and most of the conversations died down now that they were
occupied with eating. The entire time, Levi found himself feeling more and more grateful for what
they all did for him. It was nice to be surrounded by all his friends and having a good time.

"Hey, Levi," Mike called from the couch. "If the cake isn't finished after everyone has a slice, can I
take it home?"

Sasha stood up, almost personally offended. "No way, if Levi doesn't want it, I'm getting it!" She
turned to said person. "Right Levi?"

And there went the peace, right out the window.

~

The food was eaten and, for the most part, the people arguing over the cake had been sedated when
Levi said he was taking it home to his mother. Hanji declared that it was time for presents and Levi
nearly had a cow. He was never one to get excited about gifts. He felt like he didn't deserve them,
and he didn't want others going out of their way to get him a present. But at the same time, he
couldn't refuse a gift given to him out of fear that he would offend the person giving it to him or to
come off as not being grateful.

"First, I have to give you something from people that weren't able to make it," Hanji said, hiding
something behind their back.
Levi cocked an eyebrow at them, and waited back in his chair. Hanji stood in front of him and handed him a folded up piece of paper with 'Happy Berthday Levi' written on the front sloppily. Levi snorted at the poor spelling on the front and took it from Hanji, opening it up to reveal the inside. It was a card made by the little guard, signed by each member and decorated with small drawings of him, balloon stickers and hearts drawn in the corners.

Levi couldn't help that his smile kept getting bigger as the day went on. He read each of the names scribbled on the inside and it warmed his heart to no end. He could imagine all the kids gathering around to sign it, wishing him a happy birthday. The thought was adorable.

"I'll have to thank them next time I see them," he murmured contentedly.

He placed the card down carefully as people brought him his presents one by one. The more gifts that piled up, the more anxious he felt. Although, he didn't receive a single present that he didn't like or wouldn't use. He appreciated everything he got and made sure to thank each person profusely. He laughed a bit at Petra's gift, saying that he would wear it everyday. The shirt would definitely be a new favorite of his. Hanji's gifts made him extremely happy as he'd been wanting them for quite some time. He gasped as he opened up the box that contained the platforms. "These are the winklepickers I wanted," he breathed out.

A couple of people surrounding him barked out laughter. Eren was the one to say what they were all thinking. "Winkle what?" He chuckled.


Even though his explanation made perfect sense, but those who had laughed were still trying to quiet themselves. What could they say? It was a funny word.

Eren's gift was next and he felt nervous about what Levi thought. He couldn't tell if his gift was as good as the others anymore. Hoping for the best, Eren offered his gift bag to Levi. (He wasn't the best wrapper, so he put them in a bag.) "I'm sorry if these aren't the greatest things, but at least I have more gifts to give you."

Levi glared up at Eren venomously. "You shouldn't have gotten more."

"Well, I already did," Eren countered, sassing him. "You'll get them on your birthday when I come over."

Levi's grimace dissipated. "You can come?"

Eren nodded. "Yup, my parents said okay. Now open your fucking present already." He playfully shoved Levi's arm.

Levi smirked and took the tissue paper out of the bag, removing the gloves, pair by pair. Eren bit his lip, not being able to see Levi's face as it was tilted down to examine the gloves. He couldn't gauge his reaction from this angle.

Relief rushed over him when Levi looked up, smiling. "Thank you Eren, these are wonderful." Levi punctuated his words by slipping on the striped pair. "I love them."

"Good, I'm glad." Eren stepped back, not wanting to cause suspicion if he lingered too long. And as he left, Bertolt came up to give Levi his present, and Eren was once again a part of the crowd.
Hours later, the party had ended and all the guests had started leaving. Eren wanted to leave quickly so it wasn't so cold out when he went to his car. He'd park it far away so Levi wouldn't be suspicious of him saw all the cars parked around Hanji's house. It was a long walk, so he didn't want to delay his return very much.

Levi stopped him just as he put his coat on at the door. "I'll see you on Christmas?" He just wanted to confirm.

"Yeah, sometime in the afternoon," Eren replied.

Levi smiled lovingly at him. "Alright. I'll see you then."

Eren reciprocated his facial expression. "See you then, bye." He waved as he went out the door, already missing Levi and already anxious for Friday to come.

~

"Eren, wake the hell up." Mikasa loomed over him, with a pillow in hand, ready to swat him should he give her any trouble.

Eren forced one eye open, hugging his own pillow as he detached himself from sleep. "What the fuck, Mikasa? It's ass o'clock in the morning." He rubbed his eye drowsily, praying for more shut-eye.

"It's Christmas. I want my video games and I can't get them if you're not awake," she stated simply.

Eren sat up, realizing what day it was. A surge of excitement went through him as he remembered that he'd be seeing Levi later on. Just as he got his bearings, Mikasa grabbed ahold of his arm and began dragging his weight off his bed. He stumbled onto his feet and followed her out his room and down the stairs.

"There you are." Grisha perked up, seeing Eren enter the living room. "You're usually the first one up on Christmas, yelling us all awake."

"Mikasa beat you to it this time," Carla said with a chuckle.

Eren sat down on the couch, yawning. "I haven't yelled at you guys to get up on Christmas since I was a kid."

Carla shrugged. "It still feels like it was yesterday. Now, what are you two waiting for? Go on, open your presents."
Eren and Mikasa were very happy with everything they received, and their parents were just as satisfied with their own gifts. Mikasa was given all the games she had asked for, plus some. She was also given a few new articles of clothing, some books and a few other random gifts that she rather enjoyed.

Eren received new clothes as well, along with new sneakers, headphones and some miscellaneous items. He only had one last thing to unwrap before everything had been opened. He took the last box that was small in size and peeled away at the wrapping paper. His eyes lit up like their Christmas tree as he held the four CD's in his hands. Two from The Misfits and two from The Killers. In all honesty, he highly doubted that he'd get one at all. "Thanks mom, thanks dad."

"Give your mother the credit," Grisha said. "I didn't want to get them, but she convinced me."

Eren looked up at his mother, who was giving him a thumbs up. He mouthed the words 'thank you' to her, grateful that, even though she was also against the idea, she still tried to get him what he wanted.

After all the wrapping paper that was thrown everywhere was picked up, Eren's parents gave him permission to go to Levi's house. He couldn't have been more excited. He grabbed his last three gifts that were poorly wrapped, along with the gifts for Levi's family, and then he put on his coat, his scarf (that his mother had made for him), and headed out the door, wishing his family a merry Christmas.

He couldn't drive fast enough, but he wasn't about to risk his safety going ridiculously fast on such icy roads. He wanted to see Levi while still in one piece after all. Christmas music played ever so quietly on the radio, but it never reached his ears. His mind was racing with images of Levi and how their night would go. Eren felt incredibly conflicted, wanting to daydream about Levi, but also needing to focus on his driving. He could tell he was in deep when he couldn't determine which was more important at the time.

Pulling into the Ackerman's driveway, he grabbed his gifts from the back seat and tried getting out of the door, forgetting to unbuckle his seat belt. He was glad no one had been there to see it. The snow had started falling in heavier, chunkier flakes and stuck to his hair while he walked up to the front door.

Just as the cold air seeped through his clothes, making him shiver, he reached the door and rang the bell. His shoulders began shaking as he waited for someone to answer the door.

Of course, Eren wasn't waiting for long. Kutchel opened the door, smiling brightly as she saw him and pulled him in by the arm. She embraced him in a tight hug. "Oh, Eren I'm so glad you could come! Merry Christmas!" She said in her usual sleep deprived yet excited voice.

Eren couldn't prevent the splitting grin that came as he hugged her back. "Merry Christmas, Kutchel. I'm glad I could come too." He leaned back enough to see her again. Her under eye circles were still present, but her smile was enough to light up the whole room. Eren always felt so comforted and accepted around her, as if she was his second mother. Her warm heart and ever open arms seemed to melt the snow right off of him.

"My goodness, you're all covered in snow still." Kutchel patted Eren's shoulders, wiping off the extra snow flakes. "You're probably so cold. Go into the living room and have a seat, I'll bring you some hot chocolate." Before he could reply, she trotted off into the kitchen to start making his drink.

"Thank you, Kutchel." Eren walked into the living room to see the three siblings holding onto their
gifts, waiting for their mother to return. Farlan sat in a chair, pulling candy out of his stocking, Isabel was placed on the floor, holding Kitty and a flat package, and Levi was lazing on the end of the couch. One could easily tell that the knitted sweaters they were wearing were brand new as they hadn't appeared to be warn in yet. Isabel's was purple with black lettering that read 'Save The Polar Bears,' followed by a silhouette of a bear. Farlan's was dark green and had white lettering with a note on a staph. Eren was just barely knowledgeable enough in music to know that it said 'Don't b flat.' Levi's was short and sweet; a gray sweater with words in black that read 'Fuck The Homophobes.' It suited him. Eren had never seen Levi dressed so casually before. A simple sweater, black beanie and black pajama pants, and, as simple as they were, they had no problem making him look as great as ever though.

Eren cleared his throat, gaining their attention. All eyes landed on him and each person appeared to be just as delighted by his arrival.

"Happy birthday, Levi," Eren said.

"Thanks, merry Christmas," Levi replied.

Eren looked over his shoulder and gestured to Levi's sweater. "You should be careful not to let your mom see that."

Levi snorted and rolled his eyes. "She's the one who got it for me."

Eren widened his eyes in surprise. He almost envied Levi for having a mother who would not only accept his clothing choices, but bought controversial clothes for him.

"Eren!" Isabel chirped. "Come sit by me!"

"Izzy, don't make him sit on the floor." Farlan reprimanded her.

"It's okay," Eren interjected. "I don't mind." He strode over to Isabel and took a seat next to her. "Did I miss anything good?"

"We started opening presents a while ago," Levi answered. "We wanted to put it off until you got here, but you took too long." Levi smirked teasingly.

Eren scoffed. "You didn't have to wait for me." He started taking off his scarf and coat to get more comfortable.

Kutchel returned with Eren's drink and offered it to him, to which he accepted and thanked her. "Let me go get your present." She excused herself hastily.

Eren was taken aback after hearing that. He wasn't expecting a gift from her at all. Kutchel retrieved a somewhat flat package from under the tree and handed it to Eren. "Merry Christmas."

"Thank you." Eren accepted his gift and hesitantly started opening it. He briefly looked at Levi and his siblings almost as if to check if it was okay. They all stared at him expectantly, eager to see his reaction to his present. Eren peeled off the last bit of paper and revealed a white, card board box. "A box," he hummed jokingly. "Just what I've always wanted."

Kutchel chuckled and Farlan and Levi looked at each other amusedly. Isabel shoved his shoulder lightly. "Open the box, you goof."

Eren snickered and lifted the lid. Inside was a maroon, knitted sweater. Eren took it out from the box to observe it in its entirety, noticing the black 'E' in the center.
"I'm sorry I couldn't get you something more fun, I didn't know what you liked," Kutchel apologized, twiddling her thumbs. "I also guessed in your size, hopefully it fits."

Eren slipped his arms through the sleeves and pulled his head through, yanking the rest down. "It's perfect," Eren breathed. "I love it." He admired the soft quality of the sweater and was glad to now own something so warm.

"Oh, thank goodness." Kutchel sighed in relief. She turned around to sit on the couch next to Levi. "Well, go ahead kids. You can open the rest of your presents now." Kutchel pulled out her phone to take pictures and videos while her children opened their gifts. Farlan and Isabel immediately broke into their packages, while Levi waited so his mother would have time to get pictures of everyone and enjoy the process longer.

Isabel opened her present the fastest, alarming Kitty, making her jump off her lap and wander around. Inside, she found two vinyl records; one from Amanda Palmer and another from The XX. She held them up excitedly so their mother could take a picture.

Farlan was the next one to open his gift. He preferred to open them slowly, trying to savor the moment to the best of his ability. Eyes glimmering with joy, he held up his new song book, filled with songs on the piano from Bruce Springsteen. After the photo was taken he began flipping through it, looking over all the songs.

Kutchel turned to Levi expectantly, waiting for him to unwrap his next gift. Levi readjusted in his seat and tore apart the paper at a moderate pace. "I think I know what it is." He commented after feeling the plastic wrap around the contents, earning an impatient stare from his mother. He revealed the gift and pulled it out of its plasticky confinement. Levi's eyebrows rose slightly as he unfolded his gift in his hands. "Nice," he murmured, holding out the flag silk with a oujia board pattern on it. "This is great, where did you find this?"

Kutchel shrugged. "I have my sources," was all she said as she took an umpteen amount of pictures.

Levi repeated the process his siblings went through with holding up his present. He showed a small smile, having never been one to smile widely for pictures, but his mother never complained. The three thanked their mother for everything they received.

"Well, that's it. That's everything I got for you all." Kutchel stood up and went back to the tree, grabbing three envelopes that were nestled between the branches. She handed each to the person of whom they were addressed. "These are from your uncle Kenny."

"He's not showing up again?" Farlan asked, tearing open his envelope.

Kutchel sighed. "No, not this year. His company is going through a merger, and he needs to be at work. But he said he'd try to make it sometime next week."

"I'd rather he didn't," Levi muttered under his breath.

Kutchel vaguely nodded, not wanting to comment something ungrateful. "He also sent you a bottle of vodka for turning eighteen, but I sent it back. I know how you feel about drinking," she added with a sarcastic grin.

Levi snorted, rolling his eyes as he went to tearing the envelope. A stiff silence settled over as the three opened their letters. Farlan and Isabel were given one hundred dollars each, whereas Levi was given a hundred and fifty, along with a note saying 'happy birthday.'
Isabel was the most excited. "This is more than enough to pay the rest for my bunny!" she declared, picking up Kitty calmly. "You're going to have a new brother or sister soon!" She whispered to Kitty. Everyone seemed to be amused with her reaction. "Tell him I said thank you."

"I will," Kutchel promised. "I'll tell him thanks from all of you."

Levi groaned quietly, not being a fan of his uncle. Eren sensed the tension existing between the family and tried to break it. "What else did you guys get?" They all were eager to show Eren exactly what they got.

~

Levi was the one with the most presents, it being his birthday, not to mention a milestone birthday as he was turning eighteen. However, each of them received a few silks for flags and poles as well. Isabel showed off her new clarinet, explaining how she had wanted Farlan and Mr. Bozado to teach her to play. Farlan was most excited over his new case for his bass guitar. Levi showed Eren his DVD set of multiple concerts from the eighties, as it was one of his favorite gifts. Kutchel even showed Eren the new embossing powders that her children had given her. After they were done giving Eren a look at what all they had gotten, he said that it was time for him to give his presents.

Eren gave Kutchel a fifteen dollar gift card to a craft store, along with a nice Christmas card. He wasn't sure of exactly what he should get her, but he knew she liked crafts and scrapbooking and she was like another mother to him, always being so inviting and supportive of him and his relationship with Levi. He had to get her something. Luckily for him, she was ecstatic to receive anything at all.

Eren had given Isabel a small keychain with a plastic bird on it. He whispered to her that he thought it looked like the bird that she had been taking care of and it reminded him of her. She gave him a bone crunching hug and ran up to her room to put it on her backpack.

Eren had trouble picking out a good gift for Farlan, but decided on a small, tin music player that he found for a really cheap price. Farlan turned the crank and hummed along to the tune of 'We Wish You A Merry Christmas.'

Levi was especially grateful for his box of tea and his studded eyebrow piercing. Levi immediately replaced his current eyebrow piercing with the one Eren gave him, checking in the mirror and deciding that he loved it. Afterwards, Levi began making a pot of tea with the box that Eren gave him.

In his absence, Isabel and Farlan approached Eren with a gift of their own. "We both chipped in and got you this." Farlan said, handing him the present.

"We think you'll really like it." Isabel told him excitedly.

Eren opened the gift, revealing a CD from the band Green Day. The more he examined it, he realized that it was not only a CD, but it included a live concert on DVD. The title 'Bullet in a Bible,' made him feel a bit uneasy, but he trusted their taste in music and their ability to guess what he liked. "Thanks so much." Eren grinned.

In the kitchen, the kettle was filled with fresh water and would take awhile to heat up, so Levi returned to the living room while everyone tried to decide what they wanted to do.
It was already dark outside, but still fairly early. Farlan suggested a Christmas film marathon, but Kutchel thought they should do something more celebratory before that. Isabel and Farlan had just the idea.

"Gather round, gather round," Farlan requested, taking a seat at their grand piano. Isabel sat next to him on the bench and began arranging the music. Kutchel set up her video camera and settled on the couch, bringing Buster with her. Levi and Eren sat on the love seat after Levi angled it to face his siblings better.

Isabel swiveled in her seat. "How many songs, maman?"

"As many as you like." Kutchel answered.

Isabel and Farlan bickered quietly over which songs they'd play and in which order. During a moment of silence and an oddly placed stare down they faced the others and smiled forcedly. Turning back to the piano, Isabel opened the first page of the music booklet and Farlan counted them off just above a whisper.

In all honesty, it was the most beautiful rendition of Silent Night that Eren had ever heard. Farlan played each key with the lightness of a feather, creating a magnificent hum. Isabel's voice was as soft and pure as the new snow falling outside. The song didn't sound harsh or brash, it was entirely smooth and seemed to be like a hint of sound, morphing their environment into an ethereal atmosphere.

The shred of light coming from the kitchen and the few candles placed on shelves and near the piano were their only source of light. As the temperature dropped outdoors, it only increased indoors. Eren couldn't get over the revelation that this was what true comfort and a happy family felt like. It sounded like a tranquil melody. It looked like the dimly lit house that was decked in red and green ornamentation and snow falling outside the windows like sparkling dust. It tasted like the flavor of the warm beverage that lingered on his tongue. It smelled like the cinnamon candles barely reaching his nose and the scent of the ever present pine. It felt like Levi's stability depending on him while they shared each other's weight to keep themselves upright.

Once Silent Night was over, they moved onto a song Eren had heard Isabel sing at their concert. 'Peace on Earth.' And it was performed just as beautifully as before, if not more. It was truly spectacular. Isabel and Farlan both began the song solely by singing and after a few lines, Farlan came in with the piano, tentative and cautious.

Eren hadn't heard Farlan sing very much, but he thought he should do it more often. He was rather good at it, it was a shame he didn't use his voice very much.

Everyone enjoyed this song just as much as the last one, if not more. Such an innocent song brought a gentle wave of bliss over the family. Eren wondered if this was a more frequent practice that happened when he wasn't there. If that was the case, he'd give up his 'home' to join the Ackerman family.

As the song came to a halt everybody said their praises and Levi excused himself to go prepare the tea. When he returned he handed everyone a glass, and Farlan and Isabel had yet to choose their next song.

"Any requests?" Farlan offered, scanning the room.

"Free bird!" Levi yelled jokingly.
"Do Wonderwall!" Kutchel joined in.

Isabel and Farlan gave their brother and mother the most blank, unimpressed expressions they'd ever given. Facing back to the piano, without even communicating to each other, Farlan and Isabel went headfirst into their song. Farlan started playing the correct keys, albeit loudly and obnoxiously. Isabel sang at the top of her voice, purposely sounding nasally.

"TODAY IS GONNA BE THE DAY THAT THEY'RE GONNA THROW IT BACK TO YOU!" Isabel screeched.

Kutchel, Levi, and Eren all wheezed out their laughs, having been taken entirely by surprise. Eren grabbed his sides, trying to calm himself down and failing miserably.

"BY NOW, YOU SHOULD'VE SOMEHOW REALIZED WHAT YOU GOTTA DO!" Isabel continued on her vocal rampage.

"Okay, okay, stop!" Levi begged them, still laughing uncontrollably. He was lucky enough to have been loud enough for them to hear his pleas and they seized their ruckus. His siblings faced him, waiting for him to make a real request. "Um... Do a song by Esoterik."

"You got it, big bro." Isabel saluted, then discussed the song with Farlan in a hushed tone.

A more upbeat song rippled through the air as Farlan's fingers jounced across the keys. Levi recognized the song as 'Indigo Children.' Eren had never heard the song before, but he enjoyed the lyrics and found himself just as comfortable in the environment as he was with the other songs. He could get used to this.

~

Eventually, they all did end up having a Christmas film marathon. When it was over, Kutchel made Levi's favorite dish for dinner and served mint cookies afterwards. Once that was finished, she went over to the counter and started putting candles into Levi's cake.

"Two birthday cakes in a week, you're lucky," Eren commented, nudging Levi.

Levi chuckled. "I told her I didn't need another, but she insisted." He shrugged.

Kutchel lit the candles carefully and set down the lighter. "Alright everyone, on three." She counted off to sing, and Eren was a bit surprised when the others sang to the same tune but with different words.

"Joyeux anniversaire, joyeux anniversaire," they sang slowly as Kutchel made her way to the table with the cake, carefully placing it in front of Levi, who looked incredibly happy to be surrounded by his favorite people.


For the second time that week, Levi blew out the candles, making a wish. His family and Eren cheered as the tiny streams of smoke dispersed from the candles. Levi turned to Isabel. "Did you make this one too?"
Isabel smiled sheepishly. "Well, I helped. I put on the frosting."

Levi looked at the cake that was neatly coated in a deep red frosting and white piped letters spelling out 'Happy 18th birthday Levi!' and a nearly microscopic heart in the lower right hand corner, which he found amusing.

"What piece would you like, Levi?" Kutchel asked, knife in hand to start cutting.

"Corner piece, please." Levi replied politely.

Kutchel served everyone and took a small piece for herself. Silence took over them once more as they ate their cake.

~

Eren leaned into Levi as they lounged on the couch, watching an old stop motion Christmas film. Isabel, Farlan and Kutchel were also on the couch, but were fast asleep. After they finished eating what they could of the cake, they resumed their Christmas film marathon. Levi and Eren were wide awake, but wanted to finish the film they were currently watching before going to bed.

"Are they all asleep?" Eren whispered.

Levi double checked just to be certain. "Yeah, they're all out like lights." He chuckled. "You wanna go up to my room? I haven't given you your presents yet."

"Yeah, I still have one thing left to give you."


"Too bad, I got you one last gift, and you're going to accept it," Eren argued back.

"And what if I don't?" Levi countered, raising his pierced brow in question.

"Then I'll be sad." Eren batted his eyelashes and stuck out his bottom lip in a pout.

Levi rolled his eyes and carefully hoisted himself up from the couch, trying not to wake his family. "Fine, let's go." He stuck out his hand for Eren to grab and led him up to his room.

Once there, Eren retrieved his poorly wrapped gift and waited on the bed for Levi to sit down. Levi took a small box, about the size of Eren's and came to sit by him. "Since you already gave me shit, I'll go first this time," Levi demanded.

"Alright, it's your birthday. Whatever you say." Eren responded with an exaggerated tone, earning a glower from Levi.

Levi seemed to ponder over his gift for a minute, then looked up at Eren. "Actually I'll give you this after. I have something else to give you first." Levi got up and walked over to his closet, opening the door and pulling out a bag.

While Levi was searching around, Eren remembered something he was told recently. "While you're in there, find those pumps I hear you have," he said through a sly grin.
Levi stared at him, both eyebrows shot up. "And where did you hear that?"

Eren smirked in victory. "Hanji told me."

Levi huffed out a sigh, but faced back in his closet in search of the shoes. Not long after, Levi emerged a few inches higher in his black pumps. "Happy?" He drawled, strutting back to the bed.

"Very." Eren nodded, admiring the change in posture Levi had.

"Alright, stop drooling and take your present." Levi tossed Eren the bag and sat himself down, crossing his arms.

Eren stared at the garbage bag Levi handed him, filled with curiosity. He glanced at Levi who watched him expectantly, then stuck his hand in and pulled out a shirt. Eren examined it, seeing the words 'Nine Inch Nails' across the front and tour dates on the back. He rummaged through the rest of the bag; all shirts. "Why are you giving me all these shirts? Aren't these yours?"

Levi leaned back on his hands, making the springs in the bed creak. "They are... but you look so happy whenever I let you wear my shirts. So, I'm giving you the ones I think will look really nice on you."

Eren's elated expression grew bit by bit. "But, I don't want to take all your shirts."

Levi waved him off. "Trust me, I have plenty more where those came from, this won't even make a dent in my closet." He snickered.

Eren was content with that answer and leaned in to steal a kiss. Levi was more than happy to return it. Levi pulled back. "Okay, next thing." He grabbed the small gift again and offered it to Eren.

Eren took it in his hands, examining how Levi's wrapping skills were just as poor as his own, but he found it endearing. Eren made a show of tearing away each piece of tape, as there were more than enough for several other gifts. Eventually, he reached the center, revealing a gray box that flipped open. Eren raised the top to see a classy, simple watch on the inside.

"Wow, this is so nice," Eren breathed out. He gave Levi a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, Levi."

Levi smiled smugly after getting a kiss. "You didn't even see the best part." When Eren looked at him confusedly, he elaborated. "You see that tiny little knob on the side? Press that."

Eren saw the part he was talking about and gently pressed it in, unlatching the face of the watch. He checked with Levi to know if he was doing it right. Levi nodded at the watch and Eren lifted the face, gasping as he saw the interior. He traced his finger over the shrunken photo of him and Levi from the night of their homecoming dance. He was at a complete loss of words.

Levi couldn't gauge his reaction, so he awkwardly attempted to make a discussion over it. He cleared his throat, taking Eren from his thoughts. "Um... my mom helped me put the picture in. I'm not very crafty. And, uh... since it's hidden, no one will see it if you don't want them to." He started adjusting his beanie to distract himself and remain stoic.

Eren saw right through his aloof demeanor and gave him a couple of pecks on the cheek. "Thank you, Levi. I love it." He rested his hand over Levi's, causing him to break his apathetic composure.

"Good, I'm glad." Levi smiled, watching Eren put on the watch.

"And now for your gift." Eren took out Levi's present and handed it to him. "I hope you like it," he
muttered, lacking confidence and biting his lip.

"I'm sure I'll love it," Levi promised. He brought his legs up to sit cross-legged, his shoes clanking together as he positioned himself. He tore at the paper until he reached a flat, cardboard box and opened it. All the mirth left his features and he was left with an awestruck aura. He didn't dare look back at Eren, he didn't want him to see his eyes as he felt so vulnerable.

Lifting the necklace from its confinements, he read those two, marvelous words over and over. 'For Evermore.' He understood their reference, but he cared much more for their underlining significance. He was in love with the boy beside him, and that boy was in love with him. What was even better was that this boy gave him something that basically claimed him forever, and Levi had no objections to that. He was mute with the overwhelming emotion coursing through him, his heart was like rumbling thunder, his stomach weaved into knots that couldn't be unraveled, and his mind blurred into pure love for this boy. This wonderful, perfect boy who had just promised himself to him in such a personal way. He wasn't sure if Eren realized just how much this meant to him.

"What do you think?" Eren inquired, feeling the apprehension sink in during Levi's silence.

Levi looked up at him and with no hesitation, set down the necklace, cupped the sides of his face and gave him a soft, sweet kiss. Eren was a bit surprised, but wasn't complaining. Levi kept his motions slow, almost unnoticeable. He wanted to make Eren feel as loved as he felt in that moment.

Eren snaked his arm around Levi's waist, pulling him close. Levi moved his hands to slide over Eren's back and he settled his arms around his shoulders. They separated too soon, but it wasn't like they couldn't do it again.

"So, I take it you like it?" Eren joked.

Levi sent him the most serene, sincere smile he'd ever had. "It's perfect," he mumbled, pecking Eren on the lips. "How did you know I like Edgar Allan Poe?"

Eren shrugged unconvincingly. "A little birdie told me."

Levi eyed him for a moment, but accepted that answer. He sat back and grabbed the necklace, handing it over to Eren. "Put it on me," he asked, turning around.

Eren did just that, taking each end around and shutting the clasp, letting it fall to lay on Levi's neck. Levi faced Eren again. "I guess you could say you've collared me now," he purred.

Eren shrunk into himself, feeling his cheeks redden. "I guess so." He smiled to himself.

Levi scooted closer, removing his beanie, throwing his legs off the bed and kicking off his shoes.

Eren had one last thing to give Levi, it had been so long since their last time. "Is it okay if I have one more gift for you?"

Levi squinted at him. "Why do you ask it like that?" He didn't want anymore presents from Eren, he'd given him more than enough already.

"It's... it's not exactly something I can wrap. Something more personal." He explained bashfully. "Only if you want it though."

Levi pecked Eren's lips. "I wouldn't mind that," he replied honestly. He set his hands on Eren's hips. "I wouldn't mind that at all."
"And... is it okay if we start with me just doing something for you? Then we could do whatever you want, but I want to start with just me pleasing you."

Levi's interest was piqued. "Oh? And what do you plan on doing for that?" He challenged, getting into Eren's personal space.

Eren wanted to remain as confident as possible. He wanted to show Levi that he didn't always have to be the one receiving, that he could do things too. So he didn't back down when Levi approached; he sat up straight. 'Just spit it out and get the awkward part over with,' Eren thought to himself. 'Just like a band-aid.' He wasn't entirely used to talking dirty, so this was the toughest part. "I'm gonna suck you off," he rushed to say.

Levi eyebrows shot up and his lips curled into a shocked smile. "Really, now?" He was taken aback at his boyfriend's bluntness. "You know how to do that?" he teased.

Eren nodded rapidly. "Mhm." He was determined to make Levi feel good. Of course he'd never given head before, but what better time to learn than the present?

Levi was aware that Eren had never done anything like this before, and the last thing he wanted was for him to feel pressured. "Babe, if you don't actually want to or if you don't think you can do it, you don't have to," Levi assured him.

Eren shook his head furiously. "No, no! I can do it! And I want to, I just... don't know if I'll be any good." His hands sought out for refuge on Levi's waist.

Levi absolutely adored how modest and cute Eren could be. "Don't worry about that. It'll feel good to me because it's you." He planted a kiss on Eren's cheek. "If you want to back out at any time, you can."

Eren casted Levi an angelic smile. "I'll keep that in mind." Taking a deep breath, he steadied himself and nodded. "Okay, I'm ready."

"Alright, do what you want." Levi let him take control over the situation.

"Okay," Eren began. "Lay down."

Levi cocked an eyebrow at him, showing off his new piercing. "Ordering me around now, are you?" He asked in a sultry tone as he sat back on the bed.

Eren internally panicked. "Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to-"

"It's okay," Levi cut him off. "I didn't say I didn't like it." He laid himself down and waited for Eren to do whatever he pleased.

Eren was a bit caught off guard, to be honest. But even more so, he was invigorated, ready to make Levi come undone. He crawled over to Levi and hovered above him, bracing his arms on either side of Levi's head. Levi stared up at Eren, anxious and hungry for him. Eren wanted to take a picture so he could always remember how ravenous Levi looked in this moment.

Eren dove down, capturing Levi's lips in a desperate kiss; allowing Levi to slip his tongue in. God, he'd never get sick of the way Levi's tongue ring felt. When Eren felt it was time to move, he descended to Levi's neck, kissing the juncture. Levi sighed contentedly, threading his fingers through Eren's hair to keep his head in place.

Before Eren got too far, something rather important occurred to him. "Can they hear us
downstairs?" He whispered.

Levi replied, not too concerned with Eren's worries. "No, we're all heavy sleepers. Plus, they're all the way downstairs. They're not gonna hear us. Just keep going." His grip on Eren's hair tightened and Eren was suddenly very inspired to continue his work. Eren sucked at Levi's neck, making Levi moan quietly. "Ah... mon loup..." He breathed out unconsciously.

Eren went crazy for that name, even though he still wasn't quite sure what it meant. The name his lover only called out when they were in these types of intimate situations. And it was definitely better now that their roles were switched and Levi took on a more submissive tone. Eren enjoyed Levi either way, but this was new and he loved it. Being the one on top, being in control, and having Levi practically begging for him through his body language. Levi was already so pliant only after Eren teased his neck.

Eren studied his work, mentally patting himself on the back for the dark red mark he left. He took a quick glance at Levi's face and what a big mistake that was. Levi's eyes had dilated, lids hooded, his lips parted, letting quick pants escape every so often, and his bangs fell out-of-place. All that from Eren kissing his neck. The lack of distance between them was maddening, and only fueled his desire to please him. Just before he went lower, the thought crossed his mind of how he was insanely lucky to have this handsome, pale skinned, dark cloaked, masculine beauty all to himself.

Eren rested between Levi's legs, pushing Levi's sweater up to his chest and carefully pulling down his pajama pants to his mid thigh. Eren took another moment to stabilize himself. He tugged on Levi's boxer briefs until they were rested with his pants, revealing his steadily hardening cock. Eren didn't think it was correct to go at it while Levi was like that, so he started gently stroking him until he reached full hardness. He played with Levi's piercing every time his hand reached the top, causing quick breaths to escape past Levi's lips. Eren looked at Levi to see if he was enjoying it, and figured he was doing alright when Levi's eye lids fluttered shut.

Once Levi was entirely hard, Eren sank down to be level with him. Eren's cheeks flushed to a vibrant red as his face came close to Levi's erection. Giving himself a final push, he leaned forward and placed a few kisses on the crown while he continued to stroke the shaft. The faint hums coming from Levi encouraged him to keep going. Tentatively, Eren flicked his tongue out at the shining piercing and then to the head.

Levi grabbed the sheets, trying to keep his pleasure concealed until Eren continued. Luckily, Eren picked up on this action and darted his tongue out again, going against the slit. Levi bit his lip, Eren was being too slow and it was killing him. "More..." he sighed, just loud enough for Eren to hear.

Becoming the slightest bit more confident, Eren licked a long, slow stripe up Levi's erection, starting at the base and finishing by tugging his piercing ever so lightly. Levi, in turn, grunted, ready for Eren to go further. Fortunately for him, Eren quit teasing and moved his lips to carefully suck on the head, his hand still in motion. The breath left Levi's lungs and his hand grabbed a fistful of Eren's hair to keep him in place.

Eren rather enjoyed his hair being tugged on and started to suck harder and lap over the tip. Eren's heart was pounding, he couldn't believe he was actually doing this and not doing horribly. He sank lower, taking in more of Levi's cock, feeling his piercing slip past his lips. It was such a foreign feeling, having his mouth filled in such a way, but he didn't dislike it. Levi's erection weighed heavily as he sucked with more fervor.

Levi's grip tightened, but not enough for it to be painful. Eren couldn't understand why he liked the
subtle tugging, but it helped motivate him to please him more.

Eren began bobbing is head, taking a bit more of Levi in every time he descended. He moaned around him softly, using one hand to pump what he couldn't fit in his mouth and he used the other to take his sack in his hand, cradling it, eliciting more moans from Levi.

Levi's chest heaved as he breathed rapidly. Eren's mouth and hands were absolutely maddening, driving him wild with lust and desire. His toes curled, his muscles convulsed, and his head fell back. "Mm..." He moaned. "... Eren." He was close and he knew it.

Eren quickened his pace, sucking harder and put his hands to work. He wondered if more solid stimulation would feel good for Levi, so he experimented by dragging his teeth softly. Levi responded by bucking his hips, forcing Eren to retreat a few inches and hold down his hips. His hand traced the patch of black hair surrounding Levi's erection and Eren went back to stroking the last bit of him that he couldn't take in his mouth.

That was it for Levi, he couldn't take much more. "Eren," he said as an attempt to warn him, but the words he was looking for were nowhere to be found. He accidentally tightened his grip on Eren's hair until it was borderline painful. His hips jerked as he came into Eren's mouth, groaning out his name with his brows furrowed.

Eren was caught off guard as his mouth was filled with the bitter substance. He wasn't sure if it was considered rude to spit it out and he'd only ever heard of people swallowing it, so it couldn't have been too bad for him. He drank everything Levi gave him with the exception of a few droplets spilling past his lips. He kept his mouth on Levi until he was sure that Levi had finished. When he came up, he felt a bit out of breath and he looked at Levi, who appeared to be in even more need of air, his chest rising and falling, clearly overworked.

Levi looked up at his boyfriend with his arm slung over his forehead and his eyes were barely open. He tried to send Eren a smile, but the muscles in his face wouldn't comply, so it looked more like a half hearted smirk. Eren gave him a goofy grin, still baring Levi's come dripping out of his mouth obscenely, wearing pride for having such an effect on Levi. Levi would've grimaced if he had the energy to. He beckoned Eren over with his finger, lazily attempting to pull up his pants.

Eren crawled up next to him on all fours, and settled down at his side. Levi stared at the corners of his mouth. "Wipe that shit away." He gestured to his chin.

Eren tilted his head, ('like a confused puppy', Levi thought) before he realized. Eren bashfully smiled and used the heel of his hand to wipe it all off. "Did you like it?" he asked hesitantly while mindlessly playing with the edge of the sheets.

Levi stared at Eren incredulously, regaining some energy. "Are you kidding me? Of course I liked it, it was so fucking good..." He broke off his sentence. "You sure you're new at this?" Levi nudge Eren's shoulder playfully.

Eren averted his gaze meekly and nodded. "Um... if you're up for it, do you think you'd like to go again?"

Levi took a quick glance at Eren's crotch area, noticing how there was an obvious tent rising. "Yeah, let me get myself together and we'll go again."

Eren beamed and leaned in to kiss him. Levi jerked his head so that Eren's kiss landed on his cheek instead of his lips. Eren pouted afterwards, but Levi met him with an assertive glare. "Go brush your teeth and then we can kiss," he demanded.
Eren frowned, but did as he was told regardless. In his absence, Levi took the time to regain his bearings. Eren had blown his mind; his mouth had to be a gift from god. Levi ran his fingers through his hair, not yet over the fact that Eren was just that good, and all his. He remembered that Eren told him that after they finished, he could choose whatever he wanted to do. He had a pretty good idea.

Eren returned, practically jumping onto the bed next to Levi, giggling and filled with mirth. "Can I have a kiss now?" He pouted.

Levi answered him by taking him by the shirt and bringing him in, connecting their lips. They both smiled into the kiss before Levi separated them.

"So." Eren cleared his throat. "Have you decided what you want to do? You can pick anything you want, birthday boy." He rested his head on his hand as he waited.

Levi pretended to mull it over for an extended period of time, tapping his chin and squinting his eyes. He faked a gasp and snapped his fingers. "I know just the thing." Eren became more attentive, curious as to what he was plotting. Levi hoisted himself up just enough to be over Eren. He leaned in close to whisper in his ear while playing with a strand of his hair. "Would you like to fuck me?"

Eren pulled back, gawking at Levi. He searched for any sign of nervousness or teasing. When he found nothing other than pure want, he considered the option. Or not so much considered as hoped for nothing but that. "Seriously? You want me to?" he asked impatiently.

Levi have a curt nod. "Only if you're up for it," he purred.

Eren was quick to accept. "I'll do you—I-I mean, I'll do it."

Levi chuckled at his eagerness as rolled over to retrieve the lubricants from his nightstand drawer. He handed it to Eren and kissed him once more. "Do as you please," was all he said as he laid back down.

Eren's mind was racing, going in all directions, the anticipation was killing him. He could barely focus on what exactly he had to do or was expected to do. What did he need to do first?

'Come on, think!' Eren mentally screamed. 'Figure out what you need to do and do it well, this is for Levi.' Eren forced himself to concentrate on both pleasing Levi and doing what needed to be done. 'What first? Clothes? Right, clothes.' He started by removing his sweater more hastily than he had planned, removed his watch so it wouldn't get damaged and reached for the hem of Levi’s sweater.

"Anxious, are you?" Levi couldn't stop teasing Eren, it was just too easy.

"Yes, very," Eren said honestly. He raised Levi's sweater over his head, leaving his necklace on and set it aside on the ground. He moved on to Levi's pajamas and boxers, taking them off completely this time. Caught up in the moment, Eren removed his as well, forgetting any concept of patience.

Levi watched amusedly at the whole process. Eren waisted no time in giving Levi a bruising kiss, allowing Levi to slip his tongue in again. He didn't have time to think about how he hoped that Levi's lip ring hadn't left a bruise, considering how hard he accidentally came in. Levi threw his arms around Eren's neck, keeping him close and Eren set his hands on Levi's hips, rocking his own into him and drawing out breathy moans from the both of them.
The realization hit Eren that he needed to prep Levi, so he reached over and grabbed the lubricant, breaking their kiss in the process. He sat back on his haunches and poured a decent amount of lube on his fingers. He was getting ready to insert his fingers when he realized he had no idea what he was doing. "Um..." he said, confused.

Levi cocked his head at him. "You alright?"

Eren took a minute to think over his response. "I'm not sure what to do."


"Okay." Eren confirmed. He lowered his hand to Levi's entrance, running his finger along the opening. Double checking for Levi's expression, Eren gradually pushed in one finger.

Levi shut his eyes and furrowed his brows, focusing on the sensation of being breached. The breath he'd been holding in came out shaking. "More..." he begged.

Eren complied, taking his finger in all the way and adding another. Aside from subtle facial expressions and heavier breathing, Levi didn't indicate how he was feeling. He tended to be reserved on terms of his composure during intimate situations, and Eren was willing to break that.

After he determined that Levi was ready for another, Eren added his third and started a slow, steady pace for Levi to get used to.

Levi peeked through one eye and raised his hand, drawing in Eren's attention. He curled his finger in a beckoning motion, instructing Eren to do the same. Eren nodded and mimicked the action as he pumped his fingers in and out.

At some point, Eren nudged a small bundle of nerves, making Levi convulse, clenching around his fingers, screwing his eyes shut tight, his mouth dropping open and his knuckles turning white from how tight his grip on the sheets were. He forced his eyes open to see Eren and tried to get across what he wanted. "That's enough... I want you," he panted.

That was all it took for Eren to lose any patience he had left. He took the lube again, coating his erection generously, hissing at the friction. Levi tossed him a tissue from his nightstand to clean off his hand before he lined himself up with Levi's entrance. "Ready?" Eren asked, genuinely concerned with his answer.


Eren started pushing in languidly, testing the waters and making sure he didn't hurt Levi. The feeling was incredible, being enveloped in Levi made Eren feel intoxicated with pleasure. Levi was in the same boat, reveling in the feeling of being penetrated. Before Eren got too caught up in their activities, he had to check on Levi. "A–are you okay?"

Through the labored breathing, Levi answered, "Yeah... go faster, I'm alright." He rolled his hips down to meet Eren's, drawing moans out from the both of them. "Ah," Levi sighed, continuing under his breath. "Tu es tellement grand, oh mon dieu." He used his hands to grab onto Eren's back as he started to rock.

Eren couldn't get over how good Levi felt. He leaned down and started nibbling beneath Levi's ear and along his neck, knowing it'd drive him crazy. Levi's nails started digging into Eren's back, moving one up to the back of Eren's head as he made more room for him, angling his face away.

Eren started pounding into Levi vigorously, unable to control himself, making Levi softly call out
his name. Levi unconsciously began pulling at Eren's hair with one hand and clinging onto his nape in a death grip with the other. Eren responded by sinking his teeth into Levi's neck and thrusting into him even harder. (If that was possible.) He loved the affliction Levi was giving him, it gave him just the right mix of pain and satisfaction. He groaned into Levi's neck, hips still running wild. The creaking of the springs within the mattress only increased in volume, adding on the the obscene noises being emitted by the two lovers.

Eren took Levi's hardness in one hand to start stroking him and used his other hand to cradle Levi's head and graze his undercut. "F--fuck..." Levi keened.

Eren was reaching his limit and began slamming into Levi, harder and faster than any other point in the round, every thrust hitting Levi's prostate head on. He lapped at Levi's neck, tasting the sweat and the faintest hint of iron from when his teeth had accidentally broke the skin. "God, Levi," Eren panted. "You feel so good." His hips stuttered as he reached his climax. He pulled back enough to see Levi's expression, which was desperate and satisfied as he too approached his pique.

"Oh, mon loup..." Levi wailed. "Shit... oh god, Eren!" Eren thrust in just the right spot and at just the right momentum to push Levi over the edge.

They both reached their orgasm at the same time, Levi coming into Eren's hand and on his abdomen, and Eren releasing into Levi. Eren took a breather for a moment, then pulled out of Levi, settling at his side and wrapping his arm around him.

Levi still had a hard time catching his breath, but he still faced Eren to look at the person who just put him in this wrecked state. He stared incredulously at him, unconvinced that this boy had such an impact on him.

Eren only smirked smugly. "What?" he asked, noticing Levi's shock. "Did I do something?"

Levi shook his head in disbelief. "... You little shit," he huffed out.

Eren kissed his nose and whispered with a hint of pride in his voice. "Happy birthday."

~

The two had cleaned off and gotten into bed, wanting to cuddle before they returned downstairs to avoid suspicion. Eren's arms were tied securely around Levi with Levi's back to his chest. Levi laid his arms over the ones on his chest, staring into space for the longest time while Eren kissed the back of his head and neck. Levi really hated that his mind would wander down these roads in these wonderful moments, but he couldn't help it, and it wasn't his fault.

Levi couldn't help but wonder if he was safe to assume that he was enough for Eren. It tore away at his sanity, always uncertain about Eren's feelings. The people in his past killed his confidence in himself and who he was with. He briefly thought that it was foolish to bring it up, but a big part of him screamed that it was entirely necessary. "I love you, Eren," he said in a voice lacking much fondness.

"Mm, I love you too, Levi." Eren snuggled closer.

"But..." Levi fiddled with his necklace, internally screaming at himself to stop talking. "Do you really... really love me?"
"Of course I do." Eren placed a lingering kiss on his shoulder.

Levi despised that what he'd said wasn't enough for him. "... Do you... do you ... am I good enough for you? Do I make you happy?"

Eren was puzzled at where this was all coming from. "What do you mean? You make me so happy, why do you ask?"

Levi frowned at the sheets, curling into himself.

"Levi?" Eren called. "Levi could you look at me, please?" he cooed, gently pulling Levi's shoulder until he turned around. Levi refused to make eye contact. Eren hated when he saw the emptiness in Levi's eyes filled only with a thread of hurt. "Levi, what's wrong? Is something the matter?"

Levi knew he'd regret asking, but he had to. "Am I the only one you do these kinds of things with?"

Eren furrowed his brows in confusion. "What kinds of things?"

Levi's chest clenched with each question. "What we're doing now... and what we just did?" Eren's mouth dropped and eyes widened slightly, mortified that Levi would even suggest such a thing. "Never mind, forget it. I'm sorry for asking, I don't want to know."

He tried turning back around, but Eren put a stop to his movements, keeping him in place. He couldn't believe the words coming from Levi. He couldn't believe that he said he didn't want to know if he was cheating with someone else. "Levi, I promise, you're the only one I do these kinds of things with. I promise you that."

Levi still avoided his gaze. "I'm sorry."

Eren shook his head. "Sorry for what? Levi, you're the only one I want and the only one I look at. I love you so much, you're everything I want and more. You're perfect to me, and I'll never treat you like less than that, understand?"

Levi would've said he'd heard it all before, but he hadn't. He hadn't been promised to, he was never told such kind and honest things by the person who did him wrong. And the sincerity in Eren's voice was the final thing that dispelled all his insecurities. Granted, he'd struggle with them from time to time, and he lacked confidence in himself, but he didn't lack it in Eren. "I understand."

Eren smiled and kissed Levi tenderly, wanting to prove that he cherished him. And he did prove it. "I love you, Levi. More than anything."

"I love you too, mon grand. So much, you wouldn't understand." Levi gave him another quick kiss to seal his statement.

"Happy birthday, Levi."

"Merry Christmas, Eren."

Chapter End Notes

Wow, that was a bumpy ride. I really hope this was worth the wait.
Translations:
joyeux anniversaire - happy birthday

Tu es tellement grand, oh mon dieu. You're so big, oh my god.

HEY HEY GUESS WHAT. My other fic, Counterclockwise, now has two chapters. Check it out if you wanna?

Please please please, tell me what you thought in the comments or with a kudos! It would be so greatly appreciated! My tumblr is dr-s--art, so check that out for fic progress updates and my art. Thank you so much for reading!!! <3
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

The New Years goes by, and as many people expect, it brings great changes! Some changes are for the better, while others are yet to be determined.

Chapter Notes

Ah geez, I have a feeling that my chapters will be a bit later now that finals are on the horizon. Oh well, there's not much I can do about it.

I hope this chapter doesn't come across as too rushed. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren eyed the tiny hamsters running around in their cages in a lively and energetic manner. He was mostly interested in the one exercising on a wheel that was going at a ridiculous speed, and occasionally spinning with the wheel when it was not able to keep up. He huffed out an amused breath, too entertained with the small rodents. He straightened his back from his bent position, and while doing so noticed that Levi and his family had kept walking and tried to catch up to them.

Eren had been staying with Levi for a few days at his house and doing things such as: spending time with his family, doing color guard in their practice room on occasion, engaging in secret activities with Levi, and simply enjoying everyone's company. Kutchel had no problem letting him stay, considering it was winter break, and Eren's parents were easily convinced. Today was his last day staying over, and when Kutchel arrived home after work she announced that Isabel could pick out her new rabbit. Now, they were in the animal shelter, trying to find their new addition to the family.

Eren fell into step with Levi as they roamed the aisles in search of rabbits. He felt the overwhelming urge to grab Levi's hand, but it wasn't a smart thing to do in front of Isabel and Farlan. It was bad enough that Levi's scarf barely covered the rather large, dark mark that Eren had left. They stopped in front of the cages that held the rabbits and Isabel started bouncing on the balls of her feet with joy.

"Man, I wish I could give all of them a home," Isabel murmured.

Kutchel hummed in response. "It would be nice," she said in agreement. "But let's start with just one."

Isabel nodded, understanding, but still knew she'd have a difficult time deciding. The selection wasn't overly wide, but it was big enough to have her mulling over her decision for quite some time. She squatted down onto her knees to observe a few rabbits up close.

Eren leaned into Levi's side, lowering his voice. "How do you think she'll decide?"
Levi whispered back to him, "She'll pick whichever one loves her."

Eren cocked an eyebrow at him, not fully understanding.

"The rabbit that looks at her the longest and doesn't cower away. That's the one she'll pick," he elaborated.

Eren chuckled at the explanation. He didn't honestly believe that an animal showing no fear meant they loved someone, but the idea was cute to him. He wondered how long it would take until she decided.

Isabel inspected a few different rabbits that seemed interested in her presence. She was caught between a Florida White and a Checkered Giant. She offered her hands to the cages so they could take in her scent. The white rabbit briefly smelled her and went on with its day. Whereas the spotted rabbit lingered. It bristled her knuckles with its nose, tickling her skin. After it finished familiarizing itself with her scent, it simply remained at the side of its cage.

A massive grin erupted of Isabel's face as she gasped in delight. "Mom, this one loves me." She looked up at her mother expectantly.

"Is that the one you want?" Kutchel asked.

"Yup!" Isabel chirped. She faced the rabbit once more. "You're coming home with me, little buddy." She looked at the card next to the rabbits cage that indicated its breed and sex. Seeing it was a female, she picked the name. "You're coming home... Éponine."

Levi scoffed, rolling his eyes. "Of course," he muttered to Eren. "She named it that."

"What's wrong with that name?"

"Nothing, I just should've expected it. Éponine is her favorite character from Les Mis," Levi elaborated.

Eren smirked with amusement. She had developed an attachment to the little creature so fast. She asked an employee for assistance and, just like that, they had a new family member.

~

After Éponine was brought home, Levi took Eren to his. Levi parked in the driveway of the Jaeger household, hesitant to let Eren leave. "Did you have a nice stay?"

Eren nodded. "Mhm, I had a lot of fun. It was nice to spend so much time with you." He sent Levi an appreciative smile.

Levi returned the gesture. "I'm glad you had fun. I wish you could stay." His melancholic voice fell.

"I know, I do too." Eren casted his eyes downward. "But if I stayed, I'd be pushing my luck."

Levi knew better than to keep Eren longer than his parents would allow. "Well, I'm glad you could stay as long as you did. I had a lot of fun with you."

"I love you too, mon grand," Levi said before connecting their lips.

They said their goodbyes and Eren exited the car went into his house. Upon not seeing anyone in the kitchen or living room, he ascended the stairs and ventured into his room. He set down all his things and flopped down onto his bed, staring at the ceiling and wishing he could be back with Levi.

~

Eren stared at the picture that was hidden inside his watch with a heavy heart. He missed his boyfriend, even though he'd just seen him not too long ago. He closed his watch and tried to think about ways to distract himself. He supposed that cracking into his gifts would help.

He dug around in his bag to find the concert DVD that Isabel and Farlan had given him. As excited as he was to listen to the CDs his parents gave him, he wanted to hear music that was entirely new to him and the visuals that accompanied it.

He sat at his desk and turned on his laptop, putting in the DVD. He used his earbuds to listen, just in case the music was questionable to his family. He jumped in his seat after the main menu appeared with a sudden audio he wasn't expecting. Hesitantly, he pressed play, anxious over what was waiting for him.

To his surprise, a concert didn't start right away. Instead, a black and white screen showed varying angles of a man with messy hair and thick eyeliner. He was casually going on about his band and things of the like, and for some reason Eren really appreciated the sincerity in his voice and his lazy drawl.

This portion of the film didn't go on very long. Soon after he'd finished speaking, the footage changed to a shot of the stage with an enormous crowd awaiting the arrival of the band. A vaguely familiar orchestral piece played as the band appeared on stage. The members all dressed in red and black, along with the deafening crowd, excited Eren.

He waited for something to happen and became more invested when the lead guitarist started a riff on his guitar, which soon kicked into the song. Eren enjoyed the harshness of the instruments and the energy of the band members; it almost felt like he was there, living it.

~Don't want to be an American idiot

Eren was taken aback by the lyrics, but was in no way complaining.

~Don't want a nation under the new mania

Eren was definitely going to love this.

~
Eren's mind was blown after the film ended. He was so captivated in every song, so moved with the stories told in between, and even humored by the band members' antics. He even went into the scene selection to watch certain parts again. (He may have even developed a small celebrity crush on Billie Joe Armstrong in the process.) All he wanted to do was listen to more of Green Day's music, but alas, he had other things to take care of, such as eating.

He marched downstairs at a much less gloomy state than when he first came home. It was astounding how much of an effect music have on someone. He entered the kitchen and began scanning through the cupboards to find something to eat. A granola bar sounded like a great idea.

Eren decided to rest in the living room, where Mikasa was on the couch playing Mortal Kombat on her Xbox. He sat next to her and watched her play as he ate his granola bar. Mikasa acknowledged his presence, but was far too invested in the game to switch her attention over to him completely. "How was your stay?" she asked.

Eren sighed. "It was really fun. I see you're having fun slicing off flesh on your video games," he joked.

Mikasa snickered. "It's my specialty," she uttered eerily. "I just remembered something I needed to ask you." Eren gestured to let her proceed. "Armin invited us to go shopping with him tomorrow and spend the night for New Years. Are you in?"

"Yeah, always," Eren answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "You don't even need to ask."

"Well, we kind of do now," Mikasa replied. "You spend so much time with Levi now; we never know when you're free."

Eren frowned. He knew she was right and a sea of different emotions came flooding through. He wish he could tell her and Armin about Levi, but he didn't see it so simply. "I know... but I always have time for you two."

Mikasa smiled vaguely without looking away. "Great. Him and his grandpa are coming tomorrow to pick us up at one o'clock."

～

Eren stayed up late on the phone with Levi, speaking in hushed tones so he wouldn't wake Mikasa. Their conversations were very lighthearted. A smile permanently settled into Eren's face as Levi kept making comments that made him laugh. Levi was smiling just as much on the other end, no doubt. Levi was currently finishing up telling Eren about how his uncle was visiting and staying for the next few days and what an odd man he was. Eren kept giggling at the strange stories Levi was telling. "He sounds like a weird guy," Eren commented.

Eren could practically hear Levi rolling his eyes. "Trust me, the man is a psycho. I hope you never have to meet him."

Eren chuckled and thought of what it would be like to meet his uncle. They would move past the 'become well acquainted with even the strangest members of the family' stage in their relationship.
It reminded Eren of how he still hadn't introduced Levi to any of his family as his boyfriend. Or anyone at all, for that matter. No one important to Eren knew of his relationship with Levi, and that hurt. Levi was such a significant part of his life now, yet he couldn't tell a soul without fear of the dangers that came along. He wanted to scream to the world that he loved Levi, he wanted to shove him in everyone's face and declare that he was all his, but mostly he just wanted to be able to hold his hand in public. It wasn't fair.

"Babe?" Levi's voice came over the receiver. "Everything alright?"

Eren realized that he'd been quiet for a significant amount of time. "Yeah... yeah, I'm fine," he mumbled.

"Doesn't sound like it," Levi countered.

Eren knew it was no use trying to avoid his feelings with Levi, and perhaps it was the best thing to do. He always felt better after Levi talked him through his troubles. "I'm just thinking too much."

"About what, mon grand?" Levi's voice was tender and concerned.

Eren took a shaky breath. "I just really want to tell people about you." His voice didn't come out as strong as he wished it would have. "It doesn't even have to be a lot of people. I just want one person I care about to know about us. I want it so bad, Levi."

"What's holding you back?"

Eren curled into his blankets. "I'm scared." He didn't need to elaborate any further.

Levi took a minute to respond. Eren started to think he hung up at some point, but was proved wrong when he heard Levi sigh. "I know you're scared," he murmured. "And I don't blame you. With all the things you've heard growing up, I wouldn't expect you to feel any different."

Eren cradled his stomach as the knots started tying themselves within. "What should I do, Levi? I need to tell someone, I have to, but what if they leave? Or tell my parents?"

"Let me just tell you that if you're scared or you don't feel safe telling someone, you're under no obligations to tell them. You can wait as long as you need, okay sweetheart?" Eren nodded, fully aware that Levi couldn't see him. "But if you feel safe telling someone, don't hesitate. Like your sister and Armin? I don't know if they're homophobic or not, but I know that they care about you enough to not leave you over something like this. If they're really your friends, they won't mind."

Eren bit his lip and brought his legs up to his chest. "But what if they aren't my real friends?" He asked hesitantly.

"Then you'll know better and find some decent ones."

Eren stared into space, the harsh reality weighing down on him. "I don't think I can handle that... I'd keep it a secret forever if I knew for certain that that's how it would go."

Levi paused to gauge the situation. "So, you would stay with friends who you knew would leave you for being who you are? You would keep a friendship going knowing that those people are judgmental assholes who'd hate you for doing nothing but love who you love?"

"Yes," Eren answered without hesitation.

Levi went silent. It hit him just how desperate Eren was to keep himself safe and keep the people in
his life right where they were for as long as possible. Eren was truly terrified. There was no room in his plans for scouring to find new friends or coming to peace with the fact that the people he loved most did not care for him. He was willing to subject himself to unhealthy friendships, merely because it was 'safer' to him. And it broke Levi's heart. "Eren... I trust that your friends are good people and won't do something that'll hurt you, like telling your parents. I'm also certain that they won't leave you. Do you know why?"

Eren started fiddling with his pillow case. "... Why?"

"There are a few reasons. First, the day you called me a fag, they freaked out on you. So, they knew that homophobia was wrong. Second, even if they were homophobic... you are enough to change any shithead's mind. They've known you for so long. Which means that they know that you're kind, funny, smart, athletic, helpful, and all these other great things. Do you think that if they knew you were gay that they'd forget about all those other things and walk out? I don't think they would."

The words sank in Eren's mind. He genuinely trusted that his friends would still be there for him, but the fear never left. "Should I tell them?"

"Only if you want to. It's entirely your decision."

"Okay..." Eren sighed. "I'll talk to you after I tell them."

"And Eren?" Levi continued. "If you find out that you still can't tell them, you can always tell the guard. I know you're not as close to them as you are with Armin and Mikasa, but I promise they'll never judge you and they'll support you."

Eren smiled to himself. "I know they will. I'd like to tell them too... but one step at a time."

"Right," Levi confirmed. "I'll talk to you soon."

"Alright, thanks for talking with me."


"I love you too, goodnight," Eren replied, clicking the end call button. He set his phone on his bedside table and laid on his back, staring at the ceiling. The next day was bound to be filled with stress.

~

The trio walked through the mall, catching up on their vacation. Mikasa and Eren were glad to finally have some time with Armin during their winter break. It had been too long (at least to them it was too long) since they had last seen each other. Armin's grandfather let them wander around by themselves while he stayed in the book store so they didn't have to have someone constantly watching over them.

They didn't have any stores in mind that they planned on going into; they simply wanted to hang out. Through their journey in the mall they made their way into the same pop culture/media store that Eren had been in, trying to find a gift for Levi. Now that Eren wasn't stressed over getting something for someone else, he could calmly peruse the aisles, taking everything in.
"How many days did you spend at Levi's house?" Armin inquired as he looked at the DVD selection.

"I got there on Christmas and came home yesterday," Eren answered, gazing at the shirt prints on the wall.

"Wow, you must be getting really close with him, huh?" Armin mused.

Eren flinched, it was only a matter of time before he told them. "Yeah, um... we needed to practice the color guard routine, and that was the best time to do it." He didn't know why he kept lying, the truth was soon to come out.

"Oh yeah, I bet it takes a lot of practice to keep it in your memory," Armin continued. "I don't know how you can do all that and memorize it. It's very impressive."

"Thanks." Eren smiled, grateful for the praise for all his hard work. Granted, he had always been more athletically inclined, but it was still nice to hear that his efforts were recognized.

He meandered over to the posters, flipping through them without interest, not really expecting to find something he'd buy.

Mikasa came by his side and looked at the posters at the other end. "He's right, it's really cool how you can do all that stuff," she commented. "Do you think maybe you could teach me how to do it?" she asked hesitantly.

Eren looked at her with a raised brow. "You want to learn how to do color guard?"

"Well," Mikasa shrugged her shoulders. "Specifically, I want to use the sword thing."

Eren chuckled at the name. "Saber. But yeah, I could teach you a couple tricks. I'll warn you though, it's a lot harder than it looks."

Mikasa beamed. "Awesome."

Armin had tuned into their conversation and stepped to Eren's other side. "So, you're giving free lessons now? Is that what I heard?" he teased.

"Oh, I never said it'd be free," Eren joked, smirking.

Mikasa slapped his arm playfully. "Hey! I'm not paying," she said through laughter.

Soon, all three of them were in a laughing fit and it felt so nice that they could all hang out again.

As they all slipped back into their own little worlds, Eren came across a poster of three men that he had recently become very familiar with. A background of green slime bordered the men dressed in black and red. His thoughts were confirmed when he read the bold letters that spelled out 'Green Day' at the top.

"Oh my god, I need it," Eren breathed.

Armin and Mikasa both looked over his shoulder. Armin was slightly taken by surprise. "Oh, I didn't know you liked them."

"Who are they?" Mikasa asked, puzzled by the strange-looking men.

"It's a band," Eren explained. "Isabel and Farlan gave me a concert DVD of them. Their music is so
amazing! I have to buy this." Quickly, he tore his eyes away from the display poster and search for one he could purchase. In no time at all, he found the poster with the corresponding number and took it out, ready to buy it.

Mikasa observed the display poster one more time. "I don't know if dad'll be okay with you having that."

Eren scoffed. "I don't care what dad thinks. Besides, he's never home, so he'll never see it."

~

Back at Armin’s house, the three stayed in his room watching television and waiting to watch the ball drop in New York City. It was almost the New Year. Mikasa laid down on the bed, propping herself up on her elbows, while Armin and Eren sat against the wall on the bed. Each of them had their own cans of soda to keep them awake. Eren could feel his nerves acting up; he didn't think he’d ever be entirely ready to tell them, but he knew it had to happen some time. He held a pillow to his stomach to help with the uneasiness.

"Any New Years resolutions, anyone?" Mikasa asked before taking a sip of her soda.

Armin pondered it over for a minute before answering, "Take more time to stop stressing over class work."

"I wanna beat all my video games ten times over," Mikasa added.

Eren rolled his eyes. "As if that'd be a challenge for you. You're supposed to pick something that you have to put effort into."

"Oh yeah? Well, what's your resolution?" Mikasa countered.

'To be honest with everyone, to be proud of who I am,' Eren thought. He didn't really want to take the conversation down a more serious path, though, so he refrained from voicing his thoughts. "... I don't have one. I'm not into those 'new year, new me' things."

Mikasa sent him an insincere glare. "Then stop criticizing my resolutions, mister party pooper."

Eren rolled his eyes again and they continued watching the television. "The ball's about to drop!" Armin exclaimed excitedly. The group sat forward and waited, counting down along with the crowd on tv.

5... 4... 3... 2...

"Happy New Year!" Armin and Mikasa yelled, though not too loudly because they were aware of Armin's grandfather who might've been sleeping. Eren, on the other hand, kept quiet, somewhat deep in thought, but raised his soda along with his friends before taking a swig. And that was that. They went back to chatting about whatever crossed their minds.

Eren remained mostly silent throughout most of their conversations, only adding vague agreements and denials when necessary. He zoned in and out of their words, having bigger things on his thoughts. His stomach started turning as he tried to mentally inspire himself to get it over with. He needed a pause in their conversation, a time when all were quiet and uninvested.
...ren? Eren?"

Armin's voice brought him back to reality. He was unaware that he'd blanked out completely. "Huh?"

Armin quirked an eyebrow at him. "Are you alright? You don't seem very responsive."

Mikasa nodded in agreement.

Eren forced a smile, still unsure of whether or not he was ready to tell them. "I'm fine," he lied. "I think I'm just tired—"

"Cut the crap," Mikasa interrupted. "Fine never means fine. So, what's up?"

Eren's heart stopped. It was now or never. And as much as he needed to tell them, tell anyone, a lump caught in his throat and every bit of vocabulary he had escaped him. His friends had no idea what kind of inner turmoil he was experiencing. But as long as they were asking, he might as well confess.

"Um... it's just that there's something that's been... not really bothering me, but it's something I need to tell you guys." In Eren's opinion, he was off to a horrible start. He hadn't rehearsed in his head how to tell them, which was a mistake. He fumbled over his words, trying not to look them in the eye. "But I don't know how you guys will take it."

Mikasa and Armin both gave him worried glances, but never seized to give him their full attention. "Well," Armin started. "Whatever it is, I'm sure it won't be anything we can't handle." Mikasa nodded in agreement.

Eren blew out a steady breath, gripping his knees with enough force to make his hands shake. In fact, his entire body was shaking at this point. "I'm just scared that you won't want to be around me anymore or you'll hate me or something like that." Eren shook his head, trying to process more logical thoughts, but being too nervous to decipher what was and wasn't logical. They were his best friends who would never leave or judge him, but his paranoia made him forget that instantly.

"Eren, we could never hate you," Mikasa assured him, sitting up and placing a hand on his. "And we're definitely not going to leave you, we promise. Besides, I kind of can't because I live with you," she added, trying to lighten the mood.

Eren glanced at Armin to see if he agreed, and confirmed that he did when he nodded and sent him a smile. Eren closed his eyes for a moment, preparing himself as best as he could. "I wasn't originally planning on telling you guys when we were hanging out, but this is the only time I can bring myself to do it. It's something I need to tell you both, so I know whether or not you'll be able to help me with this and just be there for me. I really need to tell you, because you're my best friends, and I feel like you both should know, and I can't stand having no one else know, because... it's just something important and it's something personal that I'm sick of hiding. And... regardless of what your reactions are, I want to ask you both to keep this a secret."

"You can trust us," Armin promised.

Mikasa nodded. "We'll keep your secret."

Eren appreciated the sincerity in their voices and took a few more seconds to collect himself. He mentally screamed at himself to spit it out and get it over with. Their reactions wouldn't change, whether he waited or not. 'Just do it,' he thought. 'Tell them, you'll be okay.' He shut his eyes and blurted it out. "I'm gay."

"You can trust us," Armin promised.

Mikasa nodded. "We'll keep your secret."

Eren appreciated the sincerity in their voices and took a few more seconds to collect himself. He mentally screamed at himself to spit it out and get it over with. Their reactions wouldn't change, whether he waited or not. 'Just do it,' he thought. 'Tell them, you'll be okay.' He shut his eyes and blurted it out. "I'm gay."

Before they could add a word in, and before he lost his nerve, he added
the last part. "And I have a boyfriend."

He opened his eyes to regard their expressions and was confused when he saw Armin simply nodding and Mikasa jutting her head out, with her mouth slightly dropped and her eyes squinted. Eren swallowed thickly and went to speak, when Mikasa beat him to it.

"Since when do you have a boyfriend?" she asked defensively.

Eren wasn't sure how she was taking it based on her tone. So he nervously replied, "Um, since the beginning of the school year? Around there."

Mikasa jolted back, flailing her hands around. "Why didn't you tell me?!" she asked, as if it wasn't obvious.

Eren still was clueless. He still wasn't sure of how she felt about him being gay. "So... you're not... disgusted or anything?"

Mikasa repeated her actions. "No, I'm not disgusted!"

"We're," Armin corrected, looking pointedly at Mikasa.

"Right, we," Mikasa scoffed, rolling her eyes. "We're more mad because you didn't tell us you were dating someone! Now, who is he and when do we get to meet him?"

A wave a relief and adrenalin rushed through Eren. He couldn't believe it was that easy. "So, neither of you mind?"

"Answer the goddamn question, Eren. Of course we don't mind," she deadpanned.

Eren stumbled over his words, dumbfounded. "Uh, y–you've already met him. It's Levi."

"Well, we want to meet him and talk with him," Armin said. "Now that we know you two are dating."

"Call him up," Mikasa demanded. "We're planning this."

Eren blinked at her, still in shock over how easily his friends had taken the news. "But... I don't even know if he's awake. It's past midnight, I don't want to wake him up."

"I'll wake him up," Mikasa volunteered, pulling out her phone. "What's his number?"

Eren chuckled and waved her off. "No, it's okay. I'll text him, and if he's awake, I'll call him and we'll plan it out." He did his best to appease Armin and Mikasa, fumbling with his phone, trying to calm himself down from his elation. But the happiness he felt was insurmountable, he couldn't possibly be calm at this moment. Two of the people he cared about most in this world were completely accepting with his greatest insecurity.

He texted Levi, asking him if he was awake and if he could call him. He waited with two impatient pairs of eyes on him while he sat waiting for a reply. Instead of receiving a text, his phone vibrated as Levi called him. Eren quickly answered to phone. "Hey," he greeted him breathlessly.

"I'm so fucking glad you gave me an excuse to leave. I'm sick of hearing stupid stories from my shitty uncle that never even happened and--oh wait, aren't you telling your friends tonight?" The change in Levi's tone from irked to concerned made Eren laugh.

"Yeah," Eren responded. "I just told them and I'm still shaking." He looked at his friends who were
watching with their patience running thin.

"Oh shit," Levi breathed. "What happened? Did they not take it well?"

"No, actually--" Eren's phone was grabbed out of his hands by Mikasa.

She held up the phone to her ear and cut to the chase without introducing herself. "When do we get to meet you?"

The phone was then taken my Armin. "She means officially and without deception on Eren's part."

Armin handed the phone back to Eren, glaring at him subtly.

Eren accepted the phone and shrunk back guiltily. "Sorry about that," he apologized sheepishly. "But, now that they know you're my boyfriend, they want to meet you... again." He heard Levi laugh shortly.

Mikasa leaned in to yell into to phone and, consequently, in Eren's face. "Yeah, immediately would be great."

Armin joined in, to Eren's misfortune. "If that's at all possible."

Eren scooted to the side to get them out of range. "I don't know, what do you think?"

Levi had the same mindset as Eren, more concerned with if they were supportive of him. "So, they're okay with you being gay?"

Eren faced his friends, covering the receiver with his hand. "Just to make sure, you guys are okay with me being gay, right?"

Mikasa nodded frantically and Armin looked like he was about to lose all patience he had left. "Yes, now for the love of all that is good and pure, just ask him when we can see him and talk with him!"

Eren's smile was so wide, it hurt his cheeks. "Yeah," he spoke to Levi. "They're completely fine with it. And now they won't get off my case about when they can meet you."

"Well, I guess if that's all they're worried about, then things went really well." Eren could hear Levi's smile. "Honestly, I'd love to have a day away from my uncle, so tomorrow or the day after would be okay. We could all go to lunch or something."

"That's a good idea. When would be best?"

"Uh, is tomorrow okay with them?"

Eren covered the receiver and looked to his friends. "Would tomorrow be alright?"

"Yes," they both answered simultaneously.

Eren raised his eyebrows at their bluntness and uncovered the receiver. "Tomorrow's okay."

"Good," Levi responded. "I can pick you all up around noon and take you someplace nice," he said, waiting a moment before continuing. "And... Eren, I'm so proud of you. I know how much you were stressing over this and how hard it must've been. I'm happy everything went well and I can't wait to see you and meet with your friends tomorrow."

Eren's heart fluttered at his sweet words. Hearing that his struggles were recognized and that he
was supported by everyone involved in the situation was incredibly helpful. "Thanks Levi, I'll see you tomorrow." Eren murmured through his grin.

"I'll see you then. Bye, I love you, babe."

"I love you too, bye." Eren hung up and bit his lip, watching his friends, who were smiling smugly at him. "What?"

Mikasa and Armin shared a look, then stared back at Eren. "They love each other!" Armin exclaimed humorously.

"How sweet!" Mikasa joined in on the teasing.

Eren crossed his arms childishly. "Shut up," he muttered, still smiling. He wasn't actually angry with their teasing, quite the opposite in fact. His heart was continuously racing a hundred miles a minute. All his worries concerning his sexuality may not have been entirely erased, but this was a big start.

Armin and Mikasa came over and wrapped Eren in tight hugs. Eren's shaking slowly halted as they embraced him. "Thank you for telling us, Eren," Armin said, patting his back.

"I won't tell mom and dad," Mikasa promised. "Or anyone else. And don't ever feel scared to tell us anything."

"I won't," Eren assured them. "Thanks, you guys."

~

As it turned out, they ended up going to Scouts, considering that Mikasa and Armin had never been there. Levi picked them up, just like he promised. The only off thing was how awfully silent the car ride was. Even though Eren was now certain that his friends didn't mind his sexuality and had no issues with Levi, he still had nerves about their official meeting. He couldn't think of anything in particular, but something could still go wrong.

Once they arrived and found refuge in the warm building, they waited patiently to be seated. Fortunately, a familiar face was the one to greet them.

"Hey!" Mike's booming voice came as he grabbed a few menus. "Look who it is! Table for how many?"

"Four," Levi answered curtly.

Mike recounted the menus he took and shot his fist in the air over-enthusiastically. "Yes! I guessed the right number! Alright, follow me." Mike led the way to their table while Mikasa and Armin shared confused looks with Eren. Eren shrugged, used to Mike's loud personality.

The group sat down, Eren next to Levi, Mikasa and Armin across from them. Mike passed out the menus and took a few seconds to observe Armin and Mikasa. He gasped dramatically and put a hand over his heart. "Do my eyes deceive me? Could it be that you two are new customers?"

Armin pulled in his lips to hide the laughter bubbling up while Mikasa nodded hesitantly.
Mike's face lit up like a Christmas tree when he received his answer. "Oh boy!" he exclaimed, straightening his back and preparing his speech. "Well, since you're new, I figure I should tell you about the place. Here, we use no animal products in our food, so if that's an issue for you, you need not worry. If you have any peanut allergies, you need to inform me now, so I can notify the cook when placing your order. And most importantly, if you ask real nicely, I will supply your table with crayons and specially lined paper for tic tac toe."

The entire table began holding back their amused breaths as Mike talked. It often amazed Eren how Mike could keep a straight face and calm composure all the time.

Mike took out his pad and pen, jotted down their orders for drinks and left them to themselves. They each began flipping through the menu casually before engaging in conversation.

Eren cleared his throat, hoping to defuse the tension. "So..." he called everyone's attention. "Should we get the crayons?"

Levi snorted, covering his mouth with his hand and tilting his head down, failing to hide his mirth, while the other two chuckled at Eren's crack at a joke.

"Crayons sound great." Mikasa sarcastically agreed, furthering the chortles that existed at the table.

After the noise died down and their drinks were delivered, they all felt comfortable enough with each other to talk as they had planned. Mikasa was the first to start, eagerly addressing Levi. "So, how did you two meet?"

Eren and Levi stared back at Mikasa, Eren incredulously and Levi more incomprehensibly. Eren furrowed his eyebrows at her. "... You were there," he stated simply.

Mikasa glowered at him. "I was asking Levi, thank you very much. I want this to go as if you hadn't kept this a secret the whole time." Eren snickered and got off her case. Her expression lightened and she faced back to Levi. "How did it happen?"

Levi caught on luckily and fixed his posture, wanting to make a good first (second) impression. "Um, well it was in the cafeteria at school. My brother and sister had told me about how they thought he would be a good addition to our color guard team, so I asked him about it. He was a little freaked out, I think and he called me a fag. And that's how we fell in love." He ended his story by laying his hand in top of Eren's, drawing more laughter from everyone at the table with his dryness in telling a rather unsettling story.

"Beautiful," Armin teased. "More classic than Romeo and Juliet." He took a sip out of his drink before he spoke again. "But how did you both get together? Who asked who out?"

Eren and Levi stared at each other, wide-eyed and silently begging the other not to tell. Armin and Mikasa fixed each other with similar looks. "What's that look for?" Mikasa inquired. "What happened?"

Eren crossed his legs and started aimlessly messing with his hands and glancing around. "U-uh... I think it was me who asked Levi out. Right?" Eren eyed Levi.

Levi nodded slowly. "... Technically, yes."

"And um," Eren went on. "We were practicing for color guard at his house, I was thinking of what I wanted to say and I didn't realize that I had actually said it..." Eren remembered back to when Levi was massaging his muscles in his practice room, asking him if anything hurt. 'Just fuck me already.' "And it accidentally came out... 'Just go out with me already...' then Levi said he would, I
got really embarrassed, but it all worked out. That's it, that's all that happened." Eren was far too flustered to admit what he'd said to Levi in front of his friends. He'd only come out to them the day before, he wasn't sure if they were ready to hear such things. Or if he was ready to say such things to them for that matter.

Whatever the case, Armin and Mikasa seemed to be satisfied with that.

~

Levi and Eren found themselves very lucky to have been so easily accepted by Eren's friends. They kept telling them about their relationship and how everything was going for them. The two were extremely attentive and glad to hear that all was well for the happy couple. They were served their food in this time, and for the most part, it slowed down the chatter. That was until Armin and Mikasa decided that it was time that they got the serious part of the meeting over with.

Armin set his silverware down and wiped the corners of his mouth with his napkin. "Now that we're well acquainted, I think Mikasa and I should give our own little spiel as Eren's best friends."

"Right," Mikasa agreed. "You're not in trouble. We like you and we trust you. This is just mandatory," she assured him.

Levi listened with his undivided attention, taking the matter very seriously.

"Mikasa, I think you have a better way of wording these kinds of things, so, I'll leave it to you," Armin said.

Mikasa put her hands together, sending Armin a smile for giving her the floor. She set her eyes on Levi and took a low breath, readying herself. "There are a few ways I can say this, but to put it simply, if you hurt Eren, we'll kill you."

Eren groaned, mildly upset by her bluntness, but more concerned with his friends scaring Levi off. "Mikasa," he warned.

"Eren," Mikasa challenged right back. "This is standard procedure for us as your best friends, please don't interrupt." She directed her speech back at Levi, who seemed just as alert as before. "Now, it's not that we think you ever would, but if we find out that you've hurt or upset him in any way, you're a dead man."

"Oh my god," Eren grumbled, putting his head in his hands.

"Understood," Levi confirmed.

Eren raised his head to watch Levi warily. Levi only exchanged looks between the other three. "I promise you two and Eren, that I'll never hurt him." He gently took Eren's hand in his, intertwining their fingers. "I'll spend all my time doing my damnedest to make sure he's as happy as possible. And also make sure that no one else hurts him."

Eren locked eyes with Levi. He knew that Levi wasn't just saying that to dispel Armin and Mikasa's worries and he felt his heart quicken. Eren's friends were content with his answer, though they may have not been aware of how much that meant to Eren to hear.
"That's good to hear," Armin beamed.

Mikasa mirrored his smile and watched with him as the couple had their own small moment.

Eren took a brief look around to see if there was anyone else he knew present in the restaurant. When he didn't anyone he gave Levi a peck on the cheek, earning a massive grin from him.

"Aww," Mikasa and Armin cooed over-enthusiastically at the gesture.

"How precious," Mikasa added for good measure.

"You're blushing!" Armin joined in, pointing at Eren.

"Shut up," Eren murmured, looking down at his lap, unable to hide the smile that was plastered on his face.

Levi was too pleased with himself to tear his gaze away.

~

Going back to school after winter break wasn't as bothersome as Eren anticipated it would be. Knowing that he could confide in his friends made his daily routine much less stressful. It was two more people who knew about his relationship with Levi, and they were the two most important people to tell. Granted, he still had the weight of telling other people resting with him, but this was terrific progress being made.

After the winter break, color guard practice and competitions started back up just as they had before. As much as Eren loved practice and competing, it was refreshing to have a long break. It was even better to have things settled the way they were. He'd strengthened his bond with his sister, best friend, and Levi. He just couldn't get over how much that meant to him.

Eren felt a bit guilty for always leaving Mikasa to walk back home in the cold, all by herself, though there wasn't much to be done about it. He went to the gym, as per usual and got changed into his practice clothes. It was good to be back in the productive environment.

Practice went on like it always had, stretching, running, going through the routine, and perfecting weak areas. Since it was their first practice after their break, they went fairly easy, not overdoing it. Though, some people didn't plan on taking it easy.

During one of their breaks, Christa was teaching Bertolt how to catch a rifle behind his back. Of course, it was a rather advanced move that would take a long time to get the hang of, but if he didn't start learning, he'd never get anywhere.

Many people watched from where they sat. Reiner happened to drop by and watch in the bleachers as they practiced. Eren took a seat next to him and watched as Christa assisted Bertolt.

"He told me he was learning this," Reiner commented as the two practiced on the floor.

"I've never seen someone do it," Eren replied. "It sounds pretty cool."

Christa kept her distance from Bertolt for the safety of both of them and tossed her rifle. She did so by carefully calculating its distance and placing one hand lowly behind her back, and the other
hand more to her side. She caught it with a the gratifying slap that came from her hands hitting the strap of the rifle to the wood. Those who had been watching applauded her catch and she sheepishly smiled. Afterwards, she explained a few things to Bertolt, giving him pointers and he was ever eager to listen.

"It'll be awesome once Bertolt learns how to do that!" Reiner remarked while nudging Eren with his elbow.

"Yeah," Eren agreed. "It'll be awhile, but still."

Christa stood back again to show Bertolt one more time. "Now, watch closely to see when my right arm goes back, okay?" she reminded him with a sweet smile.

Bertolt nodded and stood back, grinning politely and watching.

Christa counted off and tossed her rifle once again, this time with a little extra force. As it came down, she realized her mistake and jumped out of the way. "Oh gosh, too high!"

Even though Bertolt was at a safe distance, he too stepped back. The rifle came crashing down at an alarming speed and hit the ground with a deafening 'crack!'

Christa shut her eyes as an instinctive reaction from hearing the noise and was somewhat scared to open them. Other members of the guard gathered around to examine the damage and several gasps followed shortly after. Even Eren and Reiner hopped up from their seats and surrounded the scene.

Levi and Hanji came through and made a noise of subtle shock, both at a loss of what to do.

At that point the attention was off the rifle and on Christa. She put her hands over her dropped mouth as she stared with eyes the size of saucers and brows shot towards the sky, caught in the middle of a gasp. Her shoulders were tucked in, knees bent, she didn't want to believe the sight before her.

The guard felt conflicted overall. It was quite a spectacle to witness, but they were unsure if they should've felt empathetic for Christa or astounded to have seen such a thing. Even Levi and Hanji were uncertain of what they should do.

Bit by bit, Christa inched towards her rifle and knelt down to see it. Her heart had stopped as conflicting emotions overcame her.

Her rifle split in half.

She lowered her hands to her chest, revealing her mouth that was in a long, thin 'o' shape. She glanced around at the other members. Even she didn't know what to think.

What a perfect time for Rico to enter.

She weaved her way through the crowd of spectators, grumbling the whole time. "My god, what has everyone so... oh." Her eyes fell on the broken wood that Christa reached out for and she put one hand on her hip and the other in her chin. "How'd that happen?"

Christa grabbed the split pieces and held them out as she stood up. She was at a loss of words as she couldn't find any explanation, holding the pieces to show Rico and remaining speechless.

"She tossed it too high too fast," Farlan clarified for her. "It wasn't safe to catch."
Rico crossed her arms and nodded, finally understanding what had happened.

"I broke Roxanne..." Christa finally found her voice. "I broke her."

"What is it with people naming their rifles?" Eren pondered as he watched the situation go down. Rico told Christa that she could keep the pieces if she wanted, and Christa, after hearing that, clung to the halves for dear life. Ymir came to her side, letting Rico go to the storage closet to retrieve a spare.

She came out with a new silicon rifle and handed it to Christa, patting her on the back in sympathy. "This one won't break, but you should still take care of it. I'm sorry for your loss." She turned around, clapping to gain the attention she already had. "Back to work," she barked.

~

Another weekend arrived, and another show came with. It didn't matter how many competitions Eren had been to, the thrill of it all was present and alive. Everyone continued to be in good spirits. There were still many schools performances he had yet to see, and he'd never get tired of putting all his effort into a show.

After they performed, it was decided that Hanji, Nanaba and Eren would be the one's accepting their award. So, they sat in the audience, still in their uniforms and makeup, watching other performances. It was a different experience watching from behind on the opposite bleachers. They got to see how the guard on the floor usually saw their crowd, and watch certain guards prepare behind set pieces, almost as if they were breaking the fourth wall. At some shows, it was expected of competing guards to sit together, mirroring the audience, and Eren didn't know which side he preferred.

Other members of Eren's guard that sat around him, Hanji and Nanaba, changed back into their team shirts and jackets, but leaving their show makeup as it was. The feeling of unity even out of their uniforms did something for Eren. The whole atmosphere had an effect on him honestly.

The current team performing had an intriguing aesthetic to their performance. It was somehow futuristic with their silk-less flag poles, flags with curved silks, black and silver uniforms, half masks, techno music, and an odd piece of equipment that Eren had never seen before. It was about the size of a rifle, white and looked to be of a sturdy material. They way it was used appeared very aerodynamic, considering it had four large holes in it and was handled fluidly.

Eren leaned over to tap Christa's shoulder, gaining her attention. "What's that weird white thing they have?"

Christa looked drowsily in search for the item he'd mentioned. "Oh, that. That's an air blade. You use it the same way you would a rifle or saber," she explained.

Eren hummed in response, more aware of her exhausted state than her answer. "Are you okay? You seem kind of out of it."

Christa sighed with a weak smile. "I'm alright, just really tired. It's been a long week. We just had a show, practice for the school musical is brutal, so is dance class, I'm teaching my little cousin cheerleading on the side... oh, and my rifle split in half. So, yeah." She huffed out a tiny laugh.
"Wow, I don't know how you do it," Eren breathed. "And I'm sorry about your rifle."

Christa shrugged. "I have more. I buy my own, so it's not the end of the world. It's just that I've only seen that happen once before, so it kinda scared me, you know? But yeah, I would've been heartbroken if my favorite one was broken. Good old Historia. That's my oldest rifle, and I'm not letting anything happen to her."

Eren snickered at the mention of her other rifle. "You guys take your rifles seriously. I still haven't chosen a name for mine."

Christa gawked at him. "You haven't? Oh my, you better choose! Do you at least have any ideas?"

Eren knitted his brows together in thought. "Not really. What are some normal names? Or does it not matter?"

Christa clapped her hands together, awakened by the talk of rifles. "Well," she began excitedly. "Ymir named hers Flip, for obvious reasons. I have a pink rifle at home named Seuss. I think Sasha named hers Marshmallow... just have fun with it! Name it whatever you like!"

Eren couldn't help but smile along with her. "I'll figure something out."

~

"My neck hurts so bad," Eren whined.

Levi rolled his eyes. "We won first fucking place and you're still bitching about your neck? Aren't you even excited?" he asked, loading equipment onto the bus.

"I know I'm excited!" Hanji shouted, wielding the team's plaque as they got on the bus, passing the two. They finally had their chance to take the award home.

"I am excited," Eren huffed, smiling nonetheless. "But my neck still hurts! And so do my ankles."

"It's because you didn't stretch," Levi reprimanded quietly.

Eren puffed out his cheeks in slight agitation, but decided to ignore his remark. They boarded the bus, exhausted from their performance and staying up so late, but as tired as they were, they were even more joyful due to their win. Eren's friends and mother were just as excited as he was and congratulated him afterward and Levi's mother couldn't be more proud.

Eren took a seat next to Isabel, as she had asked him again. Across from him sat Levi, groaning and complaining the whole time about how Hanji wouldn't shut up or stop filming him for their YouTube video. They kept cheering over finally being allowed to handle the award on their trip back to the school. Eren had to admit, seeing all the people who were able to take the award back describing it as making them feel like 'the luckiest person alive', it did start to look appealing.

"Hey, Levi," Eren called. "Could I take the award back next time?"

Levi raised his pierced brow at him and shook his head. "That's not how it works. No one gets to decide until after the award is won. It wouldn't be fair if I guaranteed that for you now. Ask next time."
Eren frowned at him. "Come on, I'm the new guy! I've never had a chance to do it before."

Levi waved his hands in a shrug. "I can't promise you anything, you'll have to wait."

Eren let the argument drop there and pouted in his seat. He supposed he'd either pester him about it another day until he gave in, or actually wait like Levi told him to. Although, the latter didn't sound as likely for him.

The next week, they didn't have a show, but instead, a late practice. Eren spent the night over at Levi's house and Levi soon discovered that it had been a grave mistake.

When they woke up on Saturday, the only thing leaving Eren's mouth was about the award. He whined and begged and complained until Levi was nearly at his wits end. At lunch time in the living room, Levi finally pushed back enough, just so Eren would be quiet. "Oh my god, it's not the end of the world," he snapped. "Even if you don't get it next time, there will be plenty of other chances. We have more shows, you know?"

Eren, in complete childlike fashion, dropped himself to lay over Levi's lap and continued to be a nuisance. "But this is my last year at school! I can't do it next year or any year after that if I don't get the chance this year! You said it's not a guarantee!"

"Holy shit," Levi groaned. "You're such a baby." He was so close to just pushing Eren off his lap and onto the floor.

Eren flipped himself over on Levi's lap and started pounding the couch cushion with his fist. "But Leevii! Come on, isn't there something you can work out? I'll do anything." To be quite honest, Eren didn't care that much about bringing the award back. He did want to, very much so in fact, but not to the point of begging. He just wanted to see how far he could press Levi's buttons.

Levi rubbed his temples to deter the oncoming migraine. "My god..." He whispered to himself. He looked down at his immature boyfriend, unaware that he wasn't as desperate as he seemed. Eren succeeded in guilting him. He wanted not only to shut him up, but make his precious boy happy. He sent a brief glance at the necklace Eren had given him, a token of his love, and decided that securing his turn to take the award back was the least he could do. Though, Eren wasn't going to get off free without paying for his bitchiness. He conjured up a scheme that he could benefit from in some way that he could use as an excuse to cheat the system. "Alright, I'll have to pull some major strings, but I can make it work."

Eren shot up from his position in favor of straddling Levi and grabbing his shoulders. "Really? Thank you, Levi!" He yelled, bringing him in for a hug and repeatedly kissing his cheek.

"Not so fast, you little minx," Levi warned, pushing him back with his hand on his chest. "We have to make a deal though. Saving you a spot isn't going to be easy, I'll be the bad guy if it's been decided beforehand. So, you need to prove that you deserve it." Levi smirked deviously. "And you said you'd do anything."

Eren shrank back, apprehensive to what Levi had in mind. "... Yeah?"

"Well," Levi clicked his tongue. "Since you're a little shit that clearly can't stretch properly and..."
then has the gall to complain about being in pain, I'm going to put you through a little test of endurance."

Eren scoffed and rolled his eyes. "Fine. Whatever you want me to do, I can take it."

Levi's smirk only broadened. "Excellent." He curled his finger in a beckoning motion, inviting Eren to come closer. He commenced his proposition once his lips were near Eren's ear and he spoke lowly and in a silky smooth baritone. "This is how it'll go. If you can stand a round of sex and get all the way through practice, immediately after, and I do mean immediately, and not complain once to me or anyone else about being sore or in pain, then I'll save you a turn for our next competition. And I will be asking if you've complained to anyone. That means even if someone asks how you feel, you can't say anything bad." When he retreated, he took a moment to see the determination on Eren's beet red face.

"When marks the end of practice?" Eren asked.

"When we step foot back into my house." Levi answered.

Eren thought over all the conditions of the deal, trying to see if there were any tricks that Levi had set into place. He figured that it seemed pretty straight forward and stuck out his hand for Levi to shake. "I'll do it."

~

Eren stayed in the living room, petting Buster and watching each of the rabbits mind their own business in their cage. Levi was currently packing his car with their equipment, getting ready to go. Eren was getting nervous, time was running out and Levi was getting ready to leave. It had only been a few hours since they made their deal, surely Levi couldn't have forgotten in that amount of time. He wasn't going to bring it up, now that Levi's family was present and in hearing range. As much as he may have doubted his endurance, he didn't want Levi to forget about it and miss out on his spot being saved.

Eren watched as Levi asked his mother to take Isabel and Farlan to practice separately, because he and Eren needed to be there early to set some things up. Eren stared incredulously from the living room. Had Levi really forgotten?

Levi strutted into the living room next to Eren, picking Buster up and setting him on the ground. "Let's go," Levi instructed.

Apparently he had forgotten.

~

Levi and Eren drove to the school nearly twenty minutes before they had to be there. It was late and already dark outside and the snow was falling steadily, making Eren grimace.

On one hand, Eren was glad Levi forgot, so he wouldn't be put through such a test. On the other
hand, he felt bitter, believing that Levi 'forgot' on purpose, so that Eren couldn't cheat the system.

As they pulled into the school zone Levi took a detour and drove around the building, pulling into the back next to a rarely used entrance. Eren thought it was odd, but dismissed that thought when he remembered Levi telling his mother they had things to set up. Eren had forgotten that some of the set pieces were dropped off at the back of the school after their previous competition.

"What are we setting up?" Eren asked as he unbuckled his seatbelt. When he didn't get an answer he looked up at Levi, who was staring at him impassively.

"Get in the back," Levi demanded.

Eren quirked his head in confusion. "... What?"

"I said, get in the back."


~

Hanji sent an umpteen amount of texts to Levi, never receiving a single one in reply. It was unlike him to show up this late on a Saturday, almost the entire guard was present. How odd. They concluded that they'd need to ask around just in case he'd already showed up and they had somehow missed him.

Hanji walked over to Annie, getting a head start on her stretching. "Annie, have you seen Levi yet?"

Annie shook her head before reaching to the ground. "Not yet."

Hanji looked at the clock. Almost sixteen minutes late. It was getting ridiculous. They started pacing back and forth, worried about Levi's safety and what would happen to practice should he not show up. Hanji stomped over to Sasha and posed the same question. "Excuse me Sasha, but have you seen Levi? Or heard from him at least?"

Sasha took a swig of her energy drink. "Sorry, Hanji. Haven't seen him."

"Thanks anyways." Hanji stepped out of the gym to check the parking lot in case he had just arrived. Just as they were about to open the door, Isabel and Farlan came through, shivering and patting the snow off their shoulders, lugging in their equipment. Hanji waited for a moment and when no one else came through, they had to ask, "Guys, where's your brother?"

"He's already here," Farlan answered as if it was obvious. "Our mom drove us."

"He left a long time ago to help set up," Isabel explained further.

Hanji stared dumbly. "That's impossible, no one has seen him."

Both siblings stared at Hanji like they had two heads. Just then, Petra came out into the corridor with them. "Has anyone seen Eren?" She took notice of Isabel and Farlan. "Him and Levi are the only ones not here now."
Farlan shared a panicked look with Isabel. "Eren went with Levi."

"Oh my god, are they okay?" Isabel gasped.

"Well, Levi hasn't answered any of my texts, but we shouldn't jump to conclusions yet. I'll call him, Izzy, you call Eren." Hanji left to a quieter area in the hall to call Levi, muttering to themselves, "Pick up, pick up, pick up..."

~

Levi's phone was turned entirely off and left forgotten in the front seat as he pounded into Eren relentlessly.

"Oh god..." Eren moaned continuously.

~

"That bastard!" Hanji hissed. "It went straight to voicemail!"

Isabel tried calling Eren and watched out the window just in case. "It's not snowing that bad. The roads were all covered, but they weren't icy. Where the heck could they be?" Her shaky voice carried to the new crowd that surrounded her.

The news had quickly dispersed through the whole guard and now several people awaited around Isabel, praying that Eren would answer.

~

Eren's phone buzzed, capturing Levi's attention, but not enough for it to have been of great importance.

Levi took his mouth away from Eren's neck, where he'd been leaving bite marks, but only just enough to speak. "Your phone... should I stop...?"

"No!" Eren shook his head vigorously. "Please-ahh... keep going..."

Levi didn't need to be told twice.

~

"Guys, he's not answering." Isabel trembled with fear over what had happened to her brother and
"What if something really bad happened?" Nanaba asked.

"No, we're not going to think about that," Hanji intervened. They handed their phone over to Farlan and took action as the instructor. "You keep calling and texting Eren and Levi. See if you can get through to them." They turned to address the rest of the guard. "Let's set up and go through things as we normally would until they show up. Now everyone get out the floor."

The worry weighed down the majority of the members, but they did as they were told nonetheless.

Hanji followed everyone back into the gym and went to the supply closet to get out the floor. Once the floor and wheels were pulled out, it was time to get the back pieces. Hanji went to look for them and it dawned on them that those pieces had yet to be retrieved from the back of the school.

"Ymir, Marco," Hanji shouted. "Come with me to the back, we left a few pieces there."

The two followed them out of the gym and down to the other end of the school. A stiff silence found its way between them as they walked, their concern for the missing members building as time went on without their arrival. The padding of their bare feet was the only noise filling their ears as they traveled through the dark school.

"What do you think happened to them?" Marco broke the silence hesitantly.

Ymir rolled her eyes. "Nothing happened, they're probably just off goofing around."

Hanji elected to not say their input, not having much to add to begin with. Hanji fell behind, letting the other two entertain themselves in conversation. Hanji had too many things to process and consider to stay in step with them. After Marco and Ymir were quite aways ahead, they eventually slowed to a casual stroll as they fell deep in thought. The three reached the other side of the school and Hanji stared at the wall as they walked. They zoned out almost completely, eyes watching the stones of the wall turn into the metal of the back door, then the metal of the back door turn into the glass of the window. And Hanji was brought out of their daze as a bit of movement from out the window caught their eye. They halted, letting Ymir and Marco keep walking, and stepped to the window to investigate. They peered out the glass and saw what was the source of the movement.

"Is that... Levi's car?" They murmured to themselves, far too quiet for the others to hear. Hanji couldn't make out if Levi or Eren were present, as the Windows seemed to be fogged up.

They opened the door and stepped one foot out, uncaring of the snow that lied beneath. Everything clicked. The car was... rocking, rhythmically at that. The windows were fogged up. And Hanji heard something unmistakable. Something they almost wished they hadn't heard.

"Levi! F-fuck... mn!"

Now Hanji knew where Levi was, and that was without a doubt, Eren's voice. "Oh my gosh..." They breathed out inaudibly. They were frozen in place, and not because their foot had stuck to the icy ground.

"Hanji, you're letting the cold air in. What are you looking at?" Ymir fussed, shuffling over to Hanji with Marco in tow. Bored, she peeked over their shoulder and went bug-eyed. "Holy. Shit."

"My eyes!" Marco turned away, flustered.

"Oh god... L-Levi, harder... yes!" Eren's wails continued.
"You're worried about your eyes?" Ymir cackled. "What about your ears? Are you hearing this shit?" Ymir was adoring the comedy show. "You know what, screw your ears. I feel bad for Eren's ass! Poor fucker is getting plowed."

Hanji stood agape through it all. They knew Levi had a crush on Eren, but they were at a loss trying to figure out what had led up to this.

"Hanji?" They were ripped out of their thoughts by a small, scared voice at the end of the hallway. They turned, all the color draining from their face when they saw Isabel walking towards them. "Farlan can't get ahold of either of them. What do we do?"

Hanji sprinted from their spot at the door and over to Isabel to stop her and cover her ears. "No, no, no, no, no!" They firmly covered both of her ears to make sure no noise seeped past. They didn't want her to hear something that could potentially scar her for life, as Eren's wails and pleas never seized, all because of her brother. "Ymir! Go tell everyone we found them and we'll be starting in a bit. Marco! Shut the door and escort Isabel back. I'm going to get the pieces by myself."

Everyone followed Hanji's orders, Marco feeling embarrassed, Isabel confused, and Ymir amused to no end. Hanji was going to kill Levi.

Chapter End Notes

I too have only seen someone split a rifle once in my life. And let me tell you, no one really knows what to think when it happens.

I miss color guard so much! But marching season has started! I was just in the Memorial Day parade marching in a color guard of two. (I was the instructor for quite a few people/ all but one bailed) Even though it's not the same because it was quickly thrown together, it brought back so many memories and my heart hurts.

We're finally getting somewhere, eep! I did the math and this fic will have around 27 chapters. Oh boy.

Also, I've decided to help with visuals in case there are some of you that are very unfamiliar with color guard. So, every chapter, I'll link a video of a really good performance or compilation! https://youtu.be/JWVHzPbVcJ0

(Teach me how to make a proper link on mobile please)

I have two tumblrs you can check out now! My fic/art blog, dr-s--art. It has my art, fics, and progress on fics. Any my new one the-witch-daddy (don't ask about the name) it has nothing but ereri/riren & color guard bc reasons. Please leave a kudos or comment if you liked this! Special thanks to my beta! Thank you for reading!
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

After Eren finds out that everyone knows about him and Levi, nothing is quite the same anymore.

Chapter Notes

I'm out of school! That means quicker updates, yay! I had a bit of trouble writing this chapter, I wanted it to come out better, but what can you do?

Trigger warning for near panic attack. I don't think it's close to one based on my experience, but just in case.

(Ymir is an asshole in this chapter)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Levi finished up tying Eren's shoe while still trying to regain his breath. "You're such a screamer," he accused.

Eren would've blushed if his cheeks weren't already tinted scarlet from his exertion. "That's your fault."

Levi smirked smugly and set Eren's foot back where it belonged. "I'm not complaining about that," he purred. "Now, let's see if you can hold up to the bet." He dug the keys into the ignition, preparing to drive to the front of the school.

Eren eyed the watch Levi had given him. "Shit," he hissed. "We're really late." He looked in the rearview mirror, wiping off the sweat on his brow and fixing his disheveled hair.

Levi shrugged it off. "They'll forgive us."

~

Ymir strutted into the gym, commanding all attention. "Listen up!" She boomed. "We found Eren and Levi!" A collective sigh went through the team. "We'll be starting when they get back in, but holy shit you guys; you're not going to believe this. Gather round."

The majority of the team shared curious looks, but closed in on Ymir nonetheless. Ymir never lowered her voice even after everyone was at a lessened distance. "So, you know our little ex-
homophobe, Eren?" She waited until a few people gave hesitant nods. "As it turns out, he's the biggest homo of them all," she said with great pleasure. Nothing made her happier in that moment than to be the one to reveal Eren.

Some members gasped, whereas others simply stared in disbelief. At this point, Marco and Isabel had joined everyone.

"I don't buy it," Annie scoffed, crossing her arms.

"How would you know that?" Petra asked, raising her brow.

"Hanji, Marco, and I are all witnesses, I guess you could say," Ymir said with a sly grin. Marco tried to stop her, knowing it wasn't her business to tell, but he was too late. "We saw Levi fucking Eren into next week... in his car!"

Sasha raised her shoulders as she gasped and covered her mouth. "Oh my gosh!"

Bertolt's face turned beet red at the new knowledge.

Petra put a hand over her heart like she'd just heard the scandal of the year.

Isabel just stared into space, whispering, "... So that's why he wouldn't go out with me..."

Ymir folded her arms across her chest and cocked her hip. "Isn't that right Marco? Saw the whole thing!"

Marco tried to splutter out a response to deny that they'd actually seen the event. However, it was of no use; Ymir just kept going.

"Now guys, we can't let them know that we know they were fucking, but we have to make them paranoid that we know, to freak them out." Her devious plan came out. "Then when the time is right, someone should say something that makes it obvious that we know, I want to see the fear in Eren's eyes. Then, you know, we can tell him we don't care and that its okay or whatever, I just want to see him panic."

It was unanimous, everybody loved the plan. Christa and Marco were wary, but didn't try to stop the team. They had to admit that this was the most fun way to show Eren they supported him, even if it meant scaring him out of his wits. They knew they'd regret it later, but as long as they'd be telling Eren the truth by the end of the day, that's all that mattered to them.

~

Eren wobbled out, following Levi. His hips were practically screaming in pain from his earlier activities and he was dreading the work ahead of him.

"So, how are you feeling Eren?" Levi teased.

Eren glowered at him with venom. "Just fine," he spat out bitterly. "I feel great."

Levi had a new skip to his step as he held the door open for Eren. "Good."

The two wandered down the halls, heading to the gym in silence. Eren's hips ached as the extra
weight of his equipment piled on over his shoulder. He noticed Levi scanning him over with his eyes and the thought crossed his mind that he’d regret making this decision. But there was no backing out now, even if he no longer cared about bringing the award home, he had to prove his endurance. His pride was on the line.

They entered the gym to see everyone scattered around, in their respective spaces, stretching without an instructor. Each person sent odd looks to the couple; some wiggling their eyebrows, some waving suggestively, and the rest just giggled amongst themselves. Eren and Levi exchanged a glance of confusion, but they shrugged it off and went their separate ways. Eren went to set his things down and go stretch. Levi stood in the front, gaining everyone's attention.

"Where's Hanji?" Levi asked no one in particular.

"They're getting the last of the set," Nanaba filled in, stretching her arm over her head. "They'll be back any minute now."

Levi nodded. "Alright, everyone get in your spaces until they get back. We'll start stretching."

The guard took their sweet time getting into place. Eren started becoming suspicious with all the stares he received. Sasha walked up to her usual spot next to him. "So, Eren... what took you so long?" she inquired, biting her lip, giddy over the fact that she knew his secret.

Eren raised a skeptical brow at her and searched for an excuse. "Uh... the weather. We caught the blizzard just as it started."

Sasha nodded slowly and over exaggeratedly. "Ahh, the blizzard!" she mused.

Eren turned back around, perplexed at her tone and expression. Halfway through stretching, Hanji finally made it into the gym, lugging in the set pieces, and calling Levi over to aid them. Levi swiftly met them at the door and assisted in bringing in the pieces, then signaling the actual beginning of their stretching.

~

The amount of looks Levi received during stretching and all through their run was disturbing. Members would randomly send him a smile or wiggle their eyebrows at him in their passing. He'd glare back at them if they got too close or her even ask them about it. All of which shrugged it off and went on with their work.

After their run, Eren put his hands on his knees, wheezing out his breath and having the pain catch up with him. Noticing his fatigued state, Levi and Petra came to his side.

"You haven't been this out of breath since our first few practices," Petra noted, stroking his shoulder. "Are you alright?"

Eren angled his head upward to toss a glance at Levi, who was pulling in his lips to hide his smug smirk. Eren glared daggers at him, keeping their bet in mind then turned to face Petra. "I'm fine," he wheezed out. "Don't worry about it."

"I know what's wrong," Levi interjected, gaining Eren and Petra's stares. Petra seemed curious and the look that Eren gave him was priceless. "He didn't stretch well enough."
Eren mouthed the words 'fuck you,' while Petra nodded, understanding. "You're probably right," she said. "Eren, stretching is really important, you shouldn't do it halfway."

Eren dropped his bitter look and stood up properly. "I know," he spoke through gritted teeth. "I'll do it right next time." He stalked off, sick of the excuse that stretching was the answer to everything.

In his absence, Levi looked to Petra who wore a knowing smile. He quirked an eyebrow at her. "What's with you?"

Petra realized her error and erased her conspicuous composure. "Nothing!" She strode off, leaving Levi to his confusion.

~

"So..." Hanji drawled out during one of their breaks. "You and Eren were pretty late. Care to explain why that is?" They tossed Levi a water bottle as the two walked over to the bleachers away from the group.

Levi shrugged, taking a swig. "I wanted to be careful on the roads, so I drove slowly. Then it started snowing heavily."

Hanji narrowed their eyes at him as they sat down. "Isabel and Farlan said you left early though."

Levi stiffened ever so slightly, but Hanji caught it and knew they'd got him. "You're lying to me, Levi. Don't even try to get out of this."

Levi looked them in the eyes, now on defense. "So we were late one time. We still made it, we're alive, and we're fine. What's the big deal? It's none of your business why we were late," he whispered. His heart started pounding as he realized that his 'explanation' sounded too personal, but he couldn't help it. He had to keep their secret for Eren's sake, and that meant he had to keep it from his best friend too.

Hanji looked at him over the rim of their glasses. "None of my business?" They hissed dangerously. "No one had seen or heard from you or Eren for nearly half an hour. I sent you a million texts and called you only to have it go straight to voicemail. Eren couldn't be contacted. I was worried sick, I didn't tell anyone so I wouldn't scare them, but I thought something had happened. On top of all that, you can't tell me what actually happened, which would add to my worry..." They paused, wondering if it was right to tell him. At Levi's inquisitive look, they decided they should. "If it wasn't for the fact that I already know."

Levi clenched his jaw shut and felt his lungs empty and heart come to a halt, but otherwise gave no indication of his panic. "None of my business?" They hissed dangerously. "No one had seen or heard from you or Eren for nearly half an hour. I sent you a million texts and called you only to have it go straight to voicemail. Eren couldn't be contacted. I was worried sick, I didn't tell anyone so I wouldn't scare them, but I thought something had happened. On top of all that, you can't tell me what actually happened, which would add to my worry..." They paused, wondering if it was right to tell him. At Levi's inquisitive look, they decided they should. "If it wasn't for the fact that I already know."

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"Levi," Hanji dropped their voice. "I know."

Levi's breathing stuttered and his heart restarted and went into a rhythmless beat. He feared for Eren and Eren alone. "How?"

Hanji reluctantly decided to be completely honest with him. "... I went outside for a brief moment, and I heard you two. I swear I didn't see anything, the windows were too foggy. But Levi—"

"Ymir and Marco were there at the time," Hanji explained. "They're the only ones."

Levi looked over at Eren, sitting on the side of the gym, surrounded by the majority of the guard. He appeared to be perplexed with the way he looked at everyone else. Levi brought his attention back to Hanji. "Hanji, you can't let anyone else know. Eren's not out yet, and I can't imagine how he'd feel if he knew that someone saw us like that, even if you didn't exactly see anything. You can't tell anybody, you have to promise me--"

"You don't have to worry about that," Hanji cut in. "I promise I won't tell anyone."

"No, you don't understand," Levi continued. "Eren's parents are homophobic and he's terrified to have anyone find out. You have to tell Ymir and Marco that they can't tell a soul."

Hanji nodded. "I'm on it." They stood up and trotted over to grab the two witnesses. They stood behind Eren's little crowd that had formed and tapped Marco and Ymir on the shoulder. "Guys, I need to talk with you both real quick."

The two stood up and followed Hanji over to the other side of the gym where they were sure to be unheard. Even at their distance, Hanji kept quiet. "I was just talking with Levi, and I have to stress to you both that you can't tell anyone about what we saw. It's extremely important that we keep this a secret."

Ymir bit her lip, but otherwise remained stoic. Marco groaned, setting his face in his hands.

"You're fucking kidding me," Hanji deadpanned. "Who did you two tell?!" they hissed, suddenly bubbling with rage.

"I didn't tell anybody," Marco defended. "... Ymir, on the other hand, told the whole guard."

Hanji's mouth dropped and their eyes widened at Ymir. "Why the hell would you do that? What made you think that was a good idea? Eren's in a really tough position right now, and having the entire team know is not going to help him one bit! Do you have any idea how hard this makes things now?"

"Look, I'm sorry, okay?" Ymir ran her hands through her hair. "We can fix this; all we have to do is tell everyone to keep their mouths shut about it."

Hanji slapped their hand to their forehead in exasperation. "How exactly do you plan on doing that? Do you think you can call a meeting for everyone but Eren? Won't it seem a little odd if we're all whispering things to everyone but Eren? This can't be fixed so easily, Ymir!"

"I know, I know!" Ymir groaned. "Do you think he'd freak out if we just came clean? We could tell him that we don't care he's got a thing for guys; would that be better?"

Hanji removed their glasses to rub their temples. "We'd have to tell him how we knew, and that would involve explaining how we caught him having sex with Levi in his car. I don't know about you, but I'm pretty sure that wouldn't go over well."

Marco sighed, putting his hands on his hips. "What are we going to do?"

Hanji noticed Levi moving towards them out of their peripheral vision when they put their glasses back on. "Dammit," they muttered. "Ymir, you're explaining to him why everyone knows."
"To who?" Ymir asked, turning around. She whipped her head back around when she saw Levi approaching. "I don't want to tell him."

"Tell me what?" Levi asked, joining them.

Hanji crossed their arms and tapped their foot, waiting for Ymir to come clean. Marco stood, watching patiently until she spoke. Ymir scratched the back of her neck as she began. "Uh, I wanna say that I'm really sorry in advance, but... I kind of told everybody in the guard about you and Eren."

Levi's eyes held a murderous expression. "I'm sorry, what?"

"I may or may not have told everyone that you two were fucking." There was no use in lying now; Ymir's death was approaching no matter what.

Levi flared his nostrils and tried to keep himself calm. "At least tell me that you made sure they know to not tell Eren."

"I can't. I'd be lying," Ymir blurted out.

If Levi looked scary before, he was positively petrifying now. Even Marco stepped back, afraid of his reaction. "What the fuck is wrong with you?!" He spat. "What exactly did you tell them?"

Ymir looked to Hanji, then Marco, silently begging them to save her from Levi's wrath. "I told them to drop hints about it, then tell him." She braced herself, preparing for the punch she was certain would come.

Levi held himself back from screaming at the top of his lungs and reprimanding her. Instead, he took a fist full of his hair, nearly tearing it out. He heaved his breaths in and out, ruffling through his thoughts all at once. "You're fucking dead when I get a minute, but right now we have other things to worry about. How are we going to make sure that Eren doesn't know that everyone knows?"

The three others looked amongst themselves, all shrugging, and at a loss of ideas.

"This is just fucking great," Levi muttered, wiping his brow.

~

Eren glanced at Levi from across the gym while odd questions and comments were constantly hurled at him. What was he talking about with Hanji, Ymir, and Marco that was so important?

"Any plans to get married?" Sasha asked, giggling and drawing out laughter from the majority of the guard.

'Where are all these questions coming from?' Eren wondered. "Uh..."

"Well, if you do, we'd be happy to have you as a brother-in-law," Isabel added, gesturing to herself and Farlan.

Eren knitted his brows at her. "What did you say?" Eren knew that Isabel had a crush on him that she was suppressing, but... in-law? That's different. Very different, in fact. What was she getting
at? He looked around at all the delightedly shocked faces. "What's going on?"

"Izzy!" Nanaba reprimanded through fits of laughter. "You should have waited longer!"

"Oops." Isabel feigned regret as everyone laughed.

The gears turned in Eren's head as he broke down the situation, piece by piece. "Wait..." Brother-in-law, marriage, all the personal questions and bizarre statements. He hoped to god that he was wrong. "What are you guys talking about?"

While snickering, Farlan was the one to reveal the secret.

~

"WHAT?!"

Levi and the others turned their heads to the source of the shriek. The whole guard was either laughing cheerfully or trying to calm a mortified Eren. Levi sent a glare at Ymir before he sprinted over to Eren, who was already stumbling into a standing position and trying to get out the door.

Levi sped past the group that lost all their mirth. He rushed out the door, trailing behind Eren, who was walking with trembling legs, getting as far away as he could. "Eren," Levi called out as he caught up to his side at last, near the end of the hallway.

"Eren," Levi repeated, turning him around to face him by grabbing his shaking arms. Eren's expression broke Levi's heart. His entire face turned red, his eyes watered and his mouth hung slightly open as his ragged breaths came out. "Eren, I'm so sorry I let this happen."

"No," Eren breathed out, shaking his head. "This isn't your fault, you didn't know this would happen."

Levi took his quavering hands in his. "But I shouldn't have risked it. It was a stupid idea, regardless of their reaction. I'm so sorry."

Eren just kept shaking his head. "Don't apologize... god, I feel so sick. I didn't want them to find out like that. Oh god, they saw us." Eren extracted his hand from Levi and buried his face in it. He started whimpering with each breath and tugging at his hair. "... I—I can't believe this..."

"Eren, they didn't actually see anything. Hanji said the windows were too fogged up—"

"Oh my god!" Eren groaned. "Oh my fucking god, this is so embarrassing..."

"I know this won't help the fact that they knew what we were doing, but they don't mind," Levi reminded him. "I don't know if it's any consolation, but none of them care that you're gay or that we're dating."

"I know!" Eren yelled. "But this is... I don't know, I can't think right now. I just know I can't look any of them in the eye."

Levi sighed and brought Eren into a tight hug, to which Eren accepted gladly, clinging onto him so desperately. "I promise everything will be okay," he murmured. "None of them judge you, just know that. They're not going to condemn you, or make you feel bad about who you are or what we
Eren did what he could to pace his breathing, letting his head fall to Levi's shoulder. "Did you know? That they saw?"

Levi threaded his fingers through Eren's hair soothingly. "Only after Hanji told me. I found out a couple of minutes before you did."

Eren sniffled, blinking rapidly to fend off the tears that accumulated. Luckily, his eyes started drying and his shaking decreased while in Levi's embrace. "I don't know how I can walk in there again."

"Do you want me to go in before you and tell them anything?" Levi asked, stroking Eren's back.

Eren shook his head. "No," he mumbled, deflating and letting the air out of his lungs. At this point, the anxiety left and he was overwhelmed with exhaustion. "I just need a few minutes."

Levi kissed Eren's cheek and patted his back a few times. "Just remember, you're not walking into a room of judgmental people. Some of them are gay themselves; they won't hold any negative thoughts towards you. They'll be supportive."

Eren inhaled, stabilizing himself. "...Okay."

~

Levi held Eren's hand as they returned to the gymnasium. They walked in to find the guard standing around and conversing quietly. Everyone killed the noise when they saw Levi and Eren enter.

Hanji took the leadership role and cut through the crowd to get to Eren. "Eren, I'm so sorry about what happened. I shouldn't have let the word spread around like that—"

"It's okay, Hanji." Eren remained close to Levi. "I guess it doesn't matter now, as long as no one will tell anybody else."

Hanji nodded frantically. "We promise not to tell, right guys?" They turned to see the team nodded in agreement. "We just want you to know that we're not going to tease you, we want you to feel safe, and that every one of us is here for you."

The corners of Eren's lips quirked up. "Thanks. Sorry for freaking out and leaving."

"Don't worry about that," Petra comforted him. "That was a normal reaction."

"Do you want to take some time before we get back to practice?" Hanji asked. "We have over an hour left of time."

Eren looked to Levi, silently asking if it was okay. Levi gently tightened his grip on Eren's hand and nodded. "Yeah," Eren answered. "I need a little time to get used to this, but I think I'll be okay after."

"Great, we'll take twenty minutes before we get back to work," Hanji said.
Eren's concern didn't take long to dissipate. Everyone gathered around him, occasionally giving him a hug and eventually, they reached a point in friendly conversation, taking turns telling about how they came out or about people they knew and how they came out. The stories Eren heard made him feel a little better about himself, and even made him hopeful for future situations.

"It was really hard to tell Jean," Marco went on. "Even though I'd known him for so long; I didn't know how accepting he'd be. At first, he was mostly nervous that he'd say something wrong, but he got used to it and he's really accepting now."

Eren held back a grimace at the mention of Jean's name. "You all are making it sound so easy to come out," he commented.

"Well," Marco continued. "It wasn't so easy telling my grandparents. I had the whole guard come to my birthday party and I spontaneously decided that I would tell them then. So, when I went up to my grandparents, everyone came with me, because they knew how religious they were. Fortunately, the only negative thing they said was that they were disappointed that they wouldn't get great-grandchildren, but they were pretty accepting about it."

"I guess it all depends on how confident you are and who you're telling," Christa added. "From all my experiences, I've never had trouble coming out or had people react badly."

"How did you come out?" Eren asked.

Christa took a moment to reflect on the events. "It must've been five years ago, now," she spoke softly with a fond smile. "I was watching television with my family. I'd realized that I wasn't straight a few months before, but at the time I didn't know the name of it. Because, I still liked boys, but I like girls too. I actually liked anyone who suited my fancy, regardless of their gender, but I didn't know that was called pansexual. It was such a burden to keep it a secret, but I didn't know how to tell everyone, so I just randomly yelled 'By the way, I'm a little gay but not completely gay!'" She started chuckling when the team broke out into laughter. "And my family lost it and started cackling, then they said it was okay."

Ymir threw her arm around Christa's shoulders. "Everyone kind of knew I was a lesbian before I said anything. I told all my friends when I started going out with my first girlfriend in fifth grade and none of them were even surprised."

Hanji took their turn explaining their experience with coming out. "It was funny for me. Keep in mind that I have a brother and a sister that are quite a bit older than me. I sort of offhandedly mentioned to my parents that I wasn't a boy or a girl. My dad asked me to explain, and I told him about my pronouns, that I was agender and after I was done telling him, my mom just shot her fist in the air and was like 'And everyone said I'd never get one of each!'"

Another round of laughter filled the group. Eren became more and more comfortable as the stories were shared. After Hanji's story, he turned to face Levi. "How did you come out to your mom?"

Levi snorted. "I came home with a boyfriend one day."

Eren wasn't satisfied with that and wanted a further explanation. "What did she do when she found out?"
"She shook his hand and said 'Hello, it's nice to meet you.'"

Eren chortled at the simple story. "That's perfect. I wish my parents were as easy to open up to."

"Why aren't they easy to open up to?" Bertolt asked meekly.

Eren sighed and let his shoulders slump. "They're these Christian extremists. My dad is horribly homophobic, is against abortion, he's transphobic, doesn't like it when people aren't Christian, and basically every other stereotype you've all probably heard about Christians. My mom never really says if she's against all those things or not, but she doesn't correct my dad whenever he says something bad. So, I don't know what she thinks."

"Your dad sounds like a real piece of work," Annie commented.

Eren huffed out a humorless laugh. "Yeah, he's something alright." He stared down at his hands that rested in his lap, mind wandering off to a plain of bitterness.

Luckily, his friends brought him out of it. "Who cares if your dad doesn't approve?" Isabel spat with fire laced in her voice. "If he doesn't like it, then he doesn't matter. We're your friends and we're okay with it."

"Yeah," Farlan joined in. "Who says you can't choose your family? We're your family now."

"And we'll defend you if need be," Nanaba said. "Now we're not just the color guard; we're your body guards. So, if you're ever out completely, we have your back."

A unanimous agreement went around the team and Eren couldn't control the smile that grew on his features. He felt blessed to have been lucky enough to meet all these wonderful people. He thought he was undeserving of all their kindness, especially because he wasn't so nice to them in the beginning. These people were genuinely caring and kind and he decided that he'd do what he could to prove that he was worthy of their friendship.

Levi cleared his throat, calling the attention of those surrounding. "And we can all assure that you being exposed like this will never happen again. Isn't that right, Ymir?" He scowled at her pointedly.

Ymir averted her eyes and nodded. "Yep."

"Good," Levi hummed. A small silence put a pause before his continuation. "We're still gonna tear you apart for this after practice. It's just nice that we have a public agreement now."

Ymir hung her head and groaned. She couldn't really complain, knowing she'd royally screwed up, but the lecture or punishment or whatever she'd be getting wasn't one she wanted to endure.

~

Eren laid back on the love seat in Levi's living room the day after practice. He was too mentally exhausted to go back home where the people who shared his space possibly weren't as accepting as the guard. Currently, he was waiting for Levi to return with popcorn. The Ackerman family was seated on the couch and they were all watching Pacific Rim.
Levi reentered the living room, handing his family their own bowls of popcorn, then seating himself next to Eren with a bowl that they'd share. The film was just ending and they were about to put another one in, so Levi thought he'd refill their snacks.

When the end credits started rolling, Kutchel began making noises, attempting to get Levi's attention. "Pst... pssst!"

Levi turned his head amusedly. "Can I help you?" He snorted.

Kutchel nervously picked at her nails. "Did you ask him yet?" she whispered, as if Eren couldn't hear her.

Smiling, Levi rolled his eyes. "Why don't you ask him? He doesn't bite."

Eren became aware that they were talking about him, so he leaned forward to face Kutchel. "Ask me what?"

Kutchel angled her shoulders inward, feeling shy. "Um, I was wondering if you weren't busy, would you maybe want to go to my graduation ceremony?"

Eren grinned at her. "Why weren't you going to ask me that yourself?"

Kutchel jutted out her chin and glanced around. "Well, I know my children hang around with the cool kids, and I wasn't sure if I'd be cramping your style if I asked you to go to a graduating ceremony for an old lady like me."

Levi scoffed, shaking his head and still baring a bright smile. "Two things, maman. First, you're not old. Second, no one says 'cramping your style' anymore."

"See?" Kutchel gestured with her hands. "I didn't know that, so I need you kids to keep me in the loop about what's cool and what's not cool." She sat up in her seat, a little more confident than before. "Eren, you don't have to go if you don't want to, but the invitation is open."

"Of course I'll go!" Eren assured her. "But why is your graduation ceremony happening so late? I thought college terms ended in December and May."

"Oh they do," Kutchel confirmed. "But there was an issue with one of our professors and for some reason, the college mixed some things up really badly, so no one could stand in for her and administer our exam. So, we finished rather late, and because of that, they postponed the ceremony. I have no idea how they could mess things up as bad as they did, but they did."

"At least you can still graduate," Farlan interjected from her side.

Kutchel giggled at his comment. "Yes, what a disaster it would've been if they didn't fix the problem." She cleared her throat, redirecting the conversation back at Eren. "So, you're sure you want to come?"

"Absolutely," Eren said. "I'd love to see you graduate."

Kutchel beamed with joy. "You picked a good one, Levi."

The room was filled with short chuckles as Levi took a hold of Eren's hand, smirking at him. "I know I did," he said, as-a-matter-of-factly.
Levi adjusted Eren's tie, as he was having difficulties doing it himself. Levi stood back, examining his work and checking to see if the forest green fabric was straight and went well against Eren's white dress shirt. Levi nodded, approving of his overall appearance. "You look so handsome," Levi murmured, moving over to the mirror to finish applying his eyeliner.

"Not as handsome as you," Eren countered. He rolled up his sleeves as he loomed behind Levi, watching him work.

Levi smirked into his mirror. "That's not true." He made the last mark on his eyelid and turned around in his chair to face Eren, staring at him challengingly.

Eren knelt down to stare back at his level. "It is true."

Levi squinted at him, mere inches away from his face. Neither seemed to be backing down any time soon, so, as quick as he could, Levi pecked Eren's nose and stood up in the other direction. "Is not; I win," he quipped.

Eren stood dumbfounded and flustered. He crossed his arms and pouted. "Fine, you win this time."

Levi chuckled, throwing on his black vest over his dark blue dress shirt. Adjusting his own tie one last time, he walked up to Eren. "Thank you for coming to the ceremony," he murmured. "I don't know if my mom would tell you, but it means a lot. This is a big day for all of us."

"She's like a second mom to me," Eren said. "I wouldn't miss it."

Levi smiled at him lovingly, taking his hand. "Well, let's go see 'our' mom graduate."

The packed audience wouldn't stay silent long enough for Eren to speak at a normal volume. He checked his watch, the one that Levi had given him, and saw that it was about fifteen minutes until the ceremony officially began. "Not too much longer," Eren half shouted to remind Levi and his siblings.

Loud shuffling and screeches from the chairs being shoved and scuffing the ground sounded from behind them. Several calls for Levi followed shortly after, gaining the attention of the four. They turned around, Levi finding Hanji flagging him down, flailing their arm in the air.

"Hey, you guys made it!" Isabel beamed, seeing the color guard team follow behind Hanji enthusiastically.

The group wove past people sitting and took up the majority of the row behind Eren, Levi and his siblings. Hanji occupied the seat directly behind Levi and sat forward to speak with him. "Are we too early?"

Look shook his head. "No, they're about to start," he said.

Eren swiveled in his chair to see the entire guard behind them, plus a few other familiar faces, such
as Reiner, Connie, Erwin, Mike and the rest of Levi's old friends. "Why did you guys all come?"

Petra leaned over to explain. "Kutchel is like the mother of the guard. She comes to all the shows and supports the team whenever she can. Sometimes, when we're short on money for something, she'll find a way to pay for it, so we want to show our support to her. Plus, she's great. I've known her for years, so it's like she's my friend too."

Several people nodded in agreement with Petra.

Eren turned around, thinking over the new information. The closeness of the guard was sometimes astounding.

After the expected amount of time of waiting, the audience silenced to a dull murmur as the first speaker stepped up to the stage. Levi couldn't care much about what the man was saying. He just wanted to see his mother walk up and accept that diploma that she worked so hard to get. He only cared about seeing her get what she deserved after years of losing sleep, doing everything she could to balance school and work, still making time to be with her family, and doing a hell of a good job at it all. Levi didn't want to hear the man give his speech about education and pride; he wanted to see his mother receive what she had earned.

His speech lasted a little under ten minutes, much to Levi's surprise, and soon, people were being called up to receive their diplomas. The group prepared themselves to cheer, aware that Kutchel would be one of the first ones up, as they were going in alphabetical order. The first person was called, and they clapped politely as they marched across the stage, and waited.

"Kutchel Ackerman," the speaker announced.

Levi, his siblings, Eren, and the rest of their group roared with hollers of Kutchel's name and other encouragements. The guard started stomping their feet incredibly loud, clapping frantically, some even whistled.

They watched Kutchel float across the stage in her white cap and gown, wide grin plastered on her face and elated eyes set on them as she approached the speaker. She shook his hand, whispering 'thank you,' and accepted her diploma. She turned to face the crowd fully, just as the person before her did, allowing her children to capture the moment on their phones.

Some people in the crowd turned to look at their group, amused with how much noise they were making, but none of them cared. Kutchel started walking again to take her seat, sending a bashful smile at the crowd and waited out the remainder of the ceremony.

~

Everyone lingered outside the college auditorium, congratulating Kutchel. She was currently in the middle of her children, wrapped in a tight hug, holding back tears of joy. She looked up and locked eyes with Eren. "Get over here," she called, waving an arm to beckon him over. Eren smiled and joined in the hug. After he went in, everyone else took that as an invitation to surround Kutchel, placing her in the center of a large group hug.

"I can't believe it," Kutchel beamed. "I can finally get my dream job, I'll have time for my family, I can sleep all I want, I won't have to be dependent on Kenny anymore... everything is going to be all better now."
"We're so proud of you, mom!" Farlan chimed.

"I can finally give you three everything you need, and be the mom you deserve," she said, holding them all tighter.

Levi shook his head. "No, you've always been the best mother anyone can ask for. You did this for you."

Kutchel lowered her head, feeling the tears spill over. "Thank you, mon fils."

"You're the best mom we've all ever had!" Hanji yelled from somewhere in the group, earning a hum of agreement from everyone there.

Kutchel chortled, and wiped away her wet cheeks; her heart beating a mile a minute. It almost didn't seem possible that she had made it this far, and that every trouble she used to struggle with was going to disappear as soon as went in for the interview of her new job.

~

Back at the Ackerman's home, they all continued the celebration of Kutchel's achievement. Isabel brought out brownies that she had made, Christa served everyone drinks, and Hanji set out other snacks. Kutchel felt so lucky to have been so appreciated by all these people. Eren sat next to Levi on the couch, who was placed right next to his mother, who was still in her cap and gown.

After a considerable amount of time, Levi excused himself, leaving to prepare Kutchel's graduation present. Eren scooted over to fill in the empty space so Kutchel wouldn't be offended or sit by herself. "Congratulations," he told her with a smile.

"Thank you, Eren. I'm so happy that you could come! It means a lot to me."

"It's no problem." Eren waved her off. "I was happy to come and celebrate with everyone." Eren eyed her cap and lifted a brow at her. "Aren't you going to change out of that?"

Kutchel shook her head. "I'm not taking it off, I'm getting my money's worth."

Eren chuckled at her dead serious explanation. Kutchel eyed him for a moment. "I guess I should say congratulations to you too," she remarked.

Eren tilted his head. "What for?"

"Levi told me that the guard knows about you and him. Congratulations; I know it must've been hard keeping it a secret from them."

Eren's cheeks warmed at the mention. "Did he tell you how they found out?" He asked hesitantly. Kutchel cocked an eyebrow at him. "You both told them all, didn't you?"

"Right, yeah," Eren agreed quickly. He mentally thanked Levi for keeping their dignity with his mother.

"So, how many people know? If you don't mind me asking, that is."
"Um." Eren scratched his arm. "You know, the guard knows, my sister knows and my friend knows."

Kutchel nodded. "Not ready to tell your parents, are you?"

"No," Eren admitted. "They're not okay with things like that. I wish they'd react as well as you did when you found out Levi was bi."

Kutchel raised her eyebrows in surprise. "He told you how I found out? Goodness, I'm surprised he remembers." She sat back, thinking it over.

Eren knitted his brows together. "Well, from what he told me, it wasn't that long ago. It sounded like he brought home his first boyfriend only a few years ago."

Kutchel looked at him in question, then started nodding, understanding what he was saying. "Ah, that's not when I found out. I found out many, many years before that. He just doesn't remember."

Eren's interest was piqued. "How did you find out?"

Kutchel sighed. "Are you sure you want to hear it? It breaks my heart to remember."

Eren felt a bit apprehensive now, but that didn't deter him. "If you're okay with telling me, then I want to hear it."

Kutchel sent him a sad smile and began her story. "Levi was so young. I think he must've been around four or five years old. I was busy cleaning around the house, so I called and asked Hanji's mother to drive him home from preschool. When he came home, I was in the middle of vacuuming. I was stressed, tired, and I'll never forgive myself for not noticing that something was wrong."

Kutchel let her shoulders slump, baring the weight of the guilt from all those years ago. "... When he walked in, I asked him how school was... and he had this angry little frown. He ignored me and stormed off to his room. I was exhausted and told myself that I'd check on him later, and I still feel like such a bad mom for not stopping what I was doing to see him. I finished vacuuming and went up to his room and I saw him on his bed..." Kutchel took in a deep breath, pained by the memory. "Eren, I've never seen him cry so hard in all his life. He cried harder than when he broke up with his girlfriend awhile back. Levi rarely ever cries, even when he was a little boy. I walked in and he was bawling his eyes out, and he was crying so hard that he'd go into a little coughing fit every few minutes because he couldn't breathe. He was holding onto his old stuffed bat... I can still picture his tiny fingers holding onto it so tightly; he was in so much pain."

Eren's heart ached as he imagined his Levi hurting so much at such a young age.

"I sat down with him and asked him what was wrong. And he said—well, it wasn't in English, but I'll translate everything to make it easy for you," Kutchel said. "He said he didn't want to go to preschool anymore. I asked him why, and it took him awhile, but he told me what happened. Apparently, Levi had a little crush on one of his friends, and he kissed his cheek on the playground. Another one of the kids saw and started harassing him, telling him that only girls could kiss boys. His friend defended him, but the other kid kept telling him he was 'gross.' Then Levi said, 'Mama, I'm sorry, but I yelled at him. I know I'm not supposed to yell, but I did. I told him to shut up.' Then he told me that the kid kept calling him a girl and Levi kept telling him to stop..."

Kutchel's pain was instantaneously replaced with anger as the story progressed. "Then the teacher came over and put him in time out. He said that it was wrong and he shouldn't do that. He didn't tell him he shouldn't be kissing other people, he told him he shouldn't be kissing boys." Kutchel
took another breath to level her voice. "Then Levi leaned on me and said, 'Mama... I think I'm supposed to be a girl too. I think that boy was right.'"

Eren couldn't believe it. He didn't want the story to end there, he needed there to be more. "What did you do when he said that?" He asked.

"I held him and let him cry. I told him that if he knew he was a girl, that was okay. But if he knew he was a boy, that it was okay to kiss boys and that the other kid and the teacher were wrong. I said 'Levi, you're my perfect little angel, and you didn't do a thing wrong. There's nothing wrong with you,' I said I'm going to talk to your teacher and tell him why I won't have him treating you like that.' And I did. Monday, I picked up Levi and let him wait by the car while I talked with his teacher. Let's just say that the other parents had heard wind of our... 'conversation' and he wasn't working there the next year."

Eren smiled, happy that Kutchel settled everything and made sure that her son was in a safe environment. He could imagine how the kind woman before him could instantly turn into someone's worst nightmare for treating her children poorly.

"But," she continued. "After I told Levi all that, he... he asked me if I hated him."

Eren's mind wandered back to when he was around that age and asked his mother that very same question. He remembered the answer just as clearly.

"I said 'Levi, I love you no matter what.' That's what you need to be able to tell your kids. You can't say, 'I love you even if you're gay, even if you're straight, even if you're depressed, even if you're sick, even if you're failing school, even if you disagree with me, even if... whatever they could possibly come to you with.' Love isn't 'because' or 'even if.' Love is 'no matter what.' And I love all my children no matter what."

Suddenly, Eren felt a new sense of hope that he didn't have before. "My mom told me that a long time ago. I don't know if she still means it..." He broke off his sentence, not confident in the answer.

Kutchel set a hand on his shoulder. "Speaking as a mother, I know she still means it. That doesn't just go away," she promised.

"How can you be so sure?" Eren asked.

Kutchel's wise eyes softened. "If you ever have kids one day, you'll understand."

Eren felt okay with that answer. He may not have been ready to tell his mother about his sexuality or boyfriend anytime in the near future, but regaining confidence in her helped a great deal.

~

Levi, Farlan, and Isabel came downstairs. Levi and Farlan waited at the bottom of the stairs, holding Kutchel's gift, and Isabel, walking ahead, gathering everyone's attention. She cleared her throat, standing in the center of the room and held her hands behind her back with her chin held high. "Thanks to everyone for coming! Farlan, Levi, and I have decided that it's time to give our college graduate her gift! We worked on it for a while and we put a lot of love into it." She held out one of her hands, gesturing for Levi and Farlan to come out.
The brothers entered the living room, holding a framed collage, cluttered with a seemingly infinite amount of photos. As they passed the guests, people oohed and ahhed. When it came into Kutchel's view she held her hands over her mouth, hiding an elated gasp. Her eyes lit up as they narrowed in as they tried to take in each captured memory on the board.

"We put the scrapbooking skills that we inherited from you to good use," Farlan pointed out.

Kutchel took it into her lap as they handed it off to her. "I'm speechless..." she murmured. She inspected it closer, noticing that each photo had her in it. Many were pictures of her with her children when they were young, some were just of her, and there were even a few of her when she was young and before she had children. She stared up at her kids, unaware of how to voice her thoughts.

"You're always hanging up pictures of us during our achievements," Levi elaborated. "So, we wanted to do that for you."

"We're proud of you, maman," Isabel added.

Kutchel started speaking before her emotions could get the best of her again. "Get over here, you three." She held her arms open, letting her children come in to give her another hug.

Somewhere in the corner, Mike had to make the moment less private. "I wish Kutchel was my mom!" he whined in a purposely lowered voice.

Laughter filled the room as some guests repeated Mike's declaration.

"I'll adopt all of you!" Kutchel said through her giggles.

~

The party settled down and everyone was divided into their own conversations, casually enjoying the atmosphere. Eren sat in his own seat now and let Buster claw his lap and doze off. He couldn't say that it was the most comfortable thing in the world, but he couldn't bring himself to remove the feline.

Eren stared into space, trying to block out the sharp claws digging into his thighs and relax while everyone engaged in conversation. That was quickly ruined for him when Hanji trotted over to his seat. They lowered themselves down to his level, leaning their forearms on the arm rest. "Hey, Eren," they whispered. "Can I talk to you in the kitchen for a sec?"

Eren looked down at the cat in his lap. "No can do, Hanji. Buster has chosen me."

Hanji rolled their eyes amusedly and stood up. "I can fix that." They grabbed a hold of Buster and hoisted him up off Eren's lap, making the cat cling to Eren for dear life and Eren bite his lip from the pain. "Follow me," they invited, setting Buster on their shoulder and walking towards the kitchen.

Eren couldn't exactly argue now, so he stood and shadowed behind Hanji as they weaved through the crowd. As Hanji passed through, they dropped Buster off on Levi's shoulders, causing him to look up at them questioningly, but he didn't object. Eren shrugged as he walked past Levi and met Hanji in the otherwise empty kitchen. Hanji stood in the far corner of the kitchen, for extra
precautions to make sure no one heard them.

"So," Hanji started, pushing up their glasses. "I didn't want to have this conversation with you right after everyone found out about you and Levi. I figured you needed some space and time to think. Then, I couldn't exactly get a private minute with you at school, so I guess this is my only opportunity." They examined Eren's worried features and took a deep breath. "Please don't hurt my best friend."

Eren furrowed his brows. "What do you m—"

Hanji held up a finger, interrupting him. "I know you might not need to be told any of this, but it's really important that I stress this just in case."

Eren nodded, showing that he understood. Whatever it was Hanji had to tell him, he knew that he needed to give them his full attention.

Hanji kept their voice low throughout their entire explanation, but still loud enough for Eren to hear without straining himself. "Levi's had some bad experience with past relationships. You probably already know about his ex-girlfriend, Lynne. Just let me tell you... that relationship hurt him in a way that he still hasn't recovered from. I wouldn't expect him to ever go into detail about it with you, but I think you should know, so you don't do anything to him. Now, I don't want you to feel threatened by what I'm about to tell you; you have nothing to worry about."

"Okay," Eren muttered, now feeling apprehensive.

"Levi... he was in love with Lynne," Hanji began. "It wasn't just a simple relationship where they both just enjoyed each other's company. He loved her so much."

Eren's stomach turned at the mention of him loving someone else, but he repeated Hanji's words in his head, telling himself not to worry.

"Towards the end of their relationship, Lynne started ignoring him and was distant half the time. At first, Levi thought it was nothing, but then he found out that she'd been cheating on him with multiple people for a long time." Even Hanji started to get enraged little by little as the story went on. "The next time Levi saw her, he confronted her about it, and instead of saying anything that could have possibly been helpful, not that it would've done anything, she said it was his fault." A new venom leaked into Hanji's words. "She said that he wasn't affectionate enough, she said he didn't do enough for her or pay attention to her as much as he should have and she went to find someone else who would. She played the role of the victim, but luckily, Levi ended it there. Keep in mind that Levi has always been a very caring and attentive person. He's not cold or heartless as she tried to make him believe he was. He believed her. He still, to this day, thinks it was his fault. He tells me that he doesn't feel guilty anymore, but I know when he lies."

Eren felt his heart speeding up with the amount of anger he was feeling. He shifted his weight and clutched onto his jeans to hopefully keep himself in check.

"Levi knew better and had enough respect for himself to leave her as soon as he talked to her about it, but... even after they broke up, he was still in love with her. Love like that didn't just go away. He may have not been the one at fault, but it killed him." Hanji casted their gaze downwards, remembering the pain of seeing their best friend so broken. "He called me the night it happened and I came over... I've never seen him so heartbroken in all my life. It was like he had a mental breakdown. It took him half a year to move on. A month before school started, he finally realized he didn't love her anymore, but even though the love was gone, it still hurts him like hell. I remember when it was right after their breakup, I went to see him at work. He would tell her
anything he could to hurt her, saying that he didn't like women anymore, saying that he moved on, and how he was so much happier now that he was done with her. They were all lies, of course, but I think he was saying it all so he could convince himself of all those things rather than her. Lynne would always try to insult him, but every so often she'd try to get him back, which only hurt him more. She never loved him, but she was obsessed with him in a way. She was crazy; I don't understand anything she did."

Eren's hatred for this girl only grew as Hanji kept talking.

"And even though Levi's over her, he's not over what she did. I'll never forgive her for making him believe that he was anything less than the most loving, nurturing boyfriend anyone could have. He's so self-conscious and insecure because of her, and that breaks my heart. He's so careful now; he put off dating because he didn't think he was good enough for dating anymore. I mean, how much of an asshole do you have to be to get a perfectly nice guy to believe that he's not cut out for going out with people?" Hanji took a minute, calming themselves and steadying their pulse. "... My point is, I was left to pick up the pieces after she broke Levi's heart, and I don't think I could hold myself back from hurting someone if they did that to him again. Because I don't think he'd be able to come back from that. Again, I know you might not need to be told this, but don't hurt Levi in any way. He's such a great person and he doesn't deserve the pain he received or anymore. Take care of him. If you love him, make sure he knows. And... when possible, just reassure him that he's enough and that he's doing a good job. Please, Eren. Please don't hurt my friend."

The way Hanji begged let Eren know that they saw Levi go through more suffering in his past relationship than anyone should have to. He was going to make sure that would never happen again. "I promise I'll never hurt him, Hanji," Eren said. "I do love him, so much, and I remind him everyday. I'm going to do my best to make him as happy as possible."

Hanji smiled at him gratefully. They couldn't contain themselves, so they flung their arms around his neck, capturing him in a bear hug. "Thank you so much, Eren!" They stood back, observing his shocked expression. "Take care of my shorty."

Eren eased from his tension. "I promise I will."

Chapter End Notes

I may have lied to you guys. I originally planned on having 27 chapters, but it looks like there'll be 28. This chapter was going to be longer, but to include everything I wanted to include would've made it ridiculously long.

I need to give my friendo credit, they shared with me their experience of coming out to their parents as non-binary and I was given permission to use their experience in my story for Hanji! Thank you Sammy Sam!

Now, as promised, here is the color guard video for this chapter! This one is legit one of the coolest fucking performances I've ever seen. I don't know if you guys actually go to the links I provide, (dear god, teach me how to make a real link) but this one is so worth it! Trust me!
https://youtu.be/aAgvtuFfC-s

Mega thanks to my wonderful beta! You da best!!! If you'd like to check out my fic/art blog, it's dr-s--art and my ereri/riren/color guard blog is the-witch-daddy. If you liked
this, please let me know with a comment or kudos! I hope you enjoyed this, thanks for reading! <3
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Valentine's Day approaches and Eren and Levi do their best to express their love to each other in new ways.

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SORRY FOR THE LATE UPDATE. THIS IS SO MUCH LONGER THAN I WANTED IT TO BE UGH.

Honestly, I'm not liking this chapter. I know I always say that but do you ever write something and there's this one chapter, or even a paragraph, that you're like "yup, this just ruined the whole thing?" That would be this chapter. I believe that I'm getting worse with each chapter I write, help.

It has been brought to my attention that my chapters are horrendously long, and I'd like to apologize. This might just be a me thing, but seeing fics with a chapter count of 30+ Is just so off putting for me. (I mean I'll still read them, it just takes me awhile to get to them.) Personally, I'd rather read fics with 20 chapters or less at 20k and up word counts on each chapter than a 40 chapter fic with 5k and down word counts. My worst fear when starting this fic was that it would surpass 50 chapters. Idk if other people are like that, and if you're the opposite I'm sooooo sorry!!! This is just my preference, trust me, I hate the long chapters too.

The songs in this chapter are Electric Love by BØRNS & Closer by Nine Inch Nails.

Smut warming: it's pretty crappy, sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Eren, Levi, and some other of their guard members remained in their own group as they wandered around in yet another unfamiliar school. Their excitement from Kutchel's graduation the day before had transferred to their current competition. The entire building was buzzing - just like every other time - but the energy never faded, no matter how accustomed they grew to this routine. The only thing that really changed was their level of anxiety. It decreased with every show, improving their experience.

The cafeteria in this particular school was hard to track down. This was one of the larger schools that they had competed at, so everyone was required to have Rico's phone number in case they got lost. Honestly though, what kind of school had three stories? Their small group descended their second flight of stairs in their search for the cafeteria and luckily stumbled upon another team looking for it, and followed them. As soon as they reached their destination, Marco and Sasha split off to the baked goods at the other side of cafeteria, leaving Levi, Eren, and Annie at the line to get
less sweet food.

Shortly, everyone sat down at their own table and began eating their food. Annie, Eren, and Levi came back with cups of fruit, salads, and rolls. While Marco returned with a half-moon cookie, and Sasha had bought several cupcakes and a large peanut butter cookie.

"So," Sasha said around a bite of pumpkin cupcake. "Do you both have any plans for Valentine's Day next month?" Her voice was laced with amusement as she nudged Eren's elbow. She couldn't help but ask; she was too happy for them.

Eren looked to Levi with his cheeks painted with red. Levi only grinned back at him. "Um," Eren began. "We haven't really talked about it yet. I don't know if Levi would want to do anything."

"Oh, I want to," Levi confirmed, smirking at him.

"You guys definitely should do something special," Marco added. "Will it be your first Valentine's Day together?"

The two nodded yes, and Marco and Sasha looked at each other excitedly, while Annie sat there, rolling her eyes at them. "You have to do something! Come on, it'll be romantic," Sasha whined.

Eren started to stammer something when Levi cut him off. "I'll think of something," he murmured, taking a bite of his salad and sending Eren a mischievous look. Eren stared at him, befuddled. What was he planning?

~

Back in their designated classroom, everyone got changed and put on their makeup for the show. Levi was assisting Eren with the red band on his eyes when he abruptly paused, setting down the brush. Eren raised a brow in question. "Am I done already?"

Levi shook his head and reached his hand under the collar of his uniform, pulling out his raven necklace dangling on its chain.

Eren bit back a smile. "You're gonna wear that during the show?"

"Well, I always wear it, so yes," Levi explained. "It's just that I know you wear your own little good luck charms during shows, so I wanted to show you mine." He slid it back under his uniform and picked up his brush. "Close your eyes."

Eren did so with a grin, feeling his heart beat faster. He felt lips pressed against his own, but only for a second. Opening his eyes in confusion, he stared at a devious Levi who was waiting for something. "I said close your eyes," he reminded him.

Eren gawked at him, mouth falling open. "But you just—"

"Eren, we're on a schedule. Close your eyes so we can get this done." Levi smirked through his words.

Eren huffed and did as he was told, letting his eyelids fall shut and his shoulders slump. Levi delightedly went back to finishing his makeup, hurrying along, then went to cover it with a setting
powder. After the finishing touches, Levi removed the border tape and checked to see if everything was even. Satisfied with his work, he threw out the tape and settled back in front of Eren. "Alright, your war paint is done," he announced.

"Awesome," Eren chimed. He stood up to go retrieve his back pack and dig out the key necklace his mother had given him. He threw it on and tucked it into his uniform, almost ready to perform. Now all he needed was to spray the tips of his hair with red. Finding one of the cans on a random desk, he took it and turned to the closest person to him, wearing a red uniform. "Izzy," he called out. "I'll do your hair if you do mine," he offered.

"Oo, okay!" She agreed, taking the can and letting Eren sit in the chair in front of her. "Just the tips, right?"

"Yup," Eren answered. He sat still and let Isabel spray his hair, taking her time, so she wouldn't get it on his skin or his uniform. While he sat, he looked around for Levi and found him spraying Annie's hair in the corner.

He watched as Levi did his work skillfully, remaining on one side, because Annie was on her phone. Eren knew eavesdropping was wrong, but he couldn't help it, so he tuned in and listened to whatever he could catch from Annie's conversation. He couldn't make out every word, but she seemed to be distressed. The noise filling the room made it difficult for him to catch much. Her usually stoic face was slightly contorted into one of worry with her eyebrows woven together and her eyes in a straight stare. "But you promised." Eren was able to read her lips this time, and though he was ignorant to the topic at hand, he felt sympathy for her.

Eren watched as she said what he assumed were her goodbyes and ended the call, setting her phone on her lap dejectedly. Levi had heard the whole conversation and put a pause in his work, setting the hair color on a nearby desk. He knelt down to her level and appeared to ask her to elaborate on the subject, to which she complied. Eren felt more invested than before, wondering what the issue was. At this point, Bertolt, Marco, and Nanaba had also taken notice of Annie's state and came over to investigate. After a brief explanation, the three saddened and brought her into a comforting embrace.

This action caught the attention of the majority of the team. Even Isabel quit spraying Eren's hair. "What's wrong, Annie?" Isabel asked.

Annie sent a glance up at Bertolt, silently granting him permission to speak for her. Bertolt angled his head towards the team. "Her dad isn't coming," he murmured. "His job got in the way."

Everyone sent Annie a look of compassion. Without needing to discuss their actions, the whole team instinctively migrated over to Annie and surrounded her, putting her in the middle of a group hug. Eren didn't even realize that this was the first time he'd gone with the group without having to be told to or without seeing them do it first. Maybe it was because he felt empathy, occasionally wishing that his father would come to one of their shows. Any of their shows. Or maybe it was because he thought it was the nice thing to do, so he acted on it. Whatever it was, he joined everyone in comforting Annie.

"Guys, I'm fine. Really." Annie halfheartedly tried shooing them away, but no one budged.

"We're your family too, Annie," Nanaba reminded her. "And we get to be in the show with you."

"Your dad can come other times too," Farlan added. "This isn't our last show."

"We're here for you!" Sasha said.
Eren was uncertain if he should give her his own words to aid her. Everyone else was doing it, but he didn't know if his words would be helpful coming from him. He forced himself to spit out what he had to say, thinking that it couldn't make things worse. "If it makes you feel any better, my dad never comes to our shows. By choice too. At least your dad wanted to come; that counts for something, right?" Of course, work played a role in why Eren's father couldn't attend as well, but even when he was free he never came.

Annie allowed herself to show the tiniest of smiles, hoping that no one would see it. "Get off of me, you saps," she barked, but lacked any real bite to her tone.

The crowd dispersed, aware that she had felt better, even if it was only a little bit. "Alright, Levi," Annie huffed out. "You can finish spraying my hair."

Everyone went back to their earlier stage in prep, still feeling sympathetic for Annie, but not about to forget that there was a show to give. Annie pushed through, pushing her dad's absence to the back of her mind and focusing on the performance. She would never admit that the moment they had all shared had actually helped her. They were right, her dad wasn't her only family, he would be at other shows, and it wasn't like he didn't want to come. After Levi finished coloring her hair, she tied it up, her mind now where it should be for their competition.

As she put the last bobby pin in place and fished setting in the hair spray, Bertolt came over for one last reassuring hug. The rest of the guard paid attention to them, curious if Annie started feeling bad again. Bertolt gave her one last affirmation before he knelt down to her height and planted a quick kiss on her forehead.

And that's when the guard erupted.

All sorts of whistles and exclamations came from every direction and the couple had their own sheepish reactions. Bertolt smiled shyly as his cheeks heated up, while Annie averted her gaze from everyone and tilted her head down to cover her blush. Bertolt set his arm around Annie's shoulder, unashamed, while Annie's lips started to quirk up.

"Two couples in one week, oh my gosh!" Hanji hollered, beginning a round of applause for them.

"You guys are so cute together!" Christa remarked.

"Why didn't you tell us you two were dating?" Farlan asked.

Bertolt and Annie looked at each other and shrugged. "Never came up, I guess," Annie filled in. The answer was curt, but enough to satisfy the team. Even so, they never stopped their clapping and congratulations.

Rico walked into the threshold of jarring noise and silenced the whole room. "What did I miss?"

"Annie and Bertolt are dating!" Christa chirped.

Rick looked at the two with a bored expression. "I see. Well, do whatever it is young couples do these days, but make it snappy. We have to get down to the auditorium to practice in twenty minutes."

~
The announcer's voice sounded, introducing the team as they entered the gymnasium. It was truly a feeling that Eren would never tire of. While still keeping on track and doing what was needed, Eren scanned the crowd and found his mother sitting next to Armin, Mikasa, and even Levi's mother, who was preparing her camera. Beside Kutchel sat Levi's old friends. This came as a surprise to him as they hadn't shown up to the shows before. Regardless, he was glad so many people could make it.

Everyone took their spots after setting their equipment in their designated areas and got into position. A few seconds passed before they heard the call that confirmed their preparedness. "The judges are ready. Trost high, is your guard ready?"

Hanji took their spot in the center and pounded their flags. The announcer accepted the signal and let them begin. "Trost High Winter Guard, you may take the floor in competition."

The music faded in, calling them all to attention and marking the beginning of their routine. Everyone moved out from behind the set pieces and executed their routine just like every other time. The crowd was as excited as ever, cheering on the team and applauding for them. This was a rush that Eren never wanted to pass or let go of. The energy from every guard member and every individual in the audience added on the high and kept him going. It was a unique feeling. The feeling of all their hard work being recognized and celebrated while he was having the time of his life participating in the sport that he had grown to love over these past five months. And knowing that his favorite people in the world were sharing this moment with him - either on his team or in the crowd - it made the whole experience that much more special.

Eventually they reached the portion of the song when they were all on the ground, letting the soloists do their work. Eren crawled at a snail's pace up to get his equipment, vaguely noticing Hanji coming out of his peripheral vision. Hanji paused, setting down their ghost flags to pick up the flags with the flame pattern and let Sasha do her solo. Eren listened as he crept forward, not able to look back and nearly reached his flag. His breath stuttered when he heard a loud clammer.

He couldn't react, as it would ruin the audiences perception and throw off the timing. He worried about what had caused the noise, so he strained his ears, listening for anything else. All he heard was their song continuing and the sound of Sasha's gloved hands grasping the rifle, but more hurried, and unsure.

Eren grabbed his flag and stood, going on with the routine as if nothing had happened, as he was supposed to. He hadn't faltered, but that bang from before invaded his train of thought.

They finished their show, greeted with roars from the audience, pulsing towards them in waves of booming sound. The announcer repeated their title, and as quickly as they set up the stage, they took everything down and exited the gym.

~

Back up in their room, certain members changed out of their uniforms. Eren decided to change into his team shirt and jacket instead of staying in his uniform, but he didn't remove the makeup, just like everyone else hadn't. It was decided that Hanji, Petra, and Bertolt would be going out for the retreat and accepting the award, but a few others also decided to stay in their uniforms.

After Eren and Levi had changed out, they invited Farlan and Sasha to come watch the other shows
with them. Farlan appeared to be over enthusiastic, however Sasha only muttered her acceptance to the invitation.

Down in the gym, the four sat a few rows in front of Levi and Eren's family and friends, given that there wasn't enough room to sit by them.

"Oh, I know this team," Levi commented.

Eren looked out at the team currently in the floor. Their song was more of a compilation and their uniforms were all blue dresses with a few mismatched uniforms. Their floor looked like a distorted checkerboard and their flags were all different from each other's.

"This school always tells a story through their show, but stories that already exist. Last year it was Little Red Riding Hood. I guess they're aiming for Alice in Wonderland this year."

Eren nodded and observed their unique performance, but his mind was distracted as he heard a heavy, yet shaky sigh come from his left.

Beside Eren, Sasha shook in her seat and looked like she was about to be sick. "Sasha?" Eren called her attention. "Is everything alright?"

Sasha shook her head. "Didn't you hear me drop?"

"Oh, that's what that was?" It finally clicked in Eren's head.

"It was so embarrassing!" Sasha complained. "During my own solo too! I knew we should've given Christa the solo; she wouldn't have dropped. We're probably not going to get a good score now, and it's all my fault." Sasha stared down at her feet and twiddled her thumbs in her mortification.

Eren tried to comfort her. "It's okay, Sasha. People drop sometimes." He patted her shoulder, uncertain of how else to console her.

"Yeah, but this is during our show! We're supposed to do our best and I couldn't even catch."

Eren didn't know what to do. He wish he knew what he could do to help. "Don't worry, it's not the end of the world—"

"What's going on?" Levi cut in, having overheard their conversation. Farlan had also leaned over to investigate.

"We're not gonna win because I dropped," Sasha said.

Levi sighed, unhappy that she was upset and felt guilty. "Sasha, everyone drops. Just ask Eren; he drops more than anyone else on the team. I mean, we can't go an entire practice without him dropping at least once."

"Thanks Levi," Eren said sarcastically.

"Any time, babe," Levi replied. "Anyways, we all drop. Even Hanji and I drop and we've been in color guard longer than anyone else on the team. You can't go to a competition without seeing someone mess up somehow. Dropping doesn't mean you're not good at color guard. Also we'd rather you drop than catch it wrong and break your wrist."

"Okay," Eren interjected. "Somehow that last part doesn't sound believable coming from you."

Levi glared pointedly at Eren. "You're not helping." He switched his stare back to Sasha, who was
looking a bit more hopeful. "As far as winning goes, that little accident isn't going to make a big
difference in where we place. You carried on, you kept going with the routine, you blended in with
the team, and hopefully you sold the performance. Plus winning isn't everything. Did you have
fun?"

"Yes," Sasha murmured.

"Did you work hard and do your best?"

"Yeah." Another quiet reply.

"Then that's what matters," Levi determined. "It's not like you dropped on purpose. Everything's
okay, Sasha. There's no need to worry about it. You did really well."

Sasha's sour face turned into a more bashful expression. "Thank you, Levi."

Levi gave a brief nod and sat back in his seat. Eren knew he should've been more concerned with
Sasha at that moment, but he couldn't help but think of how lucky he was to have such a sweet,
caring boyfriend.

~

After a few teams performed, Eren and Levi broke off to the cafeteria to get themselves some more
food. They took their seats and allowed themselves this moment to relax. Finished with the
competition and away from their excited teammates, Eren decided that engaging in idle
conversation wouldn't hurt. "Sasha and Marco got me thinking."

Levi quirked his pierced brow at him. "Yeah? About what?"

"Valentine's day," Eren elaborated, as if it was obvious. "We should do something. What do you
want to do?"

Levi shrugged and jabbed a bit of his food with his fork. "Whatever you want to do," he mumbled.

Eren frowned impatiently. "I need a better answer than that," he scoffed. "Come on, we could do
something really fun. We could go out to dinner, even if it's not someplace fancy. We could..."

Eren bit his lip in thought. "Um, we could stay at your place and watch movies all day. There are
lots of things we can do."

"Whatever you choose is fine with me," Levi said. "I just want you to be happy on Valentine's Day.
Well, I want you to be happy all the time, but you know what I mean."

Eren rolled his eyes, taking a drink of his water. "Well, I want to do something that you want to do
too. I want you to be happy as well."

The gears in Levi's head started turning. "Okay, I've got an idea," he mused. "Let's just surprise
each other. You figure out something that you want to do, I'll do the same, and that'll be that."

Eren leaned his elbows on the table, thinking over Levi's proposition. "What if we have the same
idea? Or what if we have conflicting plans?"

"What do you mean?"
"Well, if we both have the idea to go out to dinner. Or if we plan different things that would need to be at the same time."

Levi nodded, seeing his point. "Okay, how about this. We can't go out anywhere - unless you want to - in which case, we'd plan that together. But our surprises can only be things we can give or do for the other person."

That didn't sound too bad to Eren. There were plenty of things he could think of that he could give to Levi. "Alright, let's do that," he agreed.

"Then it's settled."

They went back to eating in silence and simply enjoying each other's company. It was nice to have a few moments to relax and regather their strength while away from all the energy over the competition.

It was never meant to last for long.

Their peace was interrupted by a timid hand tapping Levi's shoulder, causing both to turn around to find its source. They found that the hand belonged to a girl who looked like she was about to faint from anxiety. "May I help you?" Levi asked.

"Yeah, um..." The girl stammered. She tossed a look over her shoulder to glance a table a ways back. She returned her gaze to Levi and Eren, though not fully, as she had difficulties making eye contact. "Are you... are you both from the Trost High guard?"

"Yeah, that's us." Eren answered. As the girl looked back again, Eren followed her line of vision to see a table full of girls watching and whispering through fits of giggles. Eren became weary of the girl.

"Well... my friends and I just wanted to tell you..." The poor girl couldn't get out a full sentence without her words faltering. Eren was more concerned as Levi seemed rather amused. "You guys did really good!" She squeaked, immediately turning on her heel and speed-walking away to the table she'd been watching, not giving them a moment to say their thanks.

Levi snickered as he turned back to eat his food. Eren quirked an eyebrow at him. "What do you think that was all about?"

Levi jabbed his thumb over his shoulder. "Her friends probably put her up to it. Happens all the time."

Eren furrowed his brows. "I don't get it."

"Like I've said before, if you're a guy and do something even remotely impressive during a show, you'll get attention like that. A lot of the time, a group will single out one person to send a message to a guard member while the rest watch. Even guards do it to other guards. I would know, Christa, Mike, and I were the ones to send Petra to tell a guy we thought he was cute back in cadets in middle school."

Eren chuckled at the image. "Did she actually do it?"

Levi huffed out an amused breath. "She chickened out. She told him we liked the show instead."

"I don't blame her," Eren giggled. "I wouldn't be able to do it; it'd be too embarrassing."
Levi smirked slightly. "Maybe one of these day, you'll be the one that has to do that. It could happen, you never know."

Eren sat back and fixed Levi with an unimpressed look, rolling his eyes and drawing a breathy laugh out of the older. "The only guard member I'd ever go up to and say something like that to would be you."

Levi's smirk broadened into a genuine smile. The way Eren said it sincerely and not in a tone that would purposely reassure Levi made his heart beat a little faster, though he'd never admit it. "We should get going," he murmured, trying to take the attention off of him. "I want to get a good spot to watch the retreat and see how we placed."

~

Just as promised, Eren was the one to take the award home. Levi remembered that he didn't hear a single complaint about how sore Eren was on Saturday's practice and everyone thought he'd suffered enough embarrassment that day to be worthy of escorting the award home. Second place was a nice title to be able to carry back.

Eren held the plaque with a little more care than necessary as he picked out a few songs for Farlan to play on his speakers. He sat back with Levi and listened to the calming, unfamiliar song. After the song had been playing for a considerable duration, he decided that he very much enjoyed it. As he involuntarily swayed to the rhythm, Levi noticed just how much he liked the music and nudged his elbow, extracting him from his trance. Levi lifted a pierced brow at him. "You like Børns?"

Eren cocked his head. "Is that the band playing?"

"Yeah."

"Then I guess so," Eren answered with a shrug. "This is the first song I've heard of them, but I like it."

Levi nodded understandingly. He tucked away that bit of information for later and changed the subject. "So... do you think Annie and Bertolt are doing anything for Valentine's Day?"

Eren hummed for a moment, then began scanning the people around him. "I'll just ask them," Eren said, spotting the two sitting diagonally from him towards the back. "Hey, Bert, Annie," he called. "Do you two have plans for Valentine's Day?"

Since Bertolt was the one sitting on the outside of the seat, he was the one to answer. "Yes, we're going to Reiner's house."

Eren knitted his brows together in confusion. "You're not going on a date?"

At this point, Annie had become more invested in the conversation and answered for her boyfriend. "We decided to just hang out," she said curtly.

Eren nodded. "Oh, good idea." He could tell that she wanted to get off the subject and he respected that. Instead of pushing his luck, he turned around to talk with Levi again. "They're going to Reiner's house."
Levi thought it was an odd plan, but didn't voice this opinion. "I hope they have a good time."

Eren agreed and went back to listening to the song that was playing. Levi watched the way his eyes lit up as the music progressed and then how his face fell when the song came to a close. A brilliant idea sprang to Levi's mind.

~

Levi wiped down the tables, desperate to go on his break. He still had a few minutes left until he was released from his duty, but it felt like centuries away. The only plus side of his current situation was that it was the last day he had to work that week, then he'd be free. He picked up the last of the dishes and headed off to get them to the back.

"Hey, Levi," a slimy voice wormed its way into his ears, making his skin crawl. "Need any help with those dishes?"

"Fuck off, Lynne," Levi grumbled, setting the dishes where they needed to be, then speeding past her to busy himself with cleaning another table.

"Why so cold?" Lynne followed Levi and loomed over his shoulder as he worked. "I was only offering a helping hand."

"Don't you have work to be doing?" Levi spat.

Lynne scoffed. "Please, the place is dead. There are only two tables being occupied and they're covered." She maneuvered over to sit at the booth that Levi was washing. "Any plans for Sunday?"

Sunday. That was Valentine's Day. Levi's anger kept building up the longer she stayed. He knew it would be best to ignore her, but he couldn't bring himself to do that. "It's none of your concern." He cleared off the dishes and walked away, painfully aware that she was trailing behind him.

"Because if you're not busy, I'm free," Lynne sang.

Levi glared at her, abandoning the dishes. "What does that have to do with anything?"

Lynne sent him a sultry look that made him want to vomit. "I'm trying to say that if you're lonely, you know where I'll be."

Levi grimaced. "I have a boyfriend. And you disgust me." He pushed past her, cringing at the click of her heels on the tiled floors.

"Come on Levi, even you have to admit that the same person for too long gets a little boring. Change it up a bit," Lynne suggested. "He'll never have to know—"

"Shut the fuck up!" Levi thundered, grateful that the customers were too occupied to pay him any mind. He couldn't listen to such things; it nearly broke his heart to even think about it. "I'll never do that to him. I love him and I'm not you."

Lynne clicked her tongue. "Still upset about that, are you? Are you still under the impression that our breakup was my fault?"

"It was your fault," Levi argued.
Lynne shook her head, snickering at how agitated Levi had become. "No, I don't think it was. You were the one to end it. You said we were done. No one could blame me for what I did. There are no rules in an abusive relationship."

Levi paused. For the first time in ages, he looked her on the eyes. "Abusive?" he hissed. "I hope you're talking about yourself."

"Well, I'm not," Lynne said, crossing her arms. "You ignored me. You treated me like I was disappointing. You never showed me any affection. You're the least caring person I know. I couldn't take it anymore."

Levi cut off his eye contact. He wished that he could block out everything she said. He'd made so much progress, getting himself to believe the opposite of what she had told him, only to have her guilt trip him whenever she had the chance. On the surface, he knew it was all lies, but deep down, he'd always blamed himself. He had no want to have her in his life anymore, he wanted to be as far from her as possible. But that didn't help that he felt sick to his stomach for supposedly pushing someone to the point of cheating. "Shut up," he murmured. "It wasn't me." His words were more to himself than her, though she didn't realize it. "You cheated, I didn't—"

"Didn't treat me the way you should have," Lynne filled in for him.

"No." Levi shook his head slightly, pinching the bridge of his nose. Lynne knew that she was breaking him down.

Lynne was about to open her mouth to bother him further, but her and Levi's attention was grabbed as someone walked through the door. Levi turned to find Eren standing, waiting for someone to see him to his table. Levi's troubles had instantly faded as he caught sight of Eren and he went over to greet him, leaving Lynne behind.

As Eren saw Levi moving towards him, he straightened up and wore a blinding smile. "Hi Levi!" He waved as Levi approached.

"Eren," Levi breathed. Eren was a sight for sore eyes. As soon as he was near him, Levi framed Eren's face with his hands and brought him down into a kiss that was a little long to be a simple welcoming kiss. When they parted, Levi marveled at Eren's blush, his elated smile and of course his bright, joy-filled eyes. "What are you doing here?" Levi's grin mimicked Eren's.

Eren chortled before answering. "Calm down, you're acting like you haven't seen me in weeks." Levi's hands dropped to Eren's as he realized how dramatic he was acting. "Since we haven't been having our practices at your house, I thought I could come visit you at work."

Eren's pulse raced. He felt like the luckiest person alive to have a sweet and considerate boyfriend like Eren. His words also made him feel guilty. While working on Eren's Valentine's Day present, he had to cancel their lessons so he would have time to perfect it. "I'm sorry I haven't been spending as much time with you," Levi said. "I really am, but I'll make up for it, I promise."

"It's alright, Levi. I'm not mad." Eren beamed. "I'll let you get back to work. Are you busy?"

Levi tried to remember what exactly was going on before Eren had walked it. He made his mind go in all different directions in the best kind of way, it took him a moment to regather his thoughts. "Um, I actually think it's my break."

"Oh, then I'll let you take your break and relax."
Levi snorted. "Fuck that, I'm sitting with you."

~

Levi sat across from Eren at a booth, leaning on one elbow with his face in his hand and listening to Eren talk about his day. He could hold his attention no matter what he was rambling on about.

"And Mikasa always gives Armin and me and all her other friends boxes of chocolate for Valentine's Day, because we all used to be single. I don't know how that will work out now, but she came home today with boxes of chocolate - and I know it's a bit greedy - but I still kind of hope one is for me," Eren admitted, messing with Levi's free hand from across the table.

"Well, regardless of what she does, I'll make sure you get plenty of chocolate. Okay, mon grand?" Levi asked, running his thumb along Eren's knuckles.

"You're too sweet," Eren gushed.

One of Levi's coworkers came over and delivered their drinks, taking Eren's order and excused himself. They continued with idle chatter and Levi tried not to groan when he saw Lynne walking up from behind Eren. But he couldn't help the sour look that rested on his face as she came up to him, setting a hand on his shoulder and making Eren glare as well.

"Hanging out with your little friend again?" Lynne hummed.

Levi was finished, Eren was with him and he didn't need her staying around. "I'm not above hitting you," he said.

Lynne rolled her eyes, but the other two didn't miss how she immediately removed her hand. "I'm just trying to make friendly conversation. What's the matter, Levi? Why are you being such a grump?"

"You can't give it a rest for one fucking day, can you?" Levi hissed. "You don't have the decency to leave me be while my boyfriend is here?"

"Oh, relax," Lynne sighed, attempting to set her hand back on Levi's shoulder.

"Don't fucking touch him," Eren bit out, surprising the other two. Lynne drew her hand back upon hearing his sharp command. "Go away." Eren scowled at her, prepared to do whatever it took to get her to move along.

"Lynne!" A rough voice came from the other side of the diner. The three of them turned. Levi's boss stood, watching her. "Mina is going on break, you need to stand at the door to greet until she gets off break."

Lynne really couldn't refuse to follow the order, so she reluctantly shuffled away, sending Eren a calculating look. Eren kept eye contact, making sure his unspoken threat was clear.

Levi shook his hand gently. "I'm sorry about her," he muttered embarrassedly. "I wish she was just gone and I'm sorry we have to deal with her."

"It's okay," Eren said, finally looking back to Levi. "Don't apologize; there's nothing we can do.
about her." Eren felt the rage - the pure jealousy bubbling up - from seeing her hand fall on Levi. Everything he'd ever been told about her from Levi and Hanji swam in his thoughts, clouding his logical thinking. His reasoning withered as he thought about how badly she had hurt his Levi and how she tried reclaiming him. Eren had to take Levi back and make it clear that he belonged to Levi and that Levi belonged to him. He stood from his seat and went past the booth, confusing Levi. He slid into Levi's side of the booth and sat himself on Levi's lap, wrapping his arms around his neck. Planting a quick kiss on his boyfriend's temple, he made himself comfortable. "Let's just enjoy our time before you get off break."

Levi kept his hands settled on Eren's waist, not entirely sure where the sudden gesture had come from, though he wasn't about to protest. "What are you up to?"

"Nothing." Eren shrugged, batting his eyelashes. "Is it okay if I sit here?"

"Y-yeah, that's more than okay," Levi answered, not wanting Eren to leave. "You stay here as long as you want." Levi rested one hand on Eren's thigh and the other on his side, keeping him secure. He was almost scared to let Eren go with his old insecurities resurfacing.

Eren began playing with Levi's hair, vaguely glancing behind Levi's head to see that Lynne was watching bitterly. "You've probably had such a long day, haven't you?"

Levi had no clue why Eren was suddenly so touchy and close, but he'd be lying if he said he didn't enjoy it. "Um, yeah. It's always like that when I'm working."

"Aw, I'm sorry about that," he cooed, scratching Levi's undercut. "You work so hard everyday, and you have to put up with so much. It's not fair. You deserve a little reward." Eren leaned in and captured Levi's lips in a slow kiss, tugging on his lip ring. Levi was once again caught off guard, but returned the kiss happily nonetheless.

When Eren parted, he looked at Lynne, catching her pressing her lips in a thin line and quickly averting her eyes before Eren could see her looking. Eren brought his gaze back to Levi before he noticed he ever looked away. Eren just smiled lovingly down at him and pecked his nose. "I love you, Levi," he said a little louder than he had been speaking before. "You're so perfect, perfect in every way. I'm so lucky to have you as a boyfriend and I'll take care of you, and make you happy, and always try to make you feel like a king. And I'll always treat you right." His last words were aimed more at Lynne than anyone else. He wanted her to hear how badly she had messed up by not cherishing Levi when she had him.

"Eren," Levi said through a chuckle. "Where is all this coming from? Why are you being so affectionate all of a sudden? Not that I mind it."

Eren shrugged. "Do I need a reason to tell the most perfect man in the world why I love him?" Even he had to admit that he was overdoing it. But if he made his message clear to Lynne and especially if he was making Levi smile this much, he didn't have a problem with being a bit over the top. He started trailing kisses from Levi's lips down to his jaw line. As his mouth kept moving, he looked back at Lynne to find her fuming in place. He had won.

"You're too good to me," Levi whispered.
The two were practically inseparable that night, calling each other by words of endearment and staying physically close. After Levi's break was over, he continued to check on Eren, using the restaurant's emptiness as an excuse to linger. When Levi's shift was over, he paid for Eren's food, ignoring his complaints and linked his arm around Eren's as they stood to walk out.

As they were about to step out the door, Lynne grabbed a firm hold on Levi's free arm, yanking him to a halt. Levi glared at her and tried escaping from her grip. "Levi," she said sharply.

"Let go," he gritted out.

"No, I have to talk to you about something," she insisted. "I'm serious this time."

Levi sighed in frustration and looked to Eren. Eren seemed weary but let Levi go, regardless. Levi begrudgingly left Eren's side to listen to whatever Lynne had to say. He wasn't enthusiastic, nor did he actually want to hear what she had to say, but he figured he should give her a chance. Perhaps it was an apology.

Levi stepped away, crossing his arms once he and Lynne had their own space. "Make it quick."

Lynne stood up straight and held the most professional composure Levi had seen her wear since she had started working there. "I realize that I haven't been... nice to you since our breakup. And... I may have some of the blame," Levi's glare only intensified as she spoke. "But I was hoping that we could overlook everything and you can consider coming back to me."

Levi's mouth dropped. He was disgusted by the mere suggestion and he was about to unleash his suppressed anger through shouts and hollers, but Lynne cut him off by holding up her hand.

"I know, you're mad at me. And I understand." She put her hands behind her back, biting her lip. "We could work something out. If you're willing to leave Eren, I'd gladly take you back, I won't try anything again. Or, I'd be fine if you saw both Eren and me—"

"Shut up," Levi interrupted. "Just stop talking." He was practically fuming. He couldn't believe her nerve. "What you did to me was unforgivable. And I spent all this time under the impression that it was half my fault, and convincing myself that it wasn't has been extremely difficult. Especially when you keep bringing it up every fucking day. You really hurt me, and since we broke up you've done nothing to make up for it, or - at the very least - put everything to rest. No, you have to drag on my torture at the place I work. I can't fucking stand you and you have the nerve to ask me to come back? After I have someone who can treat me halfway decent?" Levi felt some kind of satisfaction seeing her confidence finally wane after all this time. "Eren is someone you'll never be and you've never been. To me, he's perfect. Even if I wasn't with anyone, I'll never take you back. I thought I've made it clear plenty of times that I think you're a piece of shit."

Lynne's nervousness turned into defensiveness. "Come on, Levi. What can he offer you that I can't?"

Levi looked her in the eyes with a calm expression. "Faithfulness would be one thing," he listed, immediately tearing her down. "He can offer me love; real love and not just time spent together because it's convenient for him. He can offer comfort in knowing that he genuinely cares about me and appreciates me. Unlike you, he doesn't need to find someone else to have a good time in the bedroom. And considering that, he can offer me a lot more there, than you ever could." Levi took Lynne's mortified face as his cue to leave.
Levi strutted back over to Eren, linking their arms and led him out the door. Eren took his chance to send an over-exaggerated smile over his shoulder to Lynne and wave at her. She stood there, suddenly regretting every decision she'd ever made.

~

Eren collected his gifts for Levi before he left his car. Picking out everything was a challenge, but he was happy with everything he'd accumulated.

He picked up his bouquet, Petra's words ringing in his head. He had asked her for advice on what flowers to give Levi and she happily replied with 'My time has come!' She took him to a florist the day before so the flowers would remain beautiful and have minimal dead petals. Petra and Eren ended up with a bouquet of black roses (one that Levi would appreciate its aesthetics and that symbolized new beginnings as Petra had told Eren), red amaryllis, (meaning insurmountable beauty, Petra informed him), and white arbutuses. One that Eren had particularly been drawn to once Petra told him they meant 'You're the only one I love.' Eren didn't know if Levi knew all the meanings, but he didn't really mind as long as Levi liked them.

Inside the bag that Eren held were a few things. One being a card that Mikasa had helped him make. Eren wasn't very crafty, so he snuck the new scrapbooking supplies that his mother had recently bought into his room and asked Mikasa to show him what everything was for. Of course, she was no expert either, but they figured it all out together and came up with a simple - but pretty - card.

Eren texted Hanji, asking them for help on what else to get for Levi. They informed him that Levi could never have enough clothes, and escorted him to a few stores to find something that Levi didn't already have. Eventually, the two landed on a shirt that had the cover of The Cure's album 'Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me.' It was something they both agreed that Levi would enjoy and it seemed fitting for Valentine's Day.

Eren even went as far as to ask Farlan and Isabel for ideas. They enthusiastically assisted him in making a mix CD of songs Eren liked that reminded him of Levi and songs that Levi enjoyed. He'd listened to it a few times, familiarizing himself with Levi's taste in music as well as think about Levi when his chosen songs were playing. He knew the idea was somewhat overdone, but he thought Levi would like it.

Lastly, Eren had picked out a couple of boxes of tea, knowing that Levi would appreciate them. Initially, he thought he would've had more to give, but he was lacking any other ideas. He wished he could've surprised Levi with more gifts, but the ones he already had prepared were enough to make Levi happy.

Eren hopped out of his car and trotted up to the door, kicking the snow off his shoes as he reached the front steps. He rang the doorbell and waited patiently for someone to open the door.

Soon enough, Farlan was the one to greet him, eating an apple as he opened the door. "Hey Eren!"
He beamed. "Did you come to make out with my brother?"

Eren nearly choked on air. "Wait, what—"

"I'm just messing with ya," Farlan snorted. "Come on in." He opened the door further and stood out
Eren's panic turned into amusement as he entered. He realized that everyone was now comfortable with them and had little to be surprised about anymore.

After coming in, he was welcomed by Buster first. Eren would've knelt down to pet him, but his hands were already full. "Hey there, Buster," Eren said. "Where's Levi?"

"He's in the practice room for some reason," Farlan explained. "I'll go get him."

Eren followed Farlan as far as the living room and took a spot on the couch, on the opposite side of Kutchel. She noticed his presence and happily greeted him. "Eren, you're finally here!" She beamed. "Oh my goodness, are those flowers for Levi?"

"Yeah," Eren admitted meekly.

"Well, they're beautiful. Levi will love them. Oh, what am I doing just sitting here?" Kutchel stood, flattening her skirt. "I'm going to get my camera; I need a few pictures."

She hurried into the hallway and into her room to find her camera, and soon her absence was filled when Levi entered the room. He swiftly traversed across the room over to Eren, landing on the couch beside him and not waisting a second to pull him into a kiss. Eren smiled against his lips, surprised by his enthusiasm, but was in no position to complain.

Eren pulled back to see Levi's captivating smile, as well as how out of breath he seemed. "Sorry I'm late," Levi breathed. "I was... putting the last finishing touches on one of your gifts."

"It's okay," Eren replied, holding out the bouquet. "Happy Valentine's Day."

Levi's eyes went to the flowers as he accepted them. "You're cheesy but it's cute," he mumbled. "Thank you so much. Where did you find black roses?"

Eren shrugged. "I had a little help."

"Was it Petra?"

"... It might've been," Eren admitted.

Levi snickered, quickly smelling the bouquet. His eyes lingered on them for a moment before his gaze met Eren's. "They're beautiful."

"I found my camera!" Kutchel announced as she reentered the room, interrupting their moment, though neither of them really minded.

~

Up in Levi's room, Levi accepted all of Eren gifts with a gracious smile and a warm kiss. "These are all so sweet," Levi murmured. "Thank you, mon grand." Levi took the initiative to change out of his current shirt and throw on the one Eren had given him. Eren didn't miss how the raven necklace he'd given him jingled as he changed. "It's a perfect fit too," Levi quipped.

"I'm glad you like everything," Eren responded happily.
"Love everything," Levi corrected. "And - knowing Petra - I'm going to have to look up the meanings later. Unless you already know." He challenged Eren with a smirk.

Eren felt his face heat up. "I do, but I think it would be better if you found out for yourself."

Levi shook his head. "Fine, fine. Alright, now it's time for your presents." Eren sat patiently while Levi stood to retrieve Eren's presents from his closet. As Levi rummaged around, he spoke without looking back. "Did Mikasa end up getting you chocolates?"

Eren chuckled before answering. "Yeah, it was only a tiny box though. Not that I'm ungrateful, but she got me a smaller one, because she assumed that you'd get me more."

Levi spun on his heel, returning to the bed with a large paper bag in hand, offering it to Eren. "Well, she assumed right."

Eren accepted the bag and started emptying it. He lifted a brow question at the three cardboard hearts setting on the blanket that he was seated on. "You got me three boxes of chocolate? What the fuck, Levi?" He chortled.

"You said you wanted chocolate, I gave you chocolate," Levi said with a shrug. "If you don't want them, I can return them—"

"No." Eren was quick to shut down his offer. "I'm not complaining, I just didn't expect you to give me three boxes." Eren opened the one closest to him and pulled out a single square, popping it in his mouth. He smiled around the chocolate. "Thank you, Levi."

Levi grimaced and playfully shoved Eren's arm. "Keep your mouth shut when you chew, and open the rest of your presents, you animal."

Eren giggled and went back to paw through the bag. Next, he pulled out a folded up sweatshirt and unraveled it to see the printing on the front. Eren breathed out a grin when his eyes landed on a hand holding a red, heart-shaped grenade and the words 'American Idiot' sitting above. He hadn't expected a piece of Green Day merchandise as a Valentine's Day gift, but he wasn't anywhere near disappointed.

"It has a heart on it," Levi pointed out, "so that counts as romantic, right?"

Eren chuckled. "Yes, very romantic." He leaned over and planted a soft peck on Levi's cheek.

Levi simpered while Eren's lips landed on his face. "Now, I'm sorry I didn't get you much," he began. "I was busy working on your last surprise. That's also why I cancelled our private lessons. I needed more time to put it all together."

"That's alright," Eren said. "So, what is this surprise?" He asked, narrowing his eyes at Levi.

"I'll show you."

~

Downstairs, Levi led Eren into the practice room, which appeared fairly empty. Eren was confused as to what it would be, as the only thing present was a saber and Levi told his family they couldn't
come in. Levi had left to collect a few items and came back with a fold out chair, a rifle, a silk-less flag pole, and another flag with an iridescent, light blue silk.

Eren stood to the side while watching Levi set down the chair opposite to the glass wall. Eren could just barely see the snow falling outside in the dark. His gaze went back to Levi setting down all the equipment where it needed to be. After everything was in place, Levi grabbed Eren's wrists and led him to the chair. "Sit here," he requested, turning to go back to the door.

"What are you up to?" Eren asked mischievously, knowing very well what Levi was doing.

"Shh!" Was Levi's only response as he reached for the light switch panel and shut everything off. A few seconds passed, and everything became visible again, but this time with dim, red lights.

Next, Levi slid to the ground and plugged in a CD player, setting in the disc of his choice and pressing play. As soon as the button was pushed in, Levi sprinted to the center of the room in front of Eren and in the middle of his equipment. Eren watched with a childlike excitement, not being able to bear the anticipation. He bit his lip and latched his hands together while he waited for the music to begin.

Soon enough, a steady beat started building up, signaling the beginning of Levi's routine. Levi grabbed his rifle as the guitar made its first appearance and the faint background singing came in. Eren would've said that the song was almost reminiscent of the seventies.

~ Candy, she's sweet like candy in my veins

~ Baby, I'm dying for another taste

Eren recognized the singer's voice as the one that he was introduced to weeks ago on the way home from a color guard show. Levi remembered. He stared, mesmerized by Levi's movements and the way the red light pronounced his form and the snow behind him.

~And every night my mind is running around her

~Thunder is getting louder and louder

The dimness of the room made Levi's rifle seem as if it was a blur as he spun it. This only added to Eren's appreciation for all the thought Levi put into this. The slap of Levi's hand against the rifle every time he caught it melted in with the music and everything about it was seamless.

~ Baby you're like lightening in a bottle

At that lyric, Levi's eyes made contact with Eren's, as if he was the one telling him that. Eren's lips broke into a smile as Levi smirked to himself.

~ I can't let you go now that I've got it

~ All I need is to be struck by your electric love

Levi released the rifle into a toss, putting an end to the slow and reserved rhythm he had built up, now moving more freely as he rotated before catching. Levi made use of the space around him and stopped limiting his range of movement.

Eren watched with pure adoration for his boyfriend. The amount of work and thought he'd put into this put butterflies in his stomach. Just knowing that Levi cared enough to come up with something like this made Eren absolutely giddy.
~Drowning, you make my heart beat like the rain

~Surround me, hold me deep beneath your weight

Levi switched out the rifle for his flag with the blue silk and balanced it on his collar bones before letting it fall into his hand. The red light caught the shimmer of the silk in an enchanting way, drawing in Eren's attention wherever it went. And the aluminum of the pole held the redness, keeping Eren's focus constantly moving.

~Baby, you're like lightning in a bottle
~I can't let you go now that I got it
~All I need is to be struck by your electric love

Levi tossed the flag horizontally, letting it spiral back down to him and taking a glance at Eren before keeping his gaze where it needed to be. It was actually an exercise in futility to keep from staring into Eren's glimmering orbs in this lighting while he regarded him with such eagerness and admiration.

~Rushing through me

~I feel your energy rushing through me

As the song faded, so did Levi's routine. Eren would've clapped or said something when the song ended abruptly, but Levi hadn't touched his saber or flag pole yet.

Just when Eren was about to speak up, and thrumming beat filled the silence at a much more leisurely pace than the last song. It seemed almost ominous as it seemed to go on forever and being paired with the red light, Eren couldn't help but hang on the edge of his seat.

~You let me violate you

The beginning lyrics caught Eren off guard, but easily held his attention.

~You let me desecrate you

Levi took his saber in hand and began working slowly to the rhythm, putting his focus temporarily on his equipment rather than Eren.

~You let me penetrate you

Levi held his arms above his head and allowed the saber to swing behind him freely for a brief moment.

~You let me complicate you

Eren sat back, trying to keep himself from getting worked up over Levi's routine. He fidgeted in his seat, eyes glued to Levi and his captivating movements.

The music broke down into a more steady beat and Levi inched his way forward before coming to a halt.

~(Help me) I broke apart my insides

~(Help me) I've got no soul to sell
Levi did consecutives with his saber, speed matching the new pace of the song. He went into double time, using both hands to spin his equipment. The chrome blade caught the red light and spun faster than any other piece, blurring in with everything and nearly hypnotizing Eren.

~(Help me) The only thing that works for me
~Help me get away from myself

Levi's trained hands skillfully sent the saber bounding in different directions without losing control. He used his unique method of gripping the blade backwards, which never ceased to amaze Eren.

~ I want to fuck you like an animal

The haze that was Levi's saber came to a stop as he sent it into lazy movements, holding eye contact with Eren and vaguely smirking, aware that every bit of Eren's focus was on him.

~ I want to feel you from the inside

Levi's body swayed along with the bass that pulsed through the room. He curved his saber around his neck, leaning his head down so the saber could fall to the other side, landing in his opposite hand.

~ I want to fuck you like an animal
~ My whole existence is flawed

Levi tossed his saber, catching it behind his back and letting his head fall back and his shoulders go nearly limp.

~ You get me closer to god

Another toss, this time Levi caught it after kneeling to the ground. He traded it for his flag pole while the music sped up again with a more electronic tone.

~You can have my isolation
~You can have the hate that it brings

Levi treated his pole like he normally would with a flag, rotating his wrist and spinning it around his body with ease.

~You can have my absence of faith
~You can have my everything

Eren sat on his hands and bit his lip. Levi knew exactly how he was affecting him and how entranced he was.

~(Help me) Tear down my reason
~(Help me) It's your sex I can smell

Levi shuffled forward a bit, decreasing his distance with Eren while he performed.

~(Help me) You make me perfect
~Help me become somebody else

The flag pole was tossed into the air and was caught flawlessly as it descended. Levi lessened their distance at a snail's pace, building on Eren's impatience.

~ I want to fuck you like an animal
~ I want to feel you from the inside

Levi took the end of the pole and pounded it on the ground in time with certain beats of the bass, seeming almost daunting. Eren bit his lip, letting his eyes rake up and down Levi's form shamelessly.

~ I want to fuck you like an animal
~ My whole existence is flawed
~ You get me closer to god

Levi's flag pole revolved around him as he circled Eren sitting in his chair. The corner of his lips quirked up as he noticed that Eren's lips were slightly parted. While he spun the aluminum in his left hand he allowed the other hand to trail on Eren's shoulders, eliciting a shiver from the brunet.

The music seemed to only build in intensity. Levi ignored Eren's outstretched hands as he came full circle and went back to his starting point. It appeared as though Levi barely came into contact with his equipment due to how fast he was handling it, mesmerizing Eren in the process.

A staticky voice sounded from under layers of instrumentals.

~Through every forest above the trees
~Within my stomach scraped off my knees
~I drink the honey inside your hive
~You are the reason I stay alive

Eren could just barely understand what was being said, but in all honesty - with Levi looking the way he did right in front of him - he couldn't care less. After having his fun with the flag pole, Levi let it rest on the floor and approached Eren as the sound deteriorated into faint notes.

Levi traversed the last bit of distance between them and settled himself on Eren's lap, laying his arms around Eren's neck. The song played its final portion and with anticipation at a record-breaking level and barely an inch separating their lips, Levi put an end to Eren's torture. "Happy Valentine's Day," he purred, sealing their lips in a slow, passionate kiss.

Pulling apart, Eren balanced his forehead against Levi, bearing a wild grin. "That was... amazing," he complimented. "You must've put so much work into that."

"Well, I wanted it to be perfect for you," Levi mused.

"And it was." Eren couldn't wipe off his smile if he tried. After a few silent moments, a rough chuckle erupted from his chest and slipped past his lips.

"What's so funny?" Levi asked, sitting back.
"Nothing," Eren chortled. "I just half expected you to start doing a makeshift pole dance."

Levi scoffed and rolled his eyes. Although, he had to admit, the thought was rather amusing, causing him to fight back a giggle. "You have a talent for ruining the moment," he remarked, making Eren laugh harder.

~

"Only eight o'clock," Levi pointed out as they reentered his room. "The night is still young."

Eren collapsed onto Levi's bed, staring at the ceiling. "I wish I could stay the night. Too bad there's school tomorrow."

Levi shared his disappointment. "There's no reason you can't stay. You walk to school, right?"

Eren nodded. "Well, I could drive you to your house tomorrow morning after you're done getting ready to pick up your school stuff. I could pick up your sister too. I mean, as long as your parents are fine with it."

Eren hummed and sat up to find his phone and text his sister to inform his parents of the plan. While he busied himself with that task, Levi picked up the mix CD Eren had given him. He scanned over the back, reading the list of songs in Eren's sloppy handwriting. He looked at the crooked letters with fondness, eager to listen to it in his spare time.

"My mom says it's okay," Eren called.

"Hm?" Levi set down the CD and faced Eren. "That's good." He sauntered over to the bed and sat at Eren's side, leaning back on the heels of his hands.

"So..." Eren drawled out, his tone laced with mischief. "That performance was really... provoking, you know?" He tossed Levi a hinting look.

Levi resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Of course, he knew exactly what Eren was getting at, but his little pretense had him wanting to tease him. "No, I don't know," he murmured. "Care to explain?"

Eren stared at him incredulously. The sarcasm wasn't getting through to him as easily as it should have. "Well... after watching that, I feel like there are some implied things that we can do."

"Like what?"

Eren widened his eyes in exasperation. Levi hid his amusement very well as Eren looked incredibly lost. Eren was getting too impatient to play games, so he tried to speed things up by scooting closer to Levi and putting his hand around his waist. "I was hoping that we could celebrate Valentine's Day in a more intimate way."

"Making dinner together?" Levi proposed.

Eren groaned and set his head in Levi's shoulder, unable to see his boyfriend's victorious smile. Eren felt the vibrations in Levi's chest as he accidentally let out a low chuckle. "Levi, you asshole!"

He sat back, glowering at him. "Come on, we're waisting time," he whined.

"Calm down," Levi chided through his laughter. "You're acting like we're on a schedule. We have
all night, so don't lose your head over a few seconds, you little shit."

Eren puffed out his cheeks in slight agitation and continued to scowl at Levi.

"Don't give me that look," Levi reprimanded him, pinching his nose. "Let's take this nice and slow. Tell me what you want out of tonight, mon grand," he purred, scratching underneath Eren's chin and sitting back to be fully seated on the bed.

Eren's irritation dissipated as Levi spoke. "I think we've already made it obvious that I want—"

"No, no," Levi interrupted. "I mean specifics. Let's try to squeeze in everything that we both like. So, just tell me what you want. It can be something we've never tried that you're interested in experimenting with, or it can be something you already know you like." Levi set a firm hand on Eren's thigh, inviting him to open up.

Eren's cheeks reddened quickly from the contact on his leg mixed with Levi's sultry voice. "You know some of the things I like. Right?"

"Yes, but I'm sure there are things I haven't picked up on, or things that we haven't tried that you're interested in." Levi leaned in to start nibbling at Eren's ear lobe to make him more comfortable with talking about the subject. His tactic worked as Eren melted into his embrace, releasing a pleased hum.

"Mm, I can't really think of anything right now." Granted, it may have been because his thoughts were hazed by Levi, but it was a valid excuse nonetheless.

Levi grinned against his heated skin. "Do you need some help coming up with something?" he inquired.

"A little motivation couldn't hurt," Eren replied.

Levi blew out an amused breath. "Well," he began, rubbing the inner part of Eren's thigh. "For example, I really like it when you kiss and bite at my neck. I like it when you scratch my scalp. And I know this isn't particularly out there, but I enjoy kissing you and feeling your tongue." Levi loved how Eren started to squirm bit by bit the more he talked. "What about you?"

Eren felt more capable of thinking of things that Levi did that drove him wild. "Uh, like, when you tease my ears? I like that a lot," he admitted hesitantly. "And... when there's pressure at the back of my neck at the base. I like that too. You know I love it when you speak French. Then there's..." Eren trailed off, wondering if he felt comfortable telling Levi about the last thing he could think of.

Levi raised his pierced brow. "Hm? Then there's what, babe?" He gave Eren's leg a quick, soft squeeze, urging him on.

"Um," Eren mumbled. "When you... when you pull my hair." His words fumbled out with uncertainty. "But... not gently. I like it when you pull hard." His face was on fire. Coming clean about this was a bit difficult for him; he didn't think that it was entirely normal to enjoy pain in that sense.

This turn on of Eren's wasn't news to Levi. He was able to pick up on this fact during their many times together, but seeing Eren get so flustered over it made him determined to put this knowledge to good use. "I'll make sure to do plenty of that," Levi assured him, kissing his temple. He didn't want his Eren to be embarrassed of what he liked. "Is there anything new you want to try?"

Eren pondered it over for a moment. He didn't spend much time thinking about things he wished he
could do with Levi, rather than things they'd already done. He stiffened as an idea sprung to his mind. He was about to toss it aside, but Levi had already caught his change in demeanor.

"Eren? Did you think of something?" Levi asked.

Eren chuckled uncomfortably. "Yeah, but you probably don't want to give it a shot. It's not something I'd think you'd want."

Levi studied his expression. "What is it?"

"J-just forget it," Eren stuttered. "I can think of something else."

"Eren," Levi said more firmly, taking Eren's chin in his hand and angling his head so they could face each other. "Don't be nervous. You can tell me."

Eren trusted Levi, but that didn't mean that it was easy to share his desires that were a little... unconventional. "I don't know how to explain it without sounding disrespectful."

Levi became more curious. If anything, he was dying to know what had his boyfriend so anxious to say and so worried that he might offend him. "Try your best," Levi advised.

Eren took a deep breath, prepared to make his confession. "You know how I was the one to top on your birthday?" Levi nodded. "I'd like to do that again, but a bit differently if that's okay?"

"Different how?" Levi questioned.

Eren avoided his gaze as he attempted to explain what he was envisioning. "Uh, like, more intense? I'm not sure how to say it. I know you say that being on the bottom doesn't mean that who's on top is less submissive, but I was hoping I could be more... on top in a mental way? I know, I'm not making any sense," he trailed off, shrinking into himself.

Everything clicked for Levi, and though Eren had trouble finding the words, Levi knew exactly what he meant. So, he filled in the blanks. "You want to dominate me?"

Eren eyes went wide and all he wanted was to crawl in a hole. "Th-that's one way to put it, I guess."

Levi broke into a cheshire grin. "That's nothing I'm opposed to trying out."

Eren perked up. "It's not?"

"Nope," Levi responded through a smirk. "Besides, that's nowhere's near as awkward as what I'd want."

Eren's brows furrowed. "What would you want?"

What Levi wanted was something he'd been fantasizing about for quite some time. It was something he'd always been interested in trying, but it had the potential to lead to minor humiliation on Eren's part, so he was reluctant to suggest it. "I don't know if you'd like it. It might make you really uncomfortable. I wouldn't blame you if you were completely against it."

"Well, tell me and you'll find out." Eren took Levi's free hand in his, offering him enough support to share what was on his mind without fear of judgment.

"Okay," Levi relented, exhaling deeply. "I just don't want you to feel pressured or freaked out—"

"Out with it already!" Eren snapped with a playful tone.
Levi glared at Eren, though he lacked any bite. "Fine," he gritted. "Excuse me for caring about your feelings," he muttered. At Eren's impatient stare, he finally broke down. "I want to watch you... touch yourself...? If you're up to that, of course. I don't want you to feel obligated or distressed about it. You can say no if you don't want to do—"

"Levi," Eren cut off his rambling. He bit his lip, thinking over Levi's proposal. He wanted to keep an open mind, as performing such an act had never been something he thought about. "I'm willing to do it for you."


Eren fought off the heat rising from his cheeks, over to his ears and down to his neck. "Yeah," he breathed. "If it'll make you happy. And who knows? I might like it too. Just... promise not to tease me when I do it?"

"Of course." Levi nodded rapidly, in disbelief that Eren was actually agreeing to his proposal. "I promise, I want this to be a good experience for both of us. If at any point, you want to stop, just let me know and we'll stop."

"Okay," Eren whispered, closing their distance, sealing their lips in a loving kiss.

~

It was just as Eren suspected. Awkward at first, but soon became pleasurable. They started off with Levi straddling Eren, each of them tending to the areas that they mentioned previously and slowly losing their composure. While Eren cradled and scratched the back of Levi's head and teased his neck, Levi put just as much effort into biting at Eren's ear, occasionally whispering praises in his foreign tongue, grasping at Eren's nape and pulling a fistful of his hair. They rocked into each other at a maddening pace, eliciting small groans out of each other, and it didn't stop there.

Levi guided Eren to lay down so that he was in a relaxed position. He told Eren that he didn't have to put on a show or be overly dramatic, he just wanted him to do what he normally did when Levi wasn't there. Levi was not disappointed in the slightest when Eren went to work, making quiet sounds and contorting his face in pleasured expression as he lightly stroked himself. Eren had a hard time adjusting to being watched at the beginning, but after seeing how he affected Levi, the motivation pumped through his veins, and the only thing on his mind was to keep Levi as pleased as he looked in that moment.

Levi grew closer to Eren, setting his hand beneath his head and giving his hair a few tugs here and there, making him whimper uncontrollably. Levi had to restrain himself from drooling at the sight of Eren making himself come undone. Levi would compliment him in hushed tones, switching languages every so often, so Eren would enjoy Levi's incomprehensible words and also understand just how much he was enjoying the display.

Levi put a pause to Eren's actions, requesting to finish him off himself. Levi replaced Eren's hand with his own, and brought him to his climax while giving him a bruising kiss.

Afterwards, Eren was given some time to calm down and it wasn't long before he had Levi held down on his stomach, preparing him for another round.

Currently, Eren was biting down between Levi's shoulders blades, pounding into him relentlessly. 
Levi's mouth hung open in a constant, silent scream as Eren kept hitting his prostate head on with each thrust. His knuckles turned white due to his hands digging into the sheets in a death grip. Eren wanted complete and utter control in this situation and Levi had no problem handing it over.

At first, Eren didn't think he'd have a simple time getting into the right mindset to dominate Levi, but considering how beautiful Levi looked beneath him and how lovely his quick, needy breaths were, the role came to Eren rather naturally.

Eren held back his moans as best as he could, aware that Levi's family was still downstairs and awake this time around. He leaned forward and growled in Levi's ear. "Let me hear you, Levi."

The noise that came from Levi's throat had Eren's fingers digging into his hips. Eren sank his teeth in the pale skin of Levi's neck, drawing out more sweet moans from Levi. Levi wasn't very vocal during moments like this, in fact, he didn't make too much noise at all. But this time, after Eren had taken every bit of control over him, he couldn't filter the wails. He did his best to suppress them, so they wouldn't be heard, but that was the most he could do.

Eren felt his climax approaching, so he used every bit of energy he had left and channeled it into his thrusts, going as hard and fast as he could. Now, it was his turn to take the reins and demand the same thing that Levi had asked of him. "Touch yourself," he gritted out, the feeling of authority taking over.

Levi groaned and reached one arm down to take a hold of himself. "E-Eren," he moaned. "God... it's so good..." He kept going on about how good he felt, how amazing Eren was and how he wasn't going to last. Most of his words were barely intelligible, but he did his best to let Eren know how euphoric he felt.

Levi's rambles, along with the creaking of the bed, the insistent slaps of skin and Eren's grunts all mixed together, and soon, they both reached their limit. Eren released inside of Levi, while Levi emptied himself into his hand and on the bed sheets. Eren took a moment, remaining inside Levi, letting them both cool down from their orgasms before he gently pulled out and collapsed at Levi's side.

He looked over to see how Levi was feeling and saw his boyfriend looking absolutely wrecked, with his hair stuck to his forehead, sweat glistening over every inch of skin, eyes glazed over and his entire body was vaguely shaking while he struggled to catch his breath. Levi’s eyes lazily blinked and searched for Eren, instantly glaring daggers at him.

"Are you alright?" Eren huffed out, genuinely concerned.

"I'm not... going to school... tomorrow..." he wheezed out.

"Why not?"

"Can't... walk," was all Levi said.

Eren wished his pride hadn't overcome him, because based on Levi's sour look, grinning like an idiot wasn't the correct response.
"I really enjoyed that," Levi murmured into Eren's hair. They laid there, Levi's chin sat atop Eren's head, his arms around his shoulders, while Eren's arms were wrapped around Levi's sides, his face buried in Levi's chest. "How do you feel?"

"Like I can finally die happy," Eren answered, voice muffled in Levi's skin. He felt Levi's chest rumble as he released a chuckle. "We need to try more things."

Levi started combing his fingers through Eren's hair. "Mm, yeah," he agreed.

Eren came close to dozing off, but forced himself to stay awake long enough to tell Levi one last thing. "I love you so much, Levi. You're the best boyfriend I could ask for."

Levi smiled uncontrollably into Eren's messy locks, leaving a few soft kisses on his crown. "I love you too, beautiful. You're the best thing to ever happen to me." He wasn't sure if Eren heard his final words before drifting off to sleep, but he didn't need to. He would tell Eren again and again until he was certain that he'd never forget.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry that was absolute shit!!

It has been pointed out to me that the word "Eren" was used 264 times and I kind of want to die??? I'll try to get better at substitutions!

I would like to thank my super awesome, patient beta, you're the real MVP. You're the best, homie! Edit: THEY MADE FAN ART FOR THIS CHAPTER I'M FUCKING BLESSED??!? http://dr-s--art.tumblr.com/post/154962221118/stormsoflegends-announcement-eren-jaeger-is

And the part where the girl ran up to Levi and Eren after being sent by her friends actually happens and happens frequently. We used to do that and the person we sent would either chicken out or they'd follow through and the guy would laugh. However some people take it too far though, they actually get to the point where they're shamelessly flirting and the other person is obviously uncomfortable, so if you're at a guard show, and they're not interested, be respectful.

Also, each color guard performance tells a story, but some teams take a more literal approach. I saw this video and thought I'd describe a similar routine because I'm in love with this! https://youtu.be/DDWbB7qqKZY

If you liked this chapter, please leave a comment or a kudos to let me know. Thank you so much for reading, if you'd like to follow me on tumblr, my fic/art account is dr-s--art and my ereri/riren/color guard one is the-witch-daddy. I hope you all have a lovely day!

It'll be painful from here on in.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The home show is meant to be a special time for the color guard team, but there are issues that arise that have the potential to take away from Eren's big night. And they follow him for days after the show.

Chapter Notes

Whoo! We're back to quick updates!

Dear lord, I've been waiting to write this particular chapter. I loved writing this chapter more than I should have and I think that says a lot about me. Oops. I love the pain. I live for the pain.

Trigger warning: homophobic slurs & violence

And in honor of the home show chapter, I thought I'd leave a link to one of my school's shows. I usually leave these at the end notes, but today's end note was hella long. This wasn't at our school and I wasn't in this particular show, (none of the ones I was in are on YouTube, it's been too many years) and remember how I told you that one of our shows coincidentally also had a fall out boy song? This is that show. (And we had a show called Phoenix Fire Bird and I forgot, my subconscious is calling me.) keep in mind this video is ancient so the graphics aren't the best and the person screaming "yeah baby!" every two seconds was our instructor. I miss her. Here it is! https://youtu.be/tLiAej5TEm4

Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A soft knock sounded on Eren's door before his mother opened it. "Eren, it's time for dinner—"
Carla cut off her sentence, inspecting her son's choice in clothing. "What's that on your sweatshirt?"
She looked over the print on the gift that Levi had given him. "Is... is that a grenade?"

Eren looked down at his sweatshirt, then back at his mother. "It's just an album cover from a band I like," he explained with a shrug.

Carla eyed the printing warily. "American Idiot..." she whispered to herself.

"That's the name of the album," Eren elaborated for her.

"Oh," she breathed. "Okay. Well, as I said, dinner is ready—what the hell are those?" She pointed accusingly at the posters on Eren's walls of Green Day, The Misfits, and Megadeth. "What are those?" she repeated, staring at the men in makeup, the skulls, and the overall 'creepy' aesthetic of the posters.
Eren groaned in aggravation. "Ma, they're just posters of some bands I listen to."

"When did you get those?" Carla's volume never lowered.

"I don't know." Eren rubbed his face, becoming more agitated as she spoke. "A month ago? I got one last week I think."

Carla crossed her arms, glaring at the offensive images decorating his walls. "I don't know how I feel about you having those things up in your room. Your father won't be happy if he sees them either."

"He never comes in here anyway," Eren muttered, standing up from his chair, ready to follow his mother out the door.

Carla didn't budge from the doorway. She gave her son a sad look. "You should change out of that sweatshirt. Your father's home for dinner tonight. If he sees it you know he'll throw a fit, and I don't want you to get in trouble." She left with a pat on Eren's shoulder.

Eren sighed. The frustration of living with people who were so closed off from the world was exhausting. Even though his mother had no problem with him listening to music she was unfamiliar with, the fact that she always was on defense when she saw something different was enough to annoy Eren day after day. However, his father's reactions made his mother's look over enthusiastic. Eren had happened to wear one of his Nine Inch Nails shirt that Levi gave him in front of him one day and he gave him a twenty-minute lecture of how inappropriate it was and how he never wanted to see it again.

Eren reluctantly changed out of his sweatshirt and threw on his color guard team shirt, choosing it because it was the closest thing to him. He left his room, sliding down the banister and ready to cure his hunger.

~

After a particularly long grace said by Eren's father, he began doing what he did best (aside from performing surgery) and complained about his coworkers. Eren kept himself from joining in the conversation, letting his mother have her ear talked off.

"I swear," Grisha continued. "He's going to get fired if he keeps arriving late like that."

Carla appeared to be at her wit's end. It seemed as though the only thing Grisha would ever talk about was work, but she never spoke a word against him for it. "Dear, four minutes isn't much to be concerned about. Especially since nothing important was going on at the time—"

"I'm telling you, Carla," Grisha interrupted, pointed his fork at her. "He's going to get in trouble for that. He's not going to get away with it much longer." When he put his fork down - and tended to his meal - he signaled that their current portion of the conversation was over.

Eren tossed a glance at Mikasa who looked at him with just as much distaste as he felt.

"Anyways," Grisha said, clearing his throat. "There's this new person, and I cannot stand her." Had his family wanted to start an argument with him, he would've heard three groans of complaint. "I think the worst part about her is that, despite her life being a complete mess, she's overly friendly."
Grisha's grimace might've been a little too exaggerated. "It's like she's trying to manipulate the rest of us."

"Or maybe she's just a nice person," Mikasa offered, taking a drink of her water.

"No, that's a ridiculous thought," Grisha shot down her idea immediately. "You probably think that because I haven't explained anything about her." Mikasa silently cursed herself for speaking up. "Well, I don't know how she keeps herself together the way she does, because she doesn't have a husband to help support her. She's not divorced, not a widow, and she's not looking to find anyone. I don't understand why a woman wouldn't want a husband in this day and age. It's not practical; how does she plan on getting by?"

Eren wanted to scream about how women were perfectly capable on their own. He wanted to tell his father that he wasn't in the mood to listen to any of his sexist rants, but he knew better. He knew that if he said what he was thinking that his father's sexist rants would be all he'd hear for the rest of the night.

"And good lord, she never shuts up about her children," Grisha went on while rolling his eyes. "All I heard today was how proud she was of them for doing basically nothing. I don't understand how a single woman can support three children either. They should have a more responsible mother. I feel bad for them; they don't even have a father figure in the house."

Eren listened more closely, thinking over what his father had just said. He didn't like any of it, of course, but the person he was describing reminded him of somebody he knew.

"And while she was walking out of a patient's room, she was discussing basic treatments with a nurse. I can't recall what injury they were talking about, it might've been bug bites or something of that nature, but she said that when her children were younger, she would just use a paste made out of water and baking soda. I don't know how she ended up with a job in a hospital, but that's just ridiculous. That's the kind of medicine you hear tree huggers using." Grisha shook his head and scoffed. "Probably a witch."

Eren couldn't hold back the snort that came out. The only thing he could think of was the lecture his father would receive if Hanji had heard him. He looked up from his plate to find three pairs of eyes observing him curiously.

"What is it, Eren?" Grisha asked, appearing as if he was ready to reprimand him.

"Nothing," Eren replied quickly, taking a bite of food.

Grisha's suspicious gaze remained settled on him for a moment longer before he droned on. "As I was saying, she's just a very bizarre woman and I think I'll have a talk with her about getting her life together. Oh, I almost forgot to mention. It seems as though she was rather young when she had her children. Considering her current age and the fact that her kids are all around your age." He gestured to Mikasa and Eren. "According to one of the nurses, she was showing off pictures of her children and only one looked anything like her, even though all of them are hers. Yet none of them looked like each other, so I'm sure you all know what that means." Grisha locked eyes with Mikasa. "Never make that mistake. Remember not to have children until you're married." Next, he addressed Eren. "Same goes for you. Don't get a girl pregnant until you've married her."

Eren wanted to tell him that he didn't have to worry about that, considering his preference in his partners, but not only was that a horrible idea, his mind was already occupied with his father's descriptions of the woman's children. He was almost certain he knew who it was now, but he had to ask. "I understand," he quickly said. "But... what does she do? What's her job there?"
Grisha took a moment to search for the answer in his memory. "If I'm not mistaken... I believe she's an interpreter for the patients."

Eren's heart pounded in his ear. That was all he needed to hear to know that it was Kutchel. He couldn't believe his father, or anyone for that matter, would dare speak an ill word of Levi's mother. That woman was a saint in his eyes, his second mother, a perfectly warm-hearted, and caring, gentle person. He couldn't imagine a single thing that she would do that would've called for anything his father had said. She was the best mother figure he could think of and there his father sat, feeling 'sorry' for her lucky children.

Eren had to say something, he couldn't let him talk about her like that. "Maybe you should give you another chance," he mumbled.

"That's why I'm going to have a talk with her about getting everything on track," Grisha responded, much to Eren's irritation.

Eren sat back out of the rest of the conversation, silently fuming over his father's ignorance and senseless judgment. But Eren knew what would happen if he were to do anything about it. So, he remained silent throughout their meal.

~

"This is great," Armin commented from the kitchen table. "We don't have to travel in order to get to your show this time."

"Yeah." Eren took a swig of water from his aluminum bottle. "I don't really know what to expect this time. Rico says home shows feel a lot different from other shows." He glanced at his watch, checking how much time he had until he had to leave. "I have to be there early, too. I should probably leave in twenty minutes."

"When is your first performance?" Armin asked.

"Uh, 2:30 I think?" Eren mumbled.

"Are you excited?"

"Yeah. I'm a little nervous, but I can't wait."

~

"Levi!"

"You made it!"

Levi amongst several others surrounding him turned around to see the swarm of small children heading his way, arms reached out to him. "Of course I made it," he scoffed. "I kinda have to be here." He knelt down to speak with them more easily.
Eren stood several feet behind Levi, watching as the little guard that he taught greeted him with overwhelming enthusiasm. He thought it was adorable how quickly Levi would turn from stoic and bored to an attentive adult figure in their presence. And seeing as it had been awhile since he'd seen the little guard, a smile worked its way on his features.

He watched the twins - Aleda and Gabryel - come up and smother Levi, to which he pretended to be annoyed at, but gave them quick pats on the back. After that, Maria, Rose, and Sina tackled him, screaming about how excited they were and making Levi wince at their volume.

"Okay you brats," Levi barked. "Give me some space." He looked around for anything to distract them, fortunately finding his saving grace standing behind him. "Look, there's Eren." The majority of them looked to where he had gestured. "Go on, get him."

Said brunet took a few cautious steps back as a hoard of elated children came racing toward him. Soon enough, his arms were being insistently tugged, pulling him to the ground to be at eye level with them all. "Hey, guys," he greeted them with a beaming smile. "You remember me?"

"Yeah," Maria replied from his right side. "Levi talks about you a bunch."

Eren couldn't help but blush at that.

"Are you gonna be in the show?" Gabryel asked. "Are ya?"

"Yeah, I'll be in the show. Right across from Levi." He promised. "Are you all performing today too?" He already knew the answer, observing all their matching team shirts. But seeing their joyous responses was something he wanted to see. They all broke out into wide grins, nodded frantically, some even went as far as to jump in their excitement. "Are you all ready?"

"Yeah!" The majority of them shouted.

Levi came and intruded on their conversation. "Alright everyone, go to Rico. We have to get ready to perform, and so do all of you." A dejected sigh came from the little guard as they walked off to find said instructor. "Go on, you runts. You can visit us again after we're all finished." With that being said, the small team seemed a little less disappointed as they left.

Levi stuck out a hand to help Eren stand. "Sorry about setting them on you like that, but I get that kind of attention every time I practice with them. That, and they missed you."

"They only met me once, how could they miss me?"

Levi shrugged. "Guess they took a liking to you real quick." He tugged on the sleeve of Eren's jacket, nodding his head in a different direction. "Come on, let's get ready."

~

"So," Christa began as she sprayed color onto Eren's hair. "First the little guard goes on, followed by the junior guard, then the cadets perform, and then it's us. All of that is in exhibition, and not competition because it's our home show. Then, the competing guards begin, and the cadets go on again and we go on again. Does that make sense?"

"Yup," Eren hummed. "Do people who go to our school usually come?" In all honesty, he'd
forgotten about how people he knew would see him in the guard and he had just realized that only moments ago. Granted, he was no longer embarrassed to be caught on the team, but it could still be an awkward experience.

Christa sighed. "Not many people do. You know how there aren't many people who take us seriously. Only a few people who appreciate the sport or people who know someone in the guard come."

As much as that was a relief for Eren to hear, it also disappointed him. Months ago, he would've been part of the crowd who thought the sport was stupid and strictly for girls. He would've thought that it held no importance and didn't require much skill. But after having grown on it and knowing just how much effort went into making a show, he'd built up an appreciation. Plus, after having seen how beautiful a routine could really be, he developed a love for the sport. He had been on both sides of the coin and it upset him to know that few cared about his new-found passion. Although, he dared not let that bother him for too long. Everyone who loved the sport and saw its significance was there and ready to either perform or watch the show, and that was enough for him.

~

The two younger guards had been adorable to witness. Rico stood in front of each team, doing the routine along with them, seeing as they were all very young and might have forgotten certain parts, and might've had too many nerves to perform alone now that they were in front of the audience. Eren and Levi felt a bit of pride watching the youngest team. It was almost as if they were their own children.

Only a few of them had seemed anxious at the beginning, due to not being accustomed to the enormous crowd, but their nervousness melted away as the show went on. The encouraging cheers from the crowd helped ease the tension, and had easily replaced the anxiety with a more fun atmosphere.

They had all seen the junior varsity team perform plenty of times, but it was a nice change to hear all the individual shouts from the crowd from family members and close friends, cheering on specific members.

After that, their team went on, receiving just as much hype from the audience. The same happened for them. All of their parents shouted for them, along with a few friends of theirs. Eren was almost certain he heard Connie making animal calls as his way of cheering on Sasha. He couldn't be sure of course, as he was busy focusing on the routine. However, he was certain that he heard his mother, as well as Armin and Mikasa, shouting louder and with more enthusiasm than he'd ever heard before.

After their first performance, everyone went back to their designated room and relaxed before the cadets started competing. And that's when Eren found a surprise waiting for him. On several desks in their room were flowers wrapped in tissue paper with tiny cards on them. Some were even attached to balloons.

Isabel came trotting over to Eren with a few deliveries in hand. "Eren, theses are for you!"

He raised his brow at her, and then at the flowers. "For me?" He took them from her outstretched palm and inspected them. "Why?"
"It's our home show," she explained. "There's a florist booth set up by the main entrance. People from the audience can send them to us. I got one too! It's from my mom." She held out her other hand, showing him white carnations wrapped in pink tissue paper. "She usually sends one to every person in the guard. You know, since she's like the 'mother of the guard.'"

"Oh," Eren murmured. He looked at each of his flowers. One being from Kutchel as Isabel had explained. The next he inspected was a rose, the card indicating that it was from his mother and father. He sighed, somewhat disappointed. His father didn't come and he knew it. His mother had simply signed it from both of them, most likely to make him feel better. The last one however, made him smile. Two different colored tulips were wrapped in light blue tissue paper, holding a card that said 'From Mikasa and Armin – Go get em Eren!' He put them in a safe place, so they wouldn't get crushed or forgotten.

Drawing everyone's attention, Rico came through the door holding more bouquets and single flowers. "Gather round, I've got some late deliveries," she announced. Several people meandered over while others hopped over excitedly. "One bouquet of pink roses and a balloon for Christa, from your family." She handed over the flowers to the delightfully surprised girl. "One white rose for Petra from your father and a purple carnation from your 'secret fan.'" Petra accepted her gifts with a bit of confusion, but joy nonetheless. "Bertolt and Annie, you each have a rose from Reiner. Ymir, you also have a tulip from a 'secret fan.'" Everyone collected their gifts, Ymir accepting hers, muttering something along the lines of 'whoever they are, they'll either be disappointed when they find out I'm gay or in a relationship.' With empty hands, Rico stood back by the door. "And lastly, I have some more personal deliveries to give." She opened the door, allowing a group of people flood in. All of which, were holding their gifts and coming in to hand them out personally.

In came Annie's father, rushing to embrace his daughter and tell her how proud he was. Erwin, Erd, and Gunther followed in, surrounding Hanji and Levi. Next, Connie followed in, tackling Sasha in a tight hug. "Sasha, you did so good!" He chimed.

"Thanks!" Sasha beamed, hugging him back. "Did you see my solo?"

Eren continued to watch the exchanges as they appeared. Mike had found his way in, and it surprised him that he didn't immediately go to Levi or Hanji, but instead walked over to Nanaba. He had brought her a red tulip and a balloon. They greeted each other and it seemed as though Nanaba was just as surprised as Eren was when he came up to her. At one point, Eren thought he heard Mike ask, "Are you wearing perfume?" To which she shook her head no with a faint blush. Mike only responded by complimenting her scent awkwardly and telling her she did a great job in the show. Eren had a feeling that something was going on between them, but he minded his own business.

After a few moments, Levi migrated from his small group and made his way over to Eren. "It's going to get real crowded soon," he commented. "They always let everyone in here at home shows."

Eren thought it was a great idea. Not everyone had the chance to see their friends and family at shows and this was a good way to let them do that. They'd also be able to visit them in the audience, but this was easier, so no one needed to search for them during someone's performance. Eren thought that it was such a nice—

Horrible idea. This was a horrible idea.

Eren's heart stilled and his lungs deflated when he saw Jean enter, coming to visit Marco. He distinctly remembered telling Jean back at one of the football games that he wasn't in color guard. And he was fairly certain that he didn't want to find out what Jean would do if he knew he
was lying. He'd never hear the end of it.

Jean was chatting idly with Marco, not speaking loud enough for Eren to hear. When suddenly, he scanned the room with a bored look in his eyes. That was, until he found Eren. "Jaeger?" He said, more audible this time.

Eren turned around with a straight face, pretending to not have heard him. As soon as his back was turned, his features portrayed horror. He sought out refuge from behind Levi, chanting, "Hide me, hide me, hide me."

"I can't hide you very well when you're taller than me," Levi grumbled. "What's the matter?"

Eren crouched down as best as he could, dragging Levi with him to the corner of the room. "Jean's here, I don't want him to see me."

Levi looked around and found Jean still looking over in their direction. "What's with him?"

"I kind of told him awhile back that I wasn't in the guard." Eren peaked over Levi's shoulder and locked eyes with Jean, immediately ducking back down.

"What should I do?" Levi whispered to him. "He's coming over here?"

"Wait, what?"

"He's heading straight for us, I think he sees you. Sorry I can't hide you very well."

Eren panicked. Not only had he been caught lying about being in the guard, but now he was hiding, giving the impression that he was ashamed. He wasn't ready for the ridicule to begin. He wasn't prepared. This was supposed to be his safe place at the show, and now he felt targeted.

"Alright! Everyone who isn't on the team has to leave!" Rico hollered. "Go on, out with you all."

Levi mumbled back to Eren. "Okay, he's leaving." He turned around, giving him some space. "Why did you tell him that?"

Eren groaned. "It was a long time ago, I was still embarrassed to be in the guard." He rubbed his neck, feeling his quickened heartbeat settle down now that his imagined threat had left. "I knew he would've made fun of me for it, and he would've told a lot of people."

Levi looked at him sadly, upset that he had ever felt ashamed of being a part of the sport, especially now that he had come to love it so much and somebody had the potential to ruin it for him. "Don't let him bother you. This is a time for you to have fun and feel safe. If he tries to make you feel like shit, tell me or Marco and we'll set him straight. Okay babe?"

Eren's fears hadn't completely left, but he felt more secure knowing that he had people to defend him. "Okay," he said.

Levi grinned after seeing his boyfriend's mood lighten. "That's it, mon grand." He placed a soft kiss on Eren's lips before retreating and gently tucking some hair behind his ear. "Keep smiling tonight, alright?"

"Have you come up with a name for your rifle yet?" Nanaba asked, sitting across from Eren amongst a few others at the cafeteria.

"I came up with a few names," Eren answered. "But they're not very good."

"They can't be that bad," Farlan assured him.

"Okay," Eren continued. "Well, the first one I thought of was Thunder."

Ymir snorted from the other side of the table. "Why? Because every time you drop, it sounds like thunder—"

"Aaand Thunder is off the list," he deduced, picking away at his food agitatedly.

Christa chuckled beside Ymir. "Don't worry, you'll find a good one sooner or later."

"Yeah, you're right," Eren agreed. He'd find a good name, he was sure of it.

～

"Kinda weird not having to take the award back, huh?" Levi asked walking through the halls. When he didn't receive an answer, he stopped and looked over his shoulder to see his boyfriend a few paces back wearing a conflicted expression. "Everything alright?"

Eren fidgeted around as he caught up with Levi, eyes not really focused on anything. "I don't know. Something just feels weird." He walked by Levi as they ventured down the hall behind Rico to watch her put the award in the school's trophy case.

"What feels weird? You're not sick, are you?" Levi took Eren's hand in his.

"No, it's not that. I just have a feeling that things aren't going to be okay really soon. I don't know if that makes any sense..." he trailed off, not entirely certain of what he was talking about.

Levi didn't understand where it was coming from, but he still did what he could to comfort him. "Everything will be fine," he promised, giving Eren's hand a gentle squeeze. "Whatever it is, it'll be okay."

Eren didn't seem convinced, but he nodded anyway. "Alright."

～

"What's got you in a mood?" Mikasa asked as she in her brother treaded through the snow on their way to school. "You've been acting funny all weekend."

"What do you mean?" Eren knew what she meant, but even he couldn't tell why he felt so odd.
"I mean," Mikasa began sarcastically, "you've been so on edge. You're so defensive lately and you're getting worked up over little things. Well, you normally do that, but it's worse than usual. Did something happen?"

The brunet pondered it over for a minute or two. He searched for anything in his memory that could've shaken him over the weekend, but nothing turned up. At least, nothing that he deemed logical. "Not that I can think of."

That worried Mikasa. She'd always been very concerned for her brother, but this was different. He didn't seem like himself and that bothered her to no end. "I hope you feel better," was all she could say.


In his science class, he spaced out for the majority of it. Once they were given time to study or work on other assignments, Hanji tapped on his desk to get his attention. He looked up at them and lifted a brow to show that he was listening. "Is everything okay there? You seem bothered," they whispered.

Eren shrugged and huffed out a long exhale. His nerves had only worsened as the day went on. "I don't even know. I'm worried about something but I don't know what."

"Is it the homework? Because I could help if—"

"No," he cut them off. "It's not that. I feel kinda sick, but not physically sick if that makes any sense? Like I'm anticipating something but I'm not sure what it is."

Hanji hummed in understanding. "I see what you mean. I feel like that sometimes too. Well, I hope it passes."

"Thanks."

His music class had a substitute filling in, so people were allowed in and out of the room. So, of course, Farlan and Isabel came to hang out with him in their teacher's absence. "Hey Eren!" Isabel beamed as she and her brother came to sit by him.

"Hey, Izzy. Hey, Farlan," he greeted them far less enthusiastically.

"What's wrong?" Isabel's face fell when she heard his voice come out so low and lacking character.

The two sat on either side of him while he answered, starting to get sick of having to explain something he should've had a clear answer for by then. "I wish I knew. Ever since Saturday, something just feels wrong and I can't put my finger on it."

"Is it something you're forgetting? Like a deadline or something?" Farlan guessed.

"Maybe," Eren mumbled. "It's killing me that I don't know what it is."

"I'm sure you'll figure it out eventually," Farlan said.

"Let's hope," Eren sighed.

Throughout his school day, his friends were giving him their support and trying to comfort him to the best of their ability. He felt a bit more relaxed as they surrounded him, but his worries still weighed heavily. At lunch, people were so concerned for him that everyone from Levi's table as
well as Christa and Ymir, (Ymir was forced to go by Christa) left their spots to surround Eren at his table.

Eren hadn't felt more anxious at any point in the day than at lunch. The discomfort arose quickly and he was starting to anticipate what was coming. As his friends communicated amongst themselves, the noise never reaching his ears, he scanned their surroundings, still not aware of what he was in search of. And as quick as lightning, it hit him. He felt so idiotic for not remembering before, because the second his gaze landed on eyes that were already watching him, the memory came flooding back.

"I-I need to go to the nurse," Eren blurted out, standing up abruptly with his tray. Everyone stared up at him, worried for his safety. "You guys were right, I think I am sick. I'll be back later." He just needed to take his tray up and leave. It didn't matter where to, he only had to be out of sight to avoid confrontation. He wasn't confident enough to know if he could handle the conflict that he was certain would come.

Despite his friends' protests, he left the table, his heart pounding relentlessly and his forehead sweating profusely. He felt like he was barely moving, even though he walked as fast as his feet could carry him without breaking into a run. His food tray shook in his hands while he passed the table of the person he was trying to avoid. He bit his tongue, on full defense, wishing he could disappear to make things easier. He didn't get far.

"Hey, Jaeger!"

Eren knew he shouldn't have stopped, he really shouldn't have. But the fear reigned over his actions. So, putting on a stoic face, he stilled his body and turned around to see the owner of the voice that struck him. His emotionless visage twisted into one of disgust. "What do you want, Jean?"

Jean left his table where he sat with some of his own friends, including Bertolt, Reiner as well a few other members of their football team. His sneer sickened Eren to his stomach. It only seemed to grow as he approached his target. "Where were you over the weekend?"

Eren's anxiety was replaced with pure anger. His instincts sat at the front of his mind rather than reason and logic. Should worse come to worse, he was prepared to defend himself. "What does it matter to you?" He flicked his line of vision to his surroundings once more, trying to calm himself. He vaguely noticed people from Jean's table as well as his own looking on, his friends appearing apprehensive while Jean's friends seemed to be either invested in their confrontation or worried.

"It's just that I saw someone who looked just like you on Saturday," Jean explained. "I went to see Marco at his color guard show and your doppelgänger was in a uniform just like his. But it can't be you, right?" His teasing was getting to Eren and he could tell by the way his nostrils flared.

Eren remained quiet, being caught between a rock and a hard place and unsure of what he should do.

"It can't be, because I specifically remember you telling me that you weren't in color guard." He knew Eren was trapped, and he loved holding that information over him.

Eren didn't speak a word. He wasn't about to lie again and dig himself a deeper hole and he wasn't going to show any shame. He was mentally exhausted from fearing what others would think, so being embarrassed wasn't an option. But he'd be damned if he let Jean have the upper hand.

"You're so pathetic, playing a girls sport. I don't blame you for lying about it," Jean mocked him.
"You're a joke."

The fire bubbled up within Eren's chest, he couldn't just take this. "Fuck you," he gritted out, catching Jean by surprise, but not gaining any control over the situation. "I needed to join to graduate and I ended up liking it. So what?"

"So, you know what it means when a guy is in color guard."

Jean didn't even finish his sentence before Eren spun on his heel to put his tray away, muttering, "I don't care."

"It means you're a faggot."

The words were loud and sharp, piercing through Eren's facade. He couldn't have been sure, but he thought that the chatter taking place around them had even lowered in volume, now only a dull murmur. At that point, all restraint that Eren had left had gone away, unlikely to return. He'd had his fair share of verbal fights with Jean, but he'd crossed a line and Eren couldn't let that slide. The years of humiliation and terror of people knowing along with all the outrage and pain caused by prejudice had bubbled up and overflowed in his mind at this moment. Holding back was the last thing on his he could think of.

He spun around, adrenaline pumping through his veins. He stopped just before he reached his adversary and threw down his tray, the remainder of its contents splattering on the bottom of Jean's pants as well as Eren's. Jean jumped back, disgusted, while Eren was unfazed by the food dirtying his clothes. The loud clammer had silenced the cafeteria, everyone's attention now on the two. The people from Eren's table were now on alert, just as Reiner and Bertolt were. Jean's other friends were watching as if it was some sort of sporting event on their television. The rest of the cafeteria had mixed feelings as they watched. Eren paid everyone no mind. He didn't care what they heard or saw anymore. The only thing he could think about was the asshole in front of him.

Eren stepped over the tray, invading Jean's personal space, making him lean back, scared of Eren's intentions. "So what?" Eren thundered. He was absolutely finished. He wasn't going to take anything anymore. "So what if I'm a faggot? Huh?" His rage radiated off of him, clouding his head. "What's wrong with that?" He wanted to hear him say it. He wanted him to either cower out or admit his prejudice.

Jean hadn't planned for him to take this course of action. He spared a glance at his expectant friends who waited to hear his comeback, only to have Eren jerk into his field of vision, waiting for him to answer.

"Fucking answer me!" Eren hollered, his hands curling into fists, nails biting into his flesh, his knuckles turning white.

Jean felt his friends' expectations weighing on his shoulders. Even more noticeable than that, he felt Eren's breath hitting his skin sharply. His reply fell short of the confidence he wanted to portray. "... It... it means you're a damn homo."

Eren wanted to laugh. Jean had nothing. "Ouch, you got me," he said, dripping with sarcasm. Taking another step forward, he lowered his voice. "You can't offend me by calling me what I am. So, answer my damn question. What's wrong with that? What does it mean if I'm gay? Say it, I dare you."

Jean actually seemed reluctant to respond. After a couple quick fleeting looks to his table and after mustering up the nerve to spit it out, Jean's shoulders relaxed and he looked Eren dead in the eyes
with an eerie calm. "It means you're a repulsive piece of shi—"

His sentence was stolen from him as a clenched fist fueled by pent-up anger connected with his jaw. Eren's knuckles stung from how forceful his hit was. He stared through the accumulating tears as Jean tried to regain his stance and it came as no surprise to him that he retaliated. And for every punch that landed on him, he gave Jean two. Regret and clear thinking were no longer things that registered to him. He just wanted to be rid of all the emotions that had built up over the years and who was he to deny the perfect opportunity when it presented itself?

He didn't know how long the fight lasted, he only realized it was over when people were shouting right next to his ear as he was pried off of Jean. And he only realized what he had done when the teacher shoving him between his shoulder blades to get him to start walking began shouting at him - along with Jean and everyone surrounding - to go to the principal's office.

~

Ymir, Mikasa, and Levi were the ones to pull Eren away, and therefore accompanied him in the Principal's office. Ymir sat between them, separating him and Jean in case an argument arose. Levi sat on his other side and Mikasa sat to his. Due to the awkward placing of the chairs, Bertolt and Reiner sat across from them, being the ones to tear Jean away.

Eren's frown was permanently etched onto his features as he sat with an ice pack at the base of his neck with his arms crossed. Having been to the nurse prior to being seated, he had a bandage on his eyebrow and a couple more on his shoulders. His fingers felt like they'd snap if he bent them the wrong way, and even considering how much pain his body was in, he couldn't be bothered to feel bad about what he did.

Jean looked and felt so much worse. He held an ice pack to his face, had numerous bandages scattered over his exposed skin, had a cotton pad attached to his ear to aid with the bleeding and had a slowly forming black eye. Unlike Eren's perpetual glower, Jean merely stared blankly at the floor.

Everyone else seemed either disappointed with their friend or just aggravated that they had to be there in the first place. The room was dead silent while they waited for the principal to finish discussing matters with the guidance councilor.

Levi looked at Eren, trying to fathom what had gotten into him. "Why did you do that?" he whispered, holding his incredulous stare.

Eren refused to face him. "I couldn't control it," he muttered bitterly.

"That was incredibly irresponsible," Levi reprimanded him just as quietly as before. "You know better. You could've ended up with worse injuries. Do you understand the amount of trouble you're in? Do you understand what could've—"

"I don't need this right now, Levi," Eren snapped, ever so slightly louder than before, shutting up his boyfriend immediately.

Levi didn't want to make him angrier, but seeing him in the fight, taking so many hits nearly gave him a heart attack. He wouldn't put his feelings over Eren's, especially at this moment, but he was hurting too. His precious love was verbally attacked - not to mention physically attacked - and he
was in so much pain in every way. He couldn't imagine what he was going through, but he had his worries as well. And despite the empathy he felt for him, he was also upset that Eren had started the fight, putting himself in danger.

"I don't know why I said that," Jean breathed to himself, drawing everyone's attention.

Everyone to his side looked at him confusedly while he continued to look down at his lap.

"What part?" Eren asked, leaning up to view him better, not overly interested in the answer.

"What I called you... and everything after that," Jean answered, gulping, trying to swallow down the guilt.

"It doesn't matter why the fuck you said it, the point is you said it." Eren settled back in his chair, readjusting his crossed arms.

Jean subtly shook his head, breaking his straight stare and looking at Eren. "I wouldn't say that to Marco.

Eren kept his head forward but examined Jean. He thought it was an odd choice of words at first, but then it clicked. He obviously knew of Marco's sexuality, and with Marco being his best friend, he'd never dare utter those words to him. Eren guessed that Jean had called him the slur to target him or impress his friends or assert himself or some other stupid reason. "Yeah, well, you said it to me."

Jean returned his gaze to the floor.

Eren had no sympathy for him for just starting to regret his decision. He was still mad as hell.

Jean began telling himself affirmations to cope with his mistake. "It's just a word. It's just a stupid word." Every person in the room was disgusted with his attempt to excuse his actions. Jean desperately looked to Reiner and Bertolt. "It doesn't mean anything, right?" His friends only glowered at him. "Right guys?" They refused to speak to him.

"It doesn't mean anything," he told himself. "It's a stupid fucking word."

Ymir, with her arms folded over her chest, eyes baring down on Jean judgmentally, had just about enough of his feeble self-assurance. "I wouldn't say it's just a word," she said, gaining his attention, as well as the attention from everyone else in the room. Jean's nervous composure gave her the pleasure to begin her lecture.

"You know how everyone jokes around about how 'faggot' means a bundle of sticks?" She questioned rhetorically. "Well, there's a reason for that. That's the original definition. And back in the day, a bundle of sticks was something that was very awkward to carry around, and because of that, it later became synonymous with an unbearable burden; something difficult to carry. It was also used in place of the title 'worthless woman.'" She saw him cringe as she went on. "The phrase 'fire and faggot' was said to explain the punishment of a heretic; someone who went against what was accepted in the church. Some of those heretics were of course gay people. And I'm sure you can guess from the phrase 'fire and faggot,' or 'fire and bundle of sticks,' that it meant burned at the stake. And those who said that they no longer were the way they were, had to wear embroidered figures of bundles of sticks on their sleeves as a constant reminder of how they were almost going to be killed. So, the word holds a threat, the threat of being burned alive, it tells someone that they themselves are an unbearable burden, and it calls them a worthless woman. But... you're right. It's just a word."
Jean leaned back, shutting his eyes and using his free hand to rub his temple. He felt sick to his stomach.

Everyone turned their heads as the door clicked open revealing Hannes, who examined them quickly before his gaze settled on Eren. The teen really wished he'd stop looking at him with such disappointment. Hannes shook his head at him. "Alright everyone, into Principal Pixis' office."

~

The group sat silent, only speaking to answer their principal's questions. Mr. Pixis overlooked his notes from his discussion with Hannes as well as the notes from everything the students had told him so far. "Now, who exactly started the actual fight?"

A few of them glanced at Eren, but otherwise said nothing. Eren sighed before he mumbled, "Me."

"I see," Mr. Pixis replied solemnly.

"But, it wasn't entirely Eren's fault," Mikasa interjected.

"Oh?"

"Before the fight, Jean was calling Eren some horrible things and harassing him," Mikasa explained.

"What did you say?" Mr. Pixis' question was aimed at Jean.

Jean bit his lip and sat there without providing a response.

"Anyone?" He knew that he'd get nothing out of Jean, so he beseeched the rest of them.

Crickets in the crowd. No one dared repeat what Jean had said. Fortunately, Hannes had his own notes that he set in front of the principal for him to review. Mr. Pixis scanned the paper, clicking his tongue as he finished. "Well," he cleared his throat. "I'd like to thank the bystanders for jumping in to try to calm the situation. But, that put your own safety at risk, so I'd advise you to simply find a teacher if this kind of thing ever happens again. And as for you two," he pointed to Eren and Jean. "Our school has a no tolerance policy. This was extremely inappropriate and I expect more from you both. You're seniors, act like it."

The embarrassment between the two was clearly evident. Mr. Pixis went on to give them their punishment. "Okay. To learn your lesson, I think the most fitting decision is to assign you, Jean, a month of detention, since you aren't in any ongoing extracurricular activities." He ignored the boy's groan. "And Eren, I'll have to take you out of color guard."

Eren's eyes widened and his mouth dropped. "Wait, no. You can't—"

"I'm sorry, but that's my decision. You started the fight, and this is your punishment."

He couldn't believe it. He'd ruined his newfound passion. The sport he'd come to love so much and advance in was being ripped away from him and it was his fault. He hung his head, trying to wrap his mind around the consequences.

"If I may, I'd like to bring up some important things to consider," Levi spoke up, surprising
everyone. "It's my understanding that Eren needs the credit from color guard to graduate. I know we shouldn't let him off without any consequences for the fight, but not letting him graduate seems a little harsh. And he plays a very important role on the team, so letting everyone else suffer for his mistake wouldn't be fair."

Mr. Pixis pondered it over for a few moments. "Hannes, is that true? Look it up in the files to see if he needs the credit."

"No need," Hannes said. "I had a discussion with him about finding an extracurricular activity to join back in the fall. He really needs it to graduate."

Mr. Pixis exhaled heavily. "Alright. Okay, you can stay in color guard, but you'll have detention. Are there any questions?" More silence. "Okay, you're all dismissed. Stay out of trouble."

~

Eren and Levi lagged behind, Levi walking far more slowly than necessary, talking Eren's ear off. "And the fact that you know about the no tolerance policy. What were you thinking?" He hadn't stopped reprimanding him since the second they were dismissed. "It's absolutely unbelievable."

Eren just walked and took everything Levi said to him. He was just grateful he wasn't pulled out of color guard, perhaps - he thought - he needed to be scolded like a child for the rest of the day.

Eventually the rest of the group moved out of earshot, Levi watching them attentively. "You know how reckless that was, and I am appalled that—" at that point Levi saw everyone turn a corner, far enough away that they couldn't have possibly heard him. He stopped them in their tracks, grabbing Eren's shoulders and looking him in the eye. "What was it like?"

Eren knitted his brows together at a loss of what he meant. "W-What? What was what like?"


Eren stared, perplexed.

"How did it feel?" Levi begged for an answer. "I know violence is stupid and useless and you seriously shouldn't have done that. But we all dream of what it's like to just... fucking deck an idiot spewing out homophobic bullshit. What was it like?"

Eren relaxed under his hands, feeling like he could breathe for the first time in days. He even huffed out a small chuckle at Levi's odd change of character. "Well... it felt good at first, but then... I don't know. I was too upset to care."

Levi nodded. "Yeah, I get that." He released him and began walking leisurely by his side. His fingers slipped between his boyfriend's as he spoke. "I'm still angry about the whole thing, but tonight during our private lesson, we can take it easy and I'll look at your wounds properly. I know that nurse didn't give enough shits to give them the best treatment."

"You don't need to do that," Eren said. "I'm not made of glass, and they're not that bad. Jean can't throw a good punch to save his life."

Levi snorted. "That's fair, but can you blame me for wanting to double-check? Besides, even if he
couldn't hit very well, they probably still hurt. I'll take good care of you."

Eren thought about how undeserving he was to have Levi as his boyfriend. He was always so caring, even when he was in the wrong. He let out a shaky breath and thanked Levi as he led him back to class.

~

Eren returned home after Levi had dropped him off from their private lessons. Eren was about to head upstairs, but the sight of his mother scowling at him in the living room kept his feet from moving. "Uh... hi mom." He gulped, anticipating whatever it was his mother would do to him.

"The principal called me."

Chapter End Notes

Let's play a game called "how many things can go wrong in the remaining chapters?"

Just a heads up, the next chapter will be the calm before the storm. And then it'll be just a shit fest of "fuck it all." You're welcome. ALSO! Just a quick disclaimer, I don't hate Jean. I actually really love his character, but I needed some angst and god, let me live.

I have a new one shot up!!! Just thought I'd mention it now! It's called An Innocent Inner Conflict. Also, please check out my other fic Counterclockwise! It would mean a lot!

Ah geez, this chapter takes me back to my color days. I miss our home shows, how we'd guess strangers names while in the bleachers, telling each other horror stories on the bus (which were so not true and I realize that now. I'm looking at you Deanna, wherever you are now) and screaming shitty songs that we loved, the glitter that was mysteriously everywhere, sending other members to tell guys from other guards that they were hella fine, (yes it's real, and everyone involved, including the guy, gets a good laugh) and just the magic of it all. And our home shows were great, we'd always take group photos on the bleachers and it was the one time I felt cool in the place where I was a loser everyday and god I need to stop using the a/n for nostalgic rants.

Super big thanks to my terrific beta! I wish I could give you a million high fives!

Sorry for the pain I caused in this chapter :/ I'd say that everything will be fine, but my mother didn't raise a liar. Okay, she raised one, but it wasn't me. Please leave a kudos or a comment if you liked this! (You guys are the sweetest ;--; ) My tumblrs are dr-s--art & the-witch-daddy. Thank you so much for reading! <3
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Carla discovers the reason why Eren was revisiting his past habit of fighting, and neither of them are ready to handle it. And despite how this may affect them, the championships won't be put on hold for them or anything else.

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SORRY THIS IS LATE.

Shit is going on in my life, so I've put off writing this. I've been going to work more often, I'm working on taking a trip to Maine, I have a new kitten to take care of, I'm single again, and there are a million birthdays in August I have to prepare for, including my favorite person's b-day. All that, plus not being able to remember special color guard events like this very well makes me sad, but I finished at long last!

I like half of this chapter, and the other half I'm not confident about. I hope it's good. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"The principal called me."

Eren gulped. His father may have angered him to no end, but if there was one of his parents that he avoided upsetting like he avoided death, it was his mother. "Oh... did he?"

"Yes," Carla answered. "Get in here and sit down." The bite in her voice left little room for argument. Her son lowered his head and walked into the living room, taking a seat on the couch. Though he normally stood taller than her, this time she was the one looking down on him. "What the fuck, Eren?"

"I'm sorry, ma," he murmured, genuinely ashamed of what he did for the first time that day.

"What were you thinking?" Carla began pacing out of frustration. "You're lucky your father isn't coming home until midnight, otherwise you'd be in so much trouble."

Eren didn't dare tell her that he wasn't as scared of him as he was of her, not wanting to give her more of an upper hand than she already had.

"I won't tell him what happened because he'll give you more punishment than you deserve. Not that you don't deserve any, but I'm sure the school is handling your consequences just fine." Carla paused her pacing to shake her head and pinch the bridge of her nose. "You can't do this Eren, you haven't gotten in a fight since you were eleven. I thought you were done with things like this." She sighed heavily, looking down at her son, who appeared to be mortified with his earlier actions.
She took a moment to observe the bandage on his eyebrow and the faint bruises that were somewhat visible. Her anger subsided and was replaced with the pain of seeing her son injured. She took a seat next to him, heart aching from all her conflicting emotions. "You could've gotten much more hurt. You could've done much worse things to that boy." Eren flinched, furious with himself over the fact that he almost wished he'd done worse. "I want you to be safe and I want you to be nice to people."

"Only if they're nice to me," Eren muttered.

"Eren, I'm serious!" Carla snapped, angry tears building up. "There are horrible people everywhere you go, you can't avoid them forever. When you meet them you need to know to control yourself; you can't just go hitting everyone who treats you bad. As much as we'd all like to, that's not how things work! I'm at a loss of what to do anymore! I have no idea what's gotten into you lately. I don't understand. With all the scary things on your walls, the 'music' you've been listening to, the way you've been acting. I can't help but wonder if you're getting involved in bad things or with bad people. I'm worried sick everyday! I can't..." She closed her eyes for a moment to regain her calm. "I don't know what I'd do if either of my children had something happen to them. I worry about you two so much..."

Eren didn't want to see his strong mother cry and he didn't want to be the cause of her tears either. "Mom..." his meek voice bubbled from his throat. "Ma, I'm sorry."

"I know you are," she replied. Just like most mothers, her son never seemed to grow up in her eyes. All she could see before her was her five-year old boy coming back from the park after having been in a fight and asking her if she hated him. And now that little boy had more than little scuffs and bits of dirt covering his young skin. He's now tattered with bruises, tiny cuts, and bandages and she could almost hear her heart breaking. The only thing running through her mind was why on earth would her precious child put himself through this? "Why did you punch him?"

Eren's chest hurt. He couldn't tell her, it was too embarrassing. It wouldn't be believable if he told her that he punched him over a word that as far as she knew had nothing to do with him. Over a word that to her knowledge shouldn't have affected him. "I was mad." That was all he could muster, not trusting his voice.

Carla looked to be at her wit's end. "Stop lying to me." She gave a gentle tug to one of his ears, silently telling him that their redness betrayed his bluff.

He couldn't tell her. He just couldn't. "It doesn't matter, ma. It was stupid, I won't fight anyone anymore. I swear."

"Eren," her voice wavered. "Why did you hit him? If you don't tell me, I'm going to call the school and ask. Don't make this hard." She set a hand on his, urging him to tell her the truth.

"It doesn't matter—"

"Eren." The desperation in her voice was enough to make him crack.

He looked her dead in the eyes, words barely audible. "He called me a faggot."

Carla stared at him incredulously, uncertain if she had heard him right. "... What?" She breathed.

"Please don't make me say it again."

She did as asked, but didn't stop looking at him like he had lost all control. She sighed and put her head down in her hands, exhausted from everything that had taken place that day. "My god Eren,"
she murmured. "That's just ridiculous. You can't lose your head over little names that people call you because you give them all the power when you do that. You know better, you're not what he called you, so you shouldn't have acted out. It didn't mean anything."

Eren wanted her to stop talking. She didn't know the truth, but it still felt like she was undermining his feelings. It felt like she was making it seem like his pain didn't matter, which he couldn't blame her for, since she didn't know. "Mom—"

"So what if he called you that? It's not like you actually are one, so what does it matter?" She ranted on.

"Mom, please..." He couldn't listen to this.

"You're above that. It meant absolutely nothing because there was no truth behind it, so you shouldn't have gotten so worked up."

"Ma—"

"I know he shouldn't have called you something like that, putting you on such a low-level, but—"

"Mom!" Eren roared, eyes beginning to glimmer, his body shaking through the pain, and his facial features showing his mixture of outrage and utter agony.

Carla was frozen, caught by surprise by her son's thunderous outburst.

"Mom..." He continued, though, much quieter. "It did matter. It didn't mean nothing... and it really hurt."

His mother was starting to understand, but for a few soundless moments, she didn't want to. She was drifting into denial the longer Eren went without talking. She shook her head in disbelief.

"What are you saying?"

He had to tell her, he knew he did. And if that meant being thrown out of his home or being treated like he was a disgrace, then he'd accept whatever came his way. There were several people who he knew would take him in if need be. He didn't know what she would do to him, he just knew that this couldn't go on any longer. Everyone in his life already knew, with the exception of his parents. Now, even the majority of his school knew. As much as he feared her reaction, he needed to tell his mother. He loved her and felt that she had the right to know, even if she'd reject him.

He could barely hear his own voice when he spoke and wondered if his mother heard as well. "I'm gay, ma."

At first, Eren thought she merely hadn't heard him, as her reaction was rather emotionless. She regarded him blankly, her body still and her eyes searching. When a considerable amount of time had passed, she nodded solemnly before hesitantly bringing her son into a gentle hug. She held him softly, much to his surprise, and cradled his head like she used to when he was a little boy. He sat there, immovable, wondering what she was thinking. It wasn't before long that her arms started to tremble.

"Are you... are you mad at me?" Eren asked.

"No..." Carla's voice came shaking, her steady tears evident without Eren having to see them.

Guilt settled on Eren's shoulders. Had he destroyed their relationship with a simple confession? He wanted to kick himself for making his mother cry again. "Mom, I'm sorry." He hugged her back,
not sure what else to do for making her feel this way.

"Sh-shh." She couldn't even silence him without her words stumbling. She hugged him tighter, as if to delicately reprimand him for apologizing. "You don't need to be sorry."

"Do you hate me?" Eren whispered.

Carla tore herself from him, features overcome with anger, cheeks stained with tears. "Don't you dare ask me that," she said. Eren shrunk into himself before she could further her statement. "I can never hate you. I love you no matter what, remember? Do you understand me?"

Eren's emotions started to match his mother's as his oceanic orbs threatened to flood over. "Th-then why are you crying?"

Carla released a faltering sigh. Her expression relaxed to one of exhaustion. "I'm just... sad. I'm sad that my baby's already been hurt for being who he is. I'm sad I couldn't do anything to protect you. And... I'm really sad that you didn't grow up in the best environment." Her hands framed his face. She used her thumb to wipe away a wet droplet escaping down his cheek. "I want nothing but the best for my kids, and now... I know that you didn't have the best. I'm so sorry about all the horrible things your father has said around you. I'm sorry I didn't say anything. I didn't think..."

Eren knew what she was getting at. He pulled her into a hug again as they both shook.

Carla let out a sob before speaking again. "I didn't think any of it would end up being about you. Eren, sweetie, I'm sorry you've had to hear that all your life. I'm sorry I never did anything about it. My god, I'm a terrible mom." She wept, clinging onto her son, ashamed of not doing everything in her power to make certain that he grew up knowing he was loved.

"No," Eren disagreed, shaking his head. "You're not. You're a great mom." True, he often wished Kutchel was his mother instead and frequently felt like he couldn't get through to her or have anything left that he felt would keep them close. Yet, at the end of the day, he loved his mother so much, and he wouldn't trade her for the world.

Carla reluctantly pulled back, wiping at her eyes, and attempting to get herself together. "From now on, I'm going to be nothing but supportive, I promise. I'll be more involved and make sure you're okay. In return, I just want you to stop feeling like you have to hide things from me. Okay?"

Eren nodded. "Okay."

The situation had calmed some, and Carla had stopped crying, still wiping away whatever dampness was left on her face. "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?"

Eren thought that now was a time as good as any to come clean about everything. "Yeah, I have a boyfriend too."

Carla let out a small chuckle, sniffling afterwards. "... Is he good to you?"

"Yeah, it's Levi," he answered. "He's really good to me."

Carla nodded with a bright smile forming. "Good. Levi's a nice boy. He's a lucky one. H-how long have you two been dating?"

"Since the beginning of the school year."

Carla lowered her head. She hadn't known for so long. "I see. Does he make you happy?" This
entire conversation brought back vague memories of when she was asking him about his crush, assuming that he liked a girl.

"He makes me so happy," he promised.

"That's good. I'll get to see him soon, right? For a proper meeting?"

"Yes," Eren replied, smiling a bit. "If you want to."

"I want to." Carla finished drying her eyes. "Eren... I hate that things are like this, but... you know you can't tell your father, right?"

"Yes," he mumbled.

"I'm so sorry, sweetie."

"It's okay,"

"No," Carla said. "It's not. It's not fair, it's not right, and it's not okay."

"Then... I'll be okay."

"I know you will, you're a strong young man." The two spent the remainder of the night discussing little unimportant things, catching up on quality time that they never seemed to have anymore. Carla wanted to get used to the new knowledge and let Eren know that it wasn't going to affect their relationship, aside from strengthening it.

~

"Extra clothes?"

"Yes."

"Toothbrush?"

"Yes."

"Swim trunks?"

"Yeah."

"Phone charger?"

"Yup."

"Phone?"

"Uh huh."

"Hair brush? Deodorant?"

"Mhm, got em."
"Alright, I think that's the last of the list," Carla hummed. "We need to leave in ten minutes so we're there early."

"I know." Eren couldn't believe it. The way time flew by so fast. They were on their way the championship show. Since it was a special occasion and since the school holding the championship was so far away, their team had the luxury of staying at a hotel over the weekend. Everything was moving so quickly; he couldn't process it all fast enough.

Carla volunteered along with several other parents to be chaperones. It may have been because she promised to be more involved, but it also may have had to do with her muffled explanation when Eren asked her about it. 'No son of mine is staying five hours away, all alone, for his championship show. Nope, not while I'm still breathing.' And since the show was so far away, a fair amount of friends were allowed to come along on the bus. Rico and Kutchel made sure enough rooms were provided.

"Oh! One last thing I forgot to check!" Carla remembered. She walked over to her son and lowered her voice, hushed with excitement. "Do you have your good luck charm?"

Eren simpered happily, digging under his collar to pull out the key necklace his mother had given him at his first show. "Right here."

"Good," Carla said.

"Holy crap," Mikasa groaned, standing with her suitcase and Armin to her side. "Enough with the sentimental stuff. Are we going or what?"

~

On the bus, Eren sat next to Levi with Armin and Mikasa in the seat beside them with Carla and Kutchel seated diagonally from them. The seating arrangements had taken awhile to sort out, but Rico eventually came to the conclusion that the varsity team and their guests would take one bus, while she would accompany the cadets and their guests on another.

"And she's completely fine with it?" Levi asked, eyeing Eren's mother who was speaking with his own.

"She took it hard because she said she was upset that I had to hear my dad always saying homophobic things, but she's okay with it."

"Okay, good," Levi sighed. "She's been treating you fine?"

"Yeah, if anything, she's been spoiling me," Eren chuckled.

Levi smiled at that. "You deserved to be spoiled." He gave him a kiss on the cheek, loving how blood rushed to the area he'd pecked gently.

The bus ride passed rather loudly. Instead of letting Isabel and Farlan control the music on their speakers, everyone on the bus chanted along to whatever song that was shouted out. Everybody who didn't sing occupied themselves by telling jokes or sharing stories. They loved opportunities like this to revert back to childhood. They'd only stopped once for everyone to take a bathroom break and eat at a fast food restaurant. Hours had flown by, and they'd reached their hotel as the
sun had set completely.

They all hauled their luggage into the hotel, Rico leading the way and reminding them all to be respectful, as they would be representing their school, and to not break or deface anything during their stay, while also being kind to the staff. The lobby was overly crowded as Rico checked them in. During this time, people chose who would share rooms and it was settled fairly quickly.

Rico came back to address the group and silenced their dull chatter. "Everybody get with your chaperone, I'll hand out the room keys. Take a half hour to get settled in and meet back here, so we can hit the indoor pool." A few whoops and hollers sounded. "Quiet! There are other guests here. Remember, be on your best behavior."

~

Eren sat on the edge of his bed in his room that he shared with Levi, Mikasa, and Armin. His mother, along with several other chaperones had the room next to theirs with a door that connected them.

"Levi," Eren hollered at him, while he changed in the bathroom. "Hurry up, we're all waiting!"

"I'm taking off my makeup!" Levi shouted back. "I don't want it to run in the pool!"

Eren groaned, impatient as ever.

"Now, Eren," Armin called his attention, "we know you and Levi are really close, but if you could keep it in your pants while we're at the pool, that would be greatly appreciated."

"Armin!" Eren gawked.

"Same thing goes at night," Mikasa added on. "I don't want to wake up to the sound of my brother getting it on with his boyfriend." She grimaced.

"Guys!" His friends giggled at his mortification. "We're not going to do any of that, give me a break."

Levi exited the bathroom in a black shirt with black swim shorts. "I'm ready," he said, turning his head to Eren. "Keep your head out of the gutter and try not to stare at my ass."

Eren spluttered as his friends started cackling at his misfortune.

~

Down at the pool everyone was having the time of their lives, jumping in, splashing each other like children, and ceasing to care about what the other guests thought of them. At first, Nanaba and Sasha were hesitant to get in the water, due to their insecurities about their bodies. Nanaba wouldn't take her towel off her shoulders, while Sasha felt self-conscious for wearing a long sleeve swim suit that one would use for surfing. But with such persistent friends, it wasn't long before they were in the water with everyone else, having a good time. Some chaperones lounged on the poolside
Levi sat at the edge, dangling his feet in the pool, not overly enthusiastic about getting in the water. Eren swam over to him, resting his arms on the edge. "What? You're too cool for swimming now? What was the point of taking off your makeup if you're not getting in?"

Levi shrugged. "Nope, just isn't as exciting for me as it is for you guys."

Eren frowned. "You're boring."

Levi snorted and rolled his eyes. "And you're a brat."

"Fair," the brunet decided. He turned around, lazily floating and leaning back, surveying the crowd. "So many people came..."

"It's a special show."

"I don't even remember seeing half these people on the bus."

Eren could see all of Levi's old friends horsing around in the deep end, Connie kept emerging from the water, chasing after Sasha like some sort of monster, and Reiner was relaxing in the hot tub with Bertolt, Annie, and a couple of strangers. Eren couldn't pick out everyone, the place was too crowded and people were constantly going in and out of the water.

Eren was taken by surprise when he felt Levi work his way into the water beside him. Eren quirked up his brow at him. "Thought it wasn't as exciting for you," he teased.

"It's too hot," Levi groaned.

"Here, I'll help," Eren chirped, taking his arm and hitting the surface of the water, splashing Levi's face. "Better?" He chortled.

Levi shook off the water, glaring daggers at his mischievous boyfriend. "You fucking shit," he gritted out, watching the taller inch back, biting back his laughter. "You're dead."

"I love you! I'm sorry!" Eren laughed as he attempted to get away and escape Levi's wrath, but soon he was tackled and pushed into the deep end while still in a giggling fit.

~

After everyone was finished at the pool, Rico told them when to be awake by, and when they needed to be ready to leave the next morning. The group all left the pool area and dispersed into their own ways, going up to their rooms.

"I got water in my ear," Eren complained, hitting his head.

"Knock it off," Levi reprimanded him, pulling his hand away. "You'll give yourself a concussion."

"Maybe you wouldn't have water in your ear, if you two weren't practically drowning each other," Armin commented amusedly, making Mikasa chuckle as well.
Eren sent him a glare, but left his words unanswered.

They almost reached the elevator, when a voice made their feet stand still. "Eren, wait a sec!"

The four looked behind them to find Marco trying to catch up to them, greeting them with his usual warm smile. "Wait, for just a minute." He approached them casually, but reached them as they grimaced to the boy following him. "I know you're probably still mad, but I want you to hear him out." He stepped out-of-the-way, so that Jean couldn't hide behind him any longer.

Everyone regarded him warily; Eren's friends surrounded him closely for extra precaution.

"As I'm sure you already know," Marco began. "Jean is one of my best friends, which is why he came on the trip. And this seemed like the best time for him to get out what he wanted to say." He nudged his friend's elbow. "Right?"

The rest expected him to look noncompliant, but instead they were faced with someone who looked completely remorseful. "Yeah," Jean agreed.

Eren glared at him, remaining silent and waiting for him to start talking.

"I'm, uh..." Jean mumbled. "I'm sorry about what I said to you earlier this week. I didn't mean it."

"Which part?" Eren spat bitterly.

"All of it," Jean replied quietly.

Eren didn't seemed convinced with his apology and looked to Marco.

"I'm in the same boat with you, Eren," Marco said. "I was furious when I found out what happened, and I'm still angry with him. But... he's not lying about regretting saying that to you."

Eren sighed. Marco was a saint and he was grateful that he was trying to help, but just like Marco, he was still angry. He turned his attention back to Jean. "I'm still fucking pissed."

"I know," Jean replied. "I don't know why I said it, and I know that's no excuse, but I really am sorry."

"I'm still mad, my eye still hurts, and I still have detention to go to," he stated, taking a deep breath. "But it's a lot less tiring being mad about the five bucks, you hitting on my sister, and the other shit. So, I'll forget about it for now. If you pull that shit again, I'll make sure Marco kills you."

Jean snorted at that, then straightened out when Marco looked at him, lacking any and all mirth. Jean nodded understandingly. "Fair enough."

~

The next day, everyone was woken early in the morning, as it would be a long day and preparations had to be made. As Eren got ready, his roommates told him how proud they were of him for forgiving Jean, more or less, the day after it had happened. He felt like it was pointless to drone on about it, so he briefly thanked them and hurried along with getting everything together.

"I'm so excited!" Mikasa chimed, as she threw on her scarf and slung her bag around her shoulder.
"You guys better win today."

Eren chuckled. "Levi, what are our chances of winning today?"

"Zero," he deadpanned, making the other three look at him with concern. "Kidding, I really don't know. The last time we won first place was five years ago, and I wasn't even on the varsity team yet. Last year, we didn't get a placing, we only got a finalist plaque. The year before, we got third. Year before that, seventh. It ranges, and all the teams are pretty good this year."

Eren nodded. "How many teams are we up against?"

"Let's just say we're getting up so early for a reason."

"... Oh."

"Is everyone ready?" Armin asked, checking his watch. "We have to meet in the lobby in ten minutes."

With that, the four left the room and traveled down to meet with the group.

~

Eren's mother refused to leave his side at the competition until it was necessary for her to. She wanted to be his biggest support there at the championships. 'I'm so proud of you,' she'd say every few minutes. Far too many bear hugs had been given to him within an hour.

"Kutchel told me that there are things you can buy here," Carla said.

"It's called food, ma," Eren sighed.

"No!" Carla giggled. "I mean shirts, and things like that. Fun things."

"Levi, is that true?" Eren turned to face his boyfriend.

"Yup, they have all types of merchandise here. They sell equipment, shirts, pins, you name it."

"Hmm..." Eren hummed. "Can we check that stuff out? Do we have time?"

"Tch." Levi rolled his eyes. "We have nothing but time. It'll be hours before we have to get ready."

He led them to one of the first vendors he saw, one that sold little crafts made for the event. On a table laid tiny wooden rifles with hooks so they could be hung, and inspirational quotes or sayings painted on them.

"Wow, that's inventive," Eren commented.

"Yeah, Christa gets one every year," Levi said. "My mom got me one when I was in cadets, I still have it."

Eren smiled at the image that came to mind. He walked along until he reached the side of the table where pins and buttons with color guard related jokes had been set out. Levi walked along with him and smiled to himself as one in particular caught his eye. "Babe, look." He picked it up to show
Eren looked closer to see the white pin with a drawing of a rifle and black writing. He read the words aloud. "It wasn't a drop, it was a floor catch." He frowned.

Levi snickered at Eren's sour look. "I'm buying it for you."

"No, you're not," Eren fired back.

"Oh, yes I am, mon grand," Levi argued, inching closer. "I'm going to get you one of everything so you can have the full championship experience. You know, since this is your first and last year in the guard." He leaned up to place a quick kiss on his cheek, causing him to blush.

"I can buy own things," Eren muttered, pretending to be mad.

"Nope, isn't your birthday coming up too?" Levi asked. "Let me treat you, you stubborn little shit."

"I hate you," Eren huffed out.

"Love you too." Levi smirked and called over someone behind the booth so he could pay for the pin.

After Eren reluctantly accepted the pin, the shuffled along to another vendor. They had racks of shirts set out with little sayings on them. He let out a burst of laughter when he saw the first one. Levi looked at it, having been attentive from Eren's sudden laugh. "What is it?"

The taller made a gesture to the green shirt in front of them with a drawing of a severely injured girl and black writing that read 'The mark of a color guarder: black eye, fat lip, bloody nose, and broken bones.'

Levi snickered, then pointed to another one that was black with white writing that said 'Guard is life,' with a flag and rifle crossed beneath it.

All the shirts offered them a good laugh, and they both ended up buying a few. Even Kutchel and Carla ended up buying a couple of shirts that said 'Guard Mom.'

The entire group spent some time at the vendors and decided to go to the cafeteria to get some treats. A bake sale was being held in the far corner, and no one really wanted to get healthy food at that point. Eren nearly rolled his eyes at some of the things being sold. "Flag shaped cookies?" He posed to Levi. "Really?"

Eren couldn't believe it as he turned to look, finding Levi standing there, already taking a bite out of a rifle shaped cookie. "What?" He asked. "There are some cupcakes over there with candy sabers on them, I'm gonna get one. You want one?"

Eren sighed, but nodded nonetheless. "And a flag cookie?" He hated himself for asking. He had to admit, they looked pretty good.


After buying their food, the two took a seat at a table, waiting for the others to join them. Levi huffed out an amused breath as he saw his mother taking pictures of all the sweets. She came over, looking at the photo she had just taken and smiled, happy with the results. She sat beside Levi. "I can't wait to make a few scrapbook pages for today!" She beamed. "Okay, now you two sit closer together, I want a picture of you both in your team shirts."
Both boys complied, Levi slipping his arm around the other's shoulders, while Eren leaned into his boyfriend's side. Kutchel snapped the picture, smiling all the while. "Perfect!"

Eren felt like he was on fire with how much energy he had reserved. All of the hype from every previous show combined couldn't match the spark that ran through everyone at the championships. The pressure, the excitement. It was almost too much for one person to bear.

Which was why Eren was feeling the anxiety build up as his team rushed outside of the building and grabbing a few bags without telling him what was going on. He followed behind Rico as they walked to a side of the host school where there were no windows. "Uh, Rico? What are we doing? Are we allowed back here?"

"I checked with the staff, we're alright," she said without looking back at him. "Consider this a sort of 'pre-show ritual' for luck. We tried it once on a whim, and as I recently remembered, we did really well that time. Didn't win, but we almost did. Maybe this will help again." She stopped the guard at a level area of concrete. "Alright everybody. I've spoken with a few of you about what your superstitions or beliefs are, but I haven't discussed this with you all as a group. Let the people I talked with go first and if you have any other good luck thing you'd like to do, do it quickly afterwards. And listen, just because we're doing this, doesn't mean you can half ass the show. You still have to put in every bit of effort you've got. Hanji, you first."

"Oh goody!" They squealed, pulling things out of their bag. "Everyone huddle up. I'll get things ready!" They all did as Hanji said, getting into a tight crowd as they placed random objects and stones in a circle around the group. Next, they took four tea light candles and lit them. "This might look weird, but you gotta trust me guys, it works every time! Don't say anything and stay huddled up."

They began walking around the sloppy circle they'd made, whispering inaudible words, causing everyone with the exception of Levi and a couple of others to raise their brows. Keeping a stoic expression, they refused to make eye contact with anyone.

Once they'd walked around three times, they retrieved a small bell from their bag and weaved their way into the group, nudging them aside, but not speaking a word. They rung the bell. Once the echo of the jingle faded out, Hanji's usual ecstatic composure returned and they left the huddled to blow out the candles and collect the objects.

"That's it?" Farlan asked.

"Yup!" Hanji chirped.

"Okay, let's keep moving," Rico grunted. "Annie, you're up."

Eren gulped, recalling how Annie was a satanist as Levi had told him at his first private practice, but he tried to remain open-minded. Though, he knew she probably wouldn't make them do anything dangerous, he had no idea what she had in mind.

To his surprise, all she had was an old bucket and a piece of paper. "Everyone sign this," she instructed. Keeping a quarter of the page folded and hidden, she let the group write their names.
"Does it have to be in cursive?" Isabel asked.

Annie only glared at her, as if to say 'are you joking?' Isabel immediately silenced herself and hastily signed her name.

Once every name was written, she threw the page in the bucket, asked for Hanji's lighter and set in on fire. After several moments of watching it burn and hearing it crackle, Annie cleared her throat. "That's all."

"Good," Rico responded. "Who's next?"

Several people did little exercises for good luck, varying in techniques. Nearly the entire guard had done their own method, only leaving a few people.

"Eren?" Levi asked him quietly. "I don't know how you do things, but would you want to try praying?"

Petra had overheard Levi's proposal and gasped with excitement. "That's a great idea!" She remarked loud enough for all to hear. "You could lead us in a prayer!" Having been a Christian herself, she was quite fond of the thought.

Eren scratched the back of his neck, feeling all the eyes on him. "I don't know..."

"Come on," Petra urged him. "What's the harm in asking for a little extra help?"

Eren figured here was no harm in it, and agreed. "Alright."

"Eren's going to lead us in prayer!" Petra announced. "Get in a circle!"

Everyone followed her instructions, linking hands together. Eren took a deep breath, trying to steady himself. Praying was nothing new to him, but he wasn't accustomed to doing it in front of so many people. But nevertheless, he pushed on. He tilted his head down and began his prayer, pretending he was back home.

"Lord," he breathed. "Thank you for allowing us to get this far in the competition, and for making sure we had a safe journey. Please aid us today, and give us the chance to succeed in the competition. Please grant us a safe trip back home tomorrow." He kept his prayer short, not wanting to drone on. "Amen."

"Amen!" The guard echoed happily.

"Alright, alright," Rico hollered. "We're running out of time. Are there any other pre-show rituals anyone needs to get done?"

"I do!" Sasha exclaimed. "Connie taught me this, he says its fool-proof." She cleared her throat. "Bada bing."

The group looked at her expectantly, waiting for her to finish. She looked at them all, just as expectant. Everyone remained silent, looking at each other for some sort of explanation.

Eren went on a whim and guessed what she was trying to do. "... Bada boom?"

"Perfect!" She chimed, clapping her hands together. "He says that if someone finishes it, you're guaranteed to get whatever you want. You can all thank me later when we win."

Some giggled at her explanation, while others just looked around, perplexed.
"... Does anyone else have something they need to do?" Rico asked. She nodded and started walking when she received no answer. "Let's get ready then."

~

The team left their temporary practice room, ready to do their performance. Walking to gym, they passed several teams with each member wishing them good luck. Despite the fact that it was the championships, everyone was still so supportive of their competitors and in high spirits.

Levi nudged Eren's elbow as they marched. "Kiss for good luck?" He murmured.

The taller blushed and complied, leaning down to peck Levi's lips. "If we lose, I'm never kissing you again," he joked.


"You're right," Eren chuckled. "If your kiss fails me, I've got my mom's necklace for good luck."

Levi rolled his eyes. "Fair enough, I've got my necklace too." He took out the raven pendant from under his uniform long enough for Eren to see, and put it back.

Eren couldn't help the wild grin that g ee on his face.

"Now focus," Levi reminded him. "It's really important that you give this everything you've got."

"Right."

The next thing Eren knew, he was walking into the gymnasium as the speaker announced their school. He tried blocking out all the roars that followed, determined to keep his thoughts occupied with doing the routine as best as he could. Any other time, he'd spare a glance at the audience to see if he could spot his mother or his friends, but not this time. He wouldn't let his team down by throwing himself off.

The song started and the cheers from the audience were louder than ever. The energy flowing through the room hit the guard like a wave, giving them the motivation to perform to the best of their ability.

Eren performed like it was his last show, but also as if he'd be doing this forever. He could hear his name as well as the names of all his teammates being shouted over and over. He may have even heard Rico screaming for them. As out of character and amusing as that normally would've been to him, he had to ignore it, focusing on the show.

A bit of pain hit him when the show was over sooner than he expected, but it was melted away when he was able to look at the crowd to see all of their supporters going wild. The pride he saw in Rico's eyes as she gave them a thumbs up before helping to take down the set was well worth the hours of practice and endless injuries.

~
Back in the room, they sat silent, waiting for Rico to speak. The tension could be felt by every member.

"So..." She began, letting her sentence fall off while simultaneously putting her team through torture, waiting.

Rico allowed the smallest of smiles to show. "You all did well." A mutual sigh of relief sounded. "You should be proud of your performance. You all put out a lot of energy and the crowd felt it. I'm impressed with the effort I saw tonight, I think we'll place really well." She took a brief pause to touch upon the important part. "Now, even though I believe the judges will place you highly, don't be upset if we don't win or if you don't place as high as you hoped. You made it this far, which is farther than many teams. Even if you don't win, you put on a great show."

Rico always gave them credit where it was due, but she saved her most rewarding praises until their last show, when they'd need it the most. "For those of you who are new to color guard, Eren," she started, making them chuckle. "Everyone is staying in their uniforms, because every member of each team goes out for retreat at the championships. That's all for now, so go and have fun, watch some performances, look around, but don't get lost. Meet back here at seven."

~

"Are you sure you don't want me to buy you a shirt?" Carla asked.

"Yes, ma," Eren groaned. "I'm sure, you've asked me five times."

"Is there anything else you want me to buy for you?"

"No, mom, it's okay. I don't need anything else," he assured her. "Besides, I'm pretty sure Levi's been sneaking things for me for my birthday since an hour ago and I'm a little mad about it."

"Why are you mad?" Carla wondered as they walked away from vendors.

"I don't want people spending so much money on me."

Carla scoffed. "You hush up, you deserve to get spoiled."

Eren disagreed but didn't say much about it. "I'm going to go with Levi to get something to eat," he said. "I'll see you when we're done."

"Alright, I'll be watching some of the other teams."

They said their goodbyes and Eren set off to find his boyfriend within all the vendors. He found him at a place that sold color guard equipment and pulled him away once he was finished looking. "Find anything good?"

"Yeah, there are a couple of flag silks I want. I don't really need anything else they're selling," Levi mumbled. "Are you hungry?"

"Yeah, I was actually going to ask you that."

"Well, let's get something to eat and watch whatever team is on in the cafeteria."
Eren cocked an eyebrow at him. "We can watch them in the cafeteria?"

"Mhm," Levi hummed, taking the lead, trying to find the cafeteria. "At championships, they have a television or two set up that show what's going on in the gym live."

Eren would've been surprised if it weren't for the fact that there were always so many surprises involving color guard.

After getting trays of food, they wormed their way through the crowded cafeteria to find a seat near one of the televisions showing the performances. Levi would tell Eren how the teams placed the year prior, if he could remember. Eren would rate each team out of ten and Levi would do the same. It was nice to have a relaxed moment after the most stressful part of their day was over.

In between routines, Levi tossed a glance over his shoulder and immediately turned back, scoffing. Eren noticed his annoyance and fixed him with a look. "Something wrong?"

"Don't look now," Levi advised. "But there's a group of people behind us that are all just staring."

Eren waited a moment before looking around as if to scan the area, when he saw a huddle of around six people eyeing the two of them. He faced the television again, just as Levi did as he spoke. "Aren't you used to it though?" He teased.

"Yeah, but when it gets that bad, it's just disrespectful." Levi shook his head in disbelief. "It's like they expect something to happen or for us to approach them sometimes."

Eren shot them a quick glance again, and like Levi said, they all looked rather hopeful as he looked back. "It's kind of creepy too," he commented.

"It is," Levi agreed. "One time, my friend Gunther got asked out by somebody who watched the show and they threw a fit when he said no. They felt so entitled to him for some reason and wouldn't stop harassing him. It was a little funny to watch them freak out, but it was a bit scary too."

Eren huffed out an amused breath. "That's taking it too far." He took a moment trying to think of a way to prevent that from happening and send the message that they had no interest in them. "We should make it obvious to them that we're not available, I don't want to go through that."

"What do you suggest?" Levi asked tiredly.

Eren shrugged before he brought his hand to the base of Levi's neck, bringing him closer to seal a kiss. Levi widened his eyes in surprise, but in no way rejected the kiss. After a few moments, more muscles in Levi's face relaxed and he gave the gesture more movement. It wasn't often that they would show affection in public. The last time they did something like this, Levi was at work and there were few people surrounding them. The fact that Eren was doing this to prove that he was taken made Levi's chest tighten with a renewed rush of affection.

They separated languidly, taking the time to admire each other at such a short distance. "What are they doing now?" Levi whispered.

Eren peaked over his shoulder. He almost began cackling at the four mortified faces staring back, and the two other girls who were too embarrassed to make eye contact. "I think they got the message," he chuckled.

"And you're mine," Eren countered.

~

Their team lined up along with all the other schools competing, waiting to enter the gymnasium for their final retreat. It was sad to think about, but luckily they were only thinking about their placing rather than the finality of it all.

"What if we got last place?" Sasha wondered aloud. "Oh my god, I'm gonna be sick."

"O-oh gosh, don't do that!" Marco tried comforting her, rubbing circles on her back and giving her breathing tips.

"She could be right," Bertolt said. "We could be last." His forehead started to sweat and he looked so lost.

"Easy there, Bert," Nanaba hushed, stroking his arm. "Everything will be alright, I promise."

"Yeah, even if we do get last, we'll be okay," Annie added. "Remember, Rico said we did great, so our performance wasn't bad."

Everyone stressed over how they did, of course. Soon, the announcer introduced each team, one by one, signaling them to enter the gym. Once their team was called, they walked a single file line with bright smiles that hid their anxiety as Rico instructed to do. As they traveled to their spot, they all scanned the audience, picking out their family in friends within the ocean of spectators.

They found their place next to the team that was called before them. Seeing as every other team was grouped together haphazardly, they didn't bother staying in a neat line and bundled up together. It seemed like forever until each team was out on the floor and the announcer was finished thanking all the attendants and getting the crowd excited for the awards. They said all the obligatory statements, like how the judges had a difficult time deciding places and how all the shows were better than ever.

"In thirty-third place, is..." along came the torturous, exaggerated pause. "Quinta Winter Guard!"

Eren let out a sigh of relief. At least they weren't dead last.

With each guard listed off, their hearts grew tighter and tighter with the anticipation that settled in. It didn't matter what they placed anymore, they just needed to know. Not knowing was killing them.

"We're in the top ten," Hanji whispered once the eleventh place winners were announced.

"I can't take it anymore," Isabel murmured.

More and more were listed off, adding on to their stress. It felt like centuries had passed by. Their feet were shaking, their eyes couldn't focus and their breathing became irregular.

"And the fifth place winners are..." Curses were muttered for the unbearably long silence he took. "Homeland Winter Guard!"

Annie and Bertolt cheered rather enthusiastically for that team, seeing as it was their old school.
"Getting closer," Christa said, tapping her foot.

None of them could believe it when they were left with one other school. It couldn't be true. But there they were, with only two slots left and heads full of both hope and apprehension. It was coming, and regardless of what happened, none of them were ready.

"And now, the winners of this year's Winter Guard State Championships..."

"May your shoelaces unravel spontaneously, everyday for the rest of your life for pausing that long," Hanji hissed under their breath.

"In first place, is..." The delay persisted once more. "Trost High Winter Guard! Leaving Mitras High in second place!"

The shock that followed came like a flood. But the elation that gripped them was so much stronger and held them so tightly, Hanji nearly forgot to start walking to accept their trophy. Once their ears were ringing with the blaring noise the audience gave off, people came to hand each of the members of their guard their medals.

Eren bowed his head as the stranger set the blue ribbon around his neck that held a small, gold medal at the base that weighed only enough for him to notice its presence. He looked over to Levi as he received his, and they beamed at each other, feeling the pride swell in their chests. They searched the audience to find their friends and family racing towards them with their arms wide open. Kutchel wrapped her arms around her children with joyous tears streaming down her face and a camera in her hand that had obviously been out taking pictures prior to her arrival. Carla ran with a manic grin that matched Eren's, holding her phone as she had also most likely been taking a video. She gripped her son in a bear hug, soon joined by Armin and Mikasa tackling their best friend.

As Eren was being smothered, he looked around, seeing Annie's father embrace her tightly, along with Reiner celebrating with her and Bertolt. Jean came up to rejoice with Marco, Connie lifted Sasha in his arms, Petra's parents were nearly screaming, Hitch and Marlo came from their team to congratulate everyone, Erwin rushed to offer his old friends high fives, and Mike first stopped to celebrate with Nanaba. He shifted to see Moblit, Erd, and Gunther went as far as to pick up Hanji and lift them into the air. Eren even saw several teachers from their school come to tell their students how proud they were, and since Mr. Bozado was the Ackerman's neighbor, that gave him more of a reason to show up. After Christa and Ymir finished shouting in glee, people who Eren assumed were Christa's family came to surround her. Several strangers Eren didn't recognize came to greet individual members and it dawned on him that this wasn't just an important moment for the him and his friends.

~

Rico couldn't quit smiling as she led her team to the unfamiliar school's auditorium with a box under her arm. "I'll pass out the berets once we get there."

Eren tapped on Levi's shoulder to get his attention. "Berets?"

"Yeah," Levi hummed. "It's a color guard tradition, not just for our school. Once championships are over, the teams take a group photo wearing berets. Kind of as way of paying respect to the sport
and its origins, you know?"

Eren nodded in understanding.

Once they reached the auditorium, another team was moving out, bearing purple berets. They moved in, followed by parents who also wanted photos of their own. Rico dropped down the box, waving her hand, gesturing for the team to stand in front of a curtain that was set up for this specific purpose. She had everyone in the red uniforms line up in the back arrangement by height with Hanji in the center. Then, those in blue uniforms were asked to stand on their knees in front. Rico passed out black berets, instructing them all to tip them to the same side.

Rico stood back with the parents, pulling a camera out of the box and waiting until the team wore pleasant yet stoic expressions. They all snapped a few photos that would be used professionally. Rico checked all her photos, deciding she had enough that were decent. She looked back up at the team, who all seemed to be tired and impatient. She rolled her eyes, sighing exasperatedly. "Fine, we can take a funny one."

The excitement that came from her guard made her want to laugh.

"Bertolt! Quick!" Farlan shouted. "Carry me bridal style!" He leaped into a very anxious Bertolt's arms, throwing back an arm and kicking up a leg.

"Oh, Levi," Eren quipped. "That looks fun, we should do that too!" He climbed up into his boyfriend's reluctant arms, earning a half-hearted roll of the eyes from him.

"Big bro, don't fall!" Isabel hollered.

"What do you mean— oof!" Levi huffed as Isabel jumped onto his back, nearly losing his balance as she had warned him. "Goddamn it."

"Ymir!" Sasha called. "We have to do those stereotypical rapper poses they do on their album covers."

"That's a great idea," Ymir said, squatting down with Sasha as they brought their hands up to their faces as if they were in prayer, holding pensive expressions.

Hanji dove to the ground in front of Sasha and Ymir, putting a hand on their hip and another holding up their head. "Paint me like one of your French girls, Rico," they joked, making Rico grimace.

"Annie, Nanaba," Christa said. "You two are strong, right? Can I hang on your biceps and do a split?"

Neither of the girls had any complaints with that. They flexed, letting Christa grab a hold of each of their arms as she waited for Rico to give the okay before hanging on them to go into a split.

Petra ushered Marco over to her, so she they could stand back to back with their arms interlocked. "Lift me onto your back!" Petra ordered. "Rico, am I allowed to do this?" She stuck up her middle finger at the camera, giggling sheepishly.

Rico sighed. "Whatever." Petra and Marco took on emotionless faces while the others appeared to be in character or laughing too hard. "Is everyone ready?" A unanimous 'yes' followed. "Okay, Christa get in position." Said girl lifted her feet from the ground, doing a split and depending on the other girls for balance. Rico, along with all the parents, took as many pictures as possible. "Okay, we got them." Rico announced as she checked her photos.
The team burst out into roaring laughter and dropped their poses. Some were literally dropped, landing on their bottoms.

Rico pinched the bridge of her nose. "I can't with you guys..."

The laughter only persisted after her griping.

~

Back at the hotel, Rico ordered dinner for everyone and brought back sweets from the competition for dessert. People crowded in different rooms, celebrating in little groups together. Hanji, Mike, and Moblit came to Eren, Levi, Mikasa, and Armin, eating their dinner with them.

"Can I see your medal again?" Mikasa asked her brother.

"Yeah," Eren answered, handing over the gold. He made sure to not get any of his show makeup on the ribbon. They had all changed out of the uniforms, but decided to keep on the makeup.

Mikasa turned the medal in he hand, examining it closely. "This is so cool," she mumbled.

Eren smiled at her.

"It's a good thing you got first place, considering this was your last chance." Mikasa handed it back.

Eren's grin lessened. The bittersweetness finally hit him as he realized that he'd never experience this again. "Damn, I'm never going to get to do this again, ever. I'm gonna miss this."

"That's not necessarily true," Hanji interjected. "There are teams in colleges. And there's individuals coming up!"

Eren narrowed his eyebrows in curiosity at them. "What are individuals?"

"Just about the most fun thing ever!" They exaggerated, moving to sit on the bed with him. "They go by different names, but it's this thing where you make up your own routine and you get to choose everything! The uniform, the equipment, the moves, the song; everything! You can do it alone or with other people, and there's no limit on team members. You can make as many routines as you want and we all get medals and it's so fun, you have to do it!" They started bouncing in their spot, unable to contain their excitement.

"That does sound like fun," Eren agreed with a bit of hope building up. "Can people perform with others who aren't on the team?" He wondered about Annie and Bertolt, seeing as they may wish to be with friends from their old school.

"You can do it with anyone," Levi said. "I'm doing one with my mom this year. I do most years."

"Eren, we're doing a color guard show!" Mikasa demanded after hearing that.

"Hey, I want to do one too!" Armin added.

Eren felt overwhelmed with all the offers. "Okay, okay! We can all do one together!" He promised.
"What about me?" Levi pouted exaggeratedly, inching closer to Eren and getting in his personal space. "Don't you want to do a show with me too?"

Eren's face flushed as he scooted back to get some air. "O-of course I do! I can do one with you and one with my friends."

Levi smiled at how worked up he was getting and gave his cheek a wet kiss. His friends all pretended to be disgusted, mocking them innocently.

"Get a room, you two!" Moblit said.

"My eyes are burning at the abomination!" Mike half shrieked.

"Get your gross, gay ass out of here!" Mikasa spit out through giggles.

Eren shook his head and brought Levi in for another, more intense kiss, earning more fake complaints. In that moment, he couldn't think of a place he'd rather be than right there, drunk on the exhilaration of their victory and surrounded by his favorite people in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Super special thanks to my fabulous beta who makes everything better and is perfect!

Originally this chapter was going to include Eren's birthday. Then, I saw how long it was and was like "HELL NAH FOOL"

Everything that they saw at the championships, vendor wise, is real, I've seen all of it. I actually have one of those rifles with the quotes on it and it says "shoot for the moon, even if missed, you'll land in the stars." And it's got these cute little stenciled on moon and stars. And I actually have that pin that says "it wasn't a drop, it was a floor catch." I might put pictures of my color guard trinkets and other cool things on my tumblr soon, who knows.

Sorry for those who are still in color guard if this isn't accurate to the championships. I haven't been in it in years, but I tried to describe it as true to my memory as I could make it. At first, I remembered getting in uniform the day after performing to accept awards, but I couldn't remember why or even if that memory was real. I did my best to recreate the setting. God, I miss color guard.

AND IM SORRY FOR BEING SO PREDICTABLE WITH THEM GETTING FIRST PLACE. I WAS ORIGINALLY GOING TO MAKE THEM FOURTH BUT HONEY I DID NOT PUT THEM THROUGH SO MUCH FOR THEM TO NOT WIN. I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO DO IT.

As promised, here's the color guard routine to go with the chapter! (They use a song from my favorite band, don't make fun of me for liking them, I already pick on myself for it) https://youtu.be/9UiV_PvpCB8

Please leave a comment or kudos if you liked this chapter, it would mean so much! My tumblrs are dr-s--art (my fan fic/art blog) & the-witch-daddy. (My ereri/color guard blog) thank you so much for reading!!! <3 ^_^
Eren's birthday arrives, the boys have a little friendly competition, and everyone is working on their individual performances.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry this is so late, I've been very busy lately and I have a lot of work to get done on deadlines. That, and I sorta hit a minor creative block.

Feel free to skip past the sex scene in this, it's utter garbage, I'm not kidding. I cringe just skimming through it.

Enjoy! Translations are at the bottom.

Eren walked home with Mikasa from school for the week following the championships. Three days of having no practice for color guard was etching away at his mind. Everything felt so dull, but seeing as that day was his birthday, his mood was lightened a bit more than the previous days. Especially considering all the guard members were oh-so enthusiastic and impatient to find him and wish him a happy birthday.

"Is Levi coming over tonight?" Mikasa asked.

"Yeah," Eren answered. "He asked to have an earlier shift today so he could show up before night. He won't be here right away, but eventually."

Mikasa nodded. "Now don't be expecting a gift from me. Winning the championships is enough of a birthday gift I my opinion." Eren chuckled. "I'm joking, I did get you something."

"You didn't have to," Eren reminded her.

"Shut up, you're my brother, of course I did."

They arrived home, kicking off their shoes haphazardly after closing the door behind them. Eren barely had time to process the change in setting before his mother's arms were keeping him in place, forcing the air out of his lungs. "Happy birthday!" she beamed, kissing the side of his face.

"Ma, give me some room," he wheezed, wiggling out of her grasp. Though, once free, he smiled at her gratefully. "Thanks, though."

"Hurry up and get settled on the couch," she instructed him. "I want to give you something before your father gets home." She winked at him, then excused herself to retrieve his presents.

Eren left his book bag up in his room and quickly leaped downstairs to occupy the space on the
couch next to Mikasa. Carla came out with her lips tucked in to hide her wild grin. She held her hands behind her back as she approached Eren and stumbled over her words sheepishly. "This won't be your only gift and I'm sorry if it's not amazing, but it's made with a lot of love." She handed him the bag she was hiding with tissue paper sticking out the top.

Eren accepted it gladly. "I'm sure I'll love it," he assured her. Removing the paper delicately, he peeked into the bag and pulled out its contents. A smile worked its way onto his features as he saw the colorful, yet sloppy material that came out. Without any hesitation, he threw the rainbow scarf around his neck, not minding the loose pieces of yarn sticking out in all directions.

Carla fiddled nervously with her hands. "I know it's not the greatest, but I only had such a short time to make it. You don't have to wear it, it's more of a way for me to show you that I'm going to do everything I can to show my support for you. I made it so you know that I'm not just going to tolerate you being gay, I'm going to celebrate it. I know it's a bit ugly—"

"It isn't," Eren silenced her. "I love it. I'm going to wear it whenever I can." He clutched the scarf in his hands, admiring the softness of the material she had chosen. "Thank you, mom." He stood to enclose her in a gentle hug.

"You're not just saying those things to spare my feelings, are you?" She asked.

"Of course not." Eren put some distance between them so he could look at her. "It's perfect, and it's even more special because you made it for me."

"Beats my gift," Mikasa muttered under her breath. Eren and Carla chuckled at her comment.

~

"Goddamn it!" Carla exclaimed in frustration. "I forgot to pick up your cake. I'll have to go and get it." She looked to Eren, who was still relaxing on the couch. "I'm sorry, sweetie. I guess I should go get it now."

"It's alright, it's not your fault," Eren told her.

"Would you like to come with? It takes a half hour to get to the store."

Eren pondered it over for a moment. "Nah, Levi will be here soon. I don't want him to come to an empty house."

"I'll come with," Mikasa offered. "We can pick up Armin on our way back too."

"Alright, that sounds fair," Carla agreed. She gave Eren one last hug before she departed with Mikasa.

Eren waited around, not having any exciting plans in mind. It was around five minutes after his family left when he heard a knock at the door, making him glad he decided to wait at home. He leaped from his seat to answer the door, unsurprised when he found Levi standing behind it, the cloudy sky framing his silhouette as he stepped through the door. The door was shut, and he was taken up into strong arms, smothered with kisses from his boyfriend once he set down his bag carrying Eren's gifts. Eren couldn't help the giggles that bubbled up as Levi assaulted him lovingly with his lips. "Hey, birthday boy," Levi breathed against his skin, smile apparent.
"Hey, Levi," Eren chortled, leaving a kiss on his lips. "How was work?"

"Shitty, like always," came his curt reply. "Anyways, how's your birthday so far?"

"It's good," Eren answered, reluctantly pulling himself off his boyfriend. "My mom and sister just left to pick up the cake and go get Armin."

"Where's your dad?"

"Work, where else?" Eren said, rolling his eyes.

"How dare they all leave you alone on your birthday. You need to be treated like a king from the minute you wake up until you fall asleep. Of course, everyday should go like that for you, though," Levi smirked.

"Shut up." Eren lightly shoved Levi's shoulder.

"That's a nice scarf," Levi commented, lifting up the end.

"My mom made it for me." Levi adored how happy he looked just then, grateful for the handmade gift he'd received.

Levi chuckled. "So, when are they going to be back so we can eat some cake?"

"Who says you can eat my cake?" Eren joked.

"I'm going to be eating something of yours, I know that much." Levi raked his eyes up and down his body, not trying to be subtle in the least. "How much time do we have?"

"A little over an hour," Eren said, face heating up.

"I'd say that gives us enough time, don't you think?" Levi smirked.

"I guess we'll have to find out."

~

Somehow, Eren had tricked Levi into letting him top again. Well, not so much as 'tricked' as simply playing the 'it's my birthday, let me do what I want' card.

Eren had Levi on his elbows and knees on his bed, face down into the pillows with his raven necklace dangling close to his chin, hands clutching at the sheets desperately. Levi screwed his eyes shut, biting his lip to prevent himself from letting loose all the submissive noises that would pour out of his mouth if he hadn't done otherwise. Eren was relentless as usual, thrusting deeply into him, abandoning all care.

As much as Levi was loving every bit of pleasure his boyfriend was giving him, he felt like Eren should've been on the receiving end. It was his birthday after all, and Levi didn't want him to have to do all the work, despite the fact that he heard no complaints. So, before he could get close to his climax, he devised a plan.

"Ah, hold on a second," he breathed.
Eren hips immediately stilled as he gently pulled out, letting go of Levi's waist. "Levi? Are you okay? Did I hurt you?" Concern was written all over Eren's face as he helped Levi turn around.


"L-Levi?"

"Shh," Levi silenced him. "Just watch, mon loup." He took a hold of Eren's cock, lining it up with his entrance, slowly sinking down, savoring the other's euphoric expression. "Let me make you feel good."

Eren nodded enthusiastically, letting Levi do whatever he pleased. Levi started a slow rhythm, rolling his hips once he was fully seated. He took Eren's hands and led them to feel his skin, starting from his knees, going up to the outer and inner portions of his thighs and over his hips. He guided them fleetingly over his ass then up to his waist, reaching up to pectorals. Eren couldn't get over the beautifully untainted texture of Levi's skin that laid over his sculpted muscles. He let him take his hands further down to his abdomens, then down to exactly where Levi wanted them. All the while, Levi kept his hips rocking and Eren glued his eyes to Levi's body and his sultry facial expressions.

As Eren placed one hand on Levi's hip and let the other languidly stroke his cock, thumbing over his piercing, Levi took his own hands away to comb his hair back so it would stay out of his eyes. Eren looked on, entranced, watching Levi breathe heavily with one hand holding his sweaty locks back with the other failing down to the juncture of his neck and shoulder. He wanted to leave marks all over that glistening canvas, he wanted to smother him with his lips.

Levi's parted lips curled into a slight smirk. "Tu aimes ça?" At that moment, he knew that if Eren wasn't already falling apart, he certainly was then. "Ah, mon ange," he breathed, lolling his head back, and beginning to slide up and down on his lover, aware that he wasn't about to look away. "Tu m'excites... tu est tellement sexy." He tried everything he could to drive him insane.

Eren moaned. 'Fuck, I know what that one means,' he thought. 'God, he's too much.'

"J'aime ça. Baises-moi plus fort, mon loup." He grasped at Eren's waist to steady himself as he rode him at a quicker pace.

Eren was lost in Levi's beautiful words, though he couldn't understand them. He started thrusting up into Levi, meeting him halfway, groaning out his name. "F-fuck... Levi."

"E-Eren!" Levi moaned, feeling him hit his prostate head-on. "Prends-moi plus fort!" He'd gotten to the point where it didn't occur to him to return to English so Eren could understand his requests; he was too far gone.

Levi was the first to reach his release, coming across their stomachs and in Eren's hand. Eren followed soon after, emptying himself into Levi.

After they were both sated, Levi collapsed onto Eren, bringing him into an uncoordinated, yet passionate kiss. He explored his lover's mouth, tasting every inch he could while running his fingers through Eren's hair, messing it up more than it already had been. Once they parted, Levi stayed mere centimeters away, ghosting his lips over Eren's once more, flicking out his tongue to give Eren's abused lips one last taste.

His fingers remained threaded in the other's hair with his eyes bearing down into Eren's, keeping
him caged in that very spot.

They breathed each other's air, letting that be the only sound filling the space between them aside from their hearts pounding in their ears. The only thing running through Eren's mind was how on earth was he so lucky to have had a sex god for a boyfriend? He snaked his arms around Levi's waist. "God..." he breathed. "I'm so in love with you."

He didn't voice it, but those words meant everything to Levi to hear. He tried to fill the silence by requiting what Eren had said. "I'm in love with you too." To him, it was different from simply saying 'I love you.' To him, it meant devotion, and he wanted to tell Eren that. "Happy birthday, angel."

Eren grinned widely through his labored breaths. "You're so perfect."

'I'm not,' Levi wanted to say. "You are." He sealed their lips together one last time.

~

After taking a five-minute shower, Levi reentered Eren's bedroom to find him just starting to get dressed. "Your room finally has some... character," he commented, noticing the posters as he sat on the bed. He liked it now. It felt more like Eren lived there.

"Yeah I guess it has," Eren said, not really paying attention. He was more focused on the task of getting his pants on.

Levi stared once more. The taller caught him in the act as he picked up his shirt from the ground. "Stop staring," he chastised halfheartedly. "What is it with you and my ass?"

Levi shrugged. "I like asses, and you just happen to have the best one. Can you blame me?" He put his hands behind his head and fell backwards, laying down peacefully. "Speaking of asses, mine is sore."

"It's because you didn't stretch enough," Eren mocked, giggling whilst he threw on his shirt.

Levi glared at him. "You were the one who stretched me, I'd say it's your fault."

"It's my birthday, I get a get-out-of-jail-free card!" Eren was quick to say.

Levi chuckled. "Alright." He sat himself up, and looked aimlessly around. His focus was taken by movement out of Eren's window. "Your family's here."

"Perfect timing," Eren hummed, throwing on his scarf.

Levi couldn't help but let a fond smile cross his features. He liked how he was now wearing a symbol of pride for something he was once so determined to hide. "That scarf looks good on you."

"Thank you," Eren said, his expression mirroring Levi's. "Let's meet them downstairs." He walked out of his room with Levi in tow, settling in a seat at the kitchen table.

Carla, Mikasa, and Armin came through the door beaming, Carla holding a long, white box containing Eren's birthday cake. She set it down on the table, smiling all the while. "Hello, Levi! When did you get here?"
"Hi mom," Eren cut in with a grin, as if to say 'you forgot to notice your own son.'

"Oh, you stop that!" Carla huffed exasperatedly, but stilled walked over to place a kiss on his head. "You and your sister are always doing that, trying to make me feel guilty for tending to the guest first. Anyways, Levi, when did you get here?" She tried again.

"A little less than an hour ago," Levi answered.

Carla nodded. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Don't worry about it." Levi waved her off, sending Eren a knowing glance, which he kicked him under the table for.

Armin interrupted the moment when he figured he had room to. "I brought your present, Eren. Sorry I forgot to bring it to school."

"You didn't need to get me anything at all."

"Lies, all lies," Armin argued.

~

After they'd all gotten settled in, Eren declared that the cake would be their dinner, his reasoning being that he 'was now a legal adult, who made adult decisions and his first decision in such a position was to eat cake for dinner.' Carla didn't protest - secretly hoping he'd ask for that - and lit his candles.

After they'd finished, Carla announced that Grisha would not be home until late and he had given her permission to give Eren most of his gifts before he came home. Eren couldn't be surprised anymore.

Mikasa went first. "I don't want to follow anyone who has a really cool gift that I can't compete with. So, I go first," she explained.

Eren chuckled, accepting her present and unwrapped it carefully. "Ah, nice," he mumbled as he unfolded the band shirt she'd given him. "Metallica... I've been needing something from them."

Mikasa huffed out a relieved breath. "Good, I'm in the clear."

"I'm next!" Armin chirped, handing Eren his package.

Eren thanked Armin for book he bought for him that told the history and evolution of rock music. He'd never been much of a reader, but since this pertained to his new and growing interest, he found that he was rather excited to crack it open.

Carla couldn't contain her excitement, so Levi offered for her to go before him. She thanked him and offered Eren only one gift, so she could calm down some. Her gift was a brand new pair of sneakers. "I looked up what the best shoes would be for your parkour hobby."

"... You mean 'parkour'" Eren corrected.

"Sure," Carla agreed. "Every website told me these were the best."
Eren slipped them on to test them out. "I feel faster already," he joked. "Thanks mom, they're great." He stood to give her a hug before sitting down again.

Levi enthusiastically presented Eren with his bag, setting it next to him. "There are some things in there that aren't from me," he added.

Eren raised a skeptical brow. "Oh?" He reached in and pulled out the first thing he found. He plucked out a card with a simple cover and opened it to reveal an umpteen amount of signatures and messages. "Is this everyone in the guard?"

"Everyone plus a few," Levi explained.

Eren saw what he meant when he saw signatures from Connie, Reiner, Levi's mother, and Levi's old friends. "That's so nice of everyone," he hummed. He set it down and picked out the next thing, which happened to be a framed page. He examined it, instantly knowing that Kutchel had made it. It was a scrapbook page with pictures of him and Levi along with everyone else from the color guard at the championships. The page was decorated with the colors of their teams uniforms, and had miniature color guard equipment made out of paper. Dates and descriptions were beautifully written beside each photo. "Your mother is so talented," he breathed, admiring the page.

"Let me see!" Carla hopped over to look at the page, anxious to see another one of Kutchel's creations.

"Thanks," Levi said. "She made two just like that. One that she could keep and one for you. Although, she's still making more I think."

"It's so beautiful! She has to teach me how to make this," Carla said.

"Will you tell her I said thank you and that I love it?" Eren asked.

"Of course, now open the rest of your gift."

The brunet did as asked, pawing through the bag. "As you wish," he mocked. A wrapped box was the last thing sitting in the bag. He unwrapped it without much care of where the wrapping paper landed. He uncovered the box set filled with CDs.

"I noticed how much you like Green Day, so I got you the whole collection," Levi elaborated.

Eren grinned wildly. "Thank you so much, that's so thoughtful." He leaned in to kiss Levi on the cheek. He couldn't enjoy it for long, as he could see his mother fidgeting in her seat out of the corner of his eye. "Okay, ma. You can—"

"Yes!" Carla jumped from her seat and left the room to get Eren's other presents.

Eren rolled his eyes and Levi started chuckling. "Now I know where you get your impatience from," the latter noted.

~

Eren looked at his new flag and saber in awe as he sat on the ground in his bedroom. His mother had given him a flag with two extra silks that he could change out, along with a saber. Since he
never had to give up his rifle, he now had all the equipment he'd need permanently. "How could she hide these from me for that long?"

"Our mom did the same thing for us a couple of times," Levi explained, sitting on Eren's bed. "It's not hard to hide them. All she'd need to do is talk to Rico after buying it at the championships and they'd bring it to the bus while you were gone."

Eren hummed in response. "That was so nice of her. I'm kinda glad she didn't give these to me when my dad got home. He would've been pissed."

Levi sighed. He hated that it was normal for Eren to succumb to that way of thinking. He hated that it was considered a good thing when his own father wasn't present. He hated that his father wasn't supportive of his hobby. But at least he was happy for now. "Now you can have a flag and saber for your individuals routine. If you're making one, that is."

Eren regarded him with a bright smile. "I already told you I'm doing one with you, and one with Armin and Mikasa."

"Right, I forgot."

Eren moved to sit up on the bed with Levi. "Thanks for showing up for my birthday." He closed their distance, sealing their lips in a gentle kiss.

Levi smiled against him. When they pulled back, he set his hand on top of Eren's. "What kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn't do something for you?"

Eren shrugged. "You'd still be perfect."

~

The next day at school, Eren allowed Hanji to take control over their partnered project. He wasn't taking advantage of their knowledge, it was just that they were too excited to wait for his input and he had no problem being left out of something he didn't understand. Eventually, they both reached the point where Eren was dying of boredom while Hanji scribbled away, so he struck up a conversation.

"Hanji, are you doing an individual performance?"

"Of course I am!" they beamed, still writing down answers at a ridiculous pace. "I do several every year. I'd never miss out on individuals!" They looked up from their work. "You and Levi are doing one together, right?"

"Yeah," Eren answered. "I'm doing one with a couple of my friends too."

"Oh, this is going to be so fun!" Hanji chimed.

"I'm a little nervous, you know, cuz I'll be the one putting together the routine with my friends and I'll have to help make a routine with Levi. I've only been in color guard this year and I'm not sure how good the routines will be."

"It doesn't have to be this huge, elaborate routine like ours," Hanji assured him. "And the point is to
have fun, not be the best. Everyone gets some sort of metal anyway. Besides, Levi made up his first individual performance all by himself with no one to help, and he did just fine. He was only twelve."

Eren felt a little comforted by that. "How long had he been in the guard before that?"

"... Okay, years. But my point is that it'll be alright. Don't let it stress you out; you'll do great!"

He considered it vaguely. "Was Levi's first performance good?"

Hanji nodded. "It was really good for his age. Really elaborate too. He used the song 'Dragula' by Rob Zombie. He had this heavy, black eye makeup, there was fake blood all over his clothes, and his flag silk had this evil-looking eye on it." They paused to let out a small chuckle. "You should've seen his mother's reaction."

Eren nodded with all the images flooding his mind. "Yeah, I can imagine how freaked out—"

"I've never seen that woman so proud in all my life." Hanji finished, staring off into space nostalgically.

"... Oh," Eren murmured. He should've known better. Kutchel was always so supportive of her children, it was nearly impossible for her to be disturbed by her twelve-year-old son's horror inspired routine.

"You'll have an easier time than you think," Hanji said, turning back to their work. "Don't worry about it."

~

They were right; thinking of a routine wasn't as hard as he thought. Especially when Levi was giving him pointers whenever he could. As he worked with Levi at his house in his practice room, he was picking up strategies on how to put a routine together. They would've been practicing outside since the weather was getting warmer, but having realistic representation the floor they'd be performing on would help them out more.

"Let's take a break," Levi suggested.

Eren agreed, happy to rest as his whole body had broken out into a sweat. "When are we gonna pick a song?" he asked, tossing Levi a water bottle.

Levi shrugged. "Whenever one of us finds one we both like." He took a swig of his water. "Have you been practicing with Mikasa and Armin?"

"We haven't put together a routine yet, or even started. I just showed them the basics, like drop spins and consecutives. Mikasa really likes working with saber;" he said amusedly.

Levi smirked at that, walking over to sit up against the wall. "Does Armin enjoy it?"

Eren joined him by the wall. "He prefers the flag, but overall, he's a bit scared about hitting himself."

"Aren't we all?" Levi joked. "I mean you have to throw, catch, and spin a solid block of wood or
hollowed silicon, a six-foot aluminum pole, and essentially a dulled sword mere inches away from
your face and look like you're not terrified. I don't blame him." He threw back his water bottle,
chugging the rest.

"When you say it like that, we make it look easy," Eren laughed.

Levi scoffed. "Well, I make it look easy at least."

"Hey! I'm pretty good now," Eren argued, crossing his arms.

Levi rolled his eyes. "Whatever you say, mon grand."

Eren giggled, taking a deep breath. "How many performances are you doing?"

Levi lollled his head back, thinking over his answer. "One with you, one with my brother and sister,
one with Hanji, Petra, Nanaba and all our old friends, and one with my mom. So... four."

"Aw, you're doing one with your mom?"

"Yeah," Levi affirmed, grinning. "Isabel, Farlan, and I always do one with her, but this year we're
making one for her and they can't handle learning more than one routine with the time we have."

"Your mom is lucky to have children like you three. You all love her so much." Eren said. "Is your
mom really good at color guard?"

Levi shrugged. "She only does that one performance every year, so it's understandable that she's
not advanced. But, she loves it and she does decently."

Eren nodded in understanding. "I can't believe you're doing four routines. How do have the time?"

"Two of them are rather short. And I plan out our practices and stick to those schedules. Last year,
I did a routine with my mom and siblings, another with Petra, Gunther, and Erd, one with Erwin,
Hanji, and Mike, another by myself, and... one with just Hanji. So that's five and I think that's the
most I've ever done in a year."

Eren could only gawk at him. "Calm down, jeez."

Levi blew an amused breath out of his nose at that.

"Hanji's been in it a long time like you; are they doing that many?"

"No," Levi answered. "They're doing the one with me and our friends, one by themselves, and one
with Moblit. So, they're doing one less, but they've done more than that in the past."

Eren shook his head. "You guys are all crazy." He took a drink of his own water. "So... since you're
making so many routines, you're probably going to be too busy to spend time with me, huh?"

"Well, I'll spend some time with you, of course. It'll just be a bit less than the time we've been
sharing lately."

Eren let out an exaggerated sigh, letting his head fall to Levi's shoulder. "You're no fun," he joked.

Even though he wasn't serious in the slightest, Levi couldn't help but feel a pang in his chest. He
didn't want Eren to get bored of him and leave. He couldn't go through something like that again.
"This weekend."
Eren lifted his head to look at him. "What?"

"I'm busy all this week, but on the weekend, we'll do something fun, I promise."

"Levi, you know I was kidding, right?" Eren held his hand.

"Yeah, but..." Levi tried altering his voice so he didn't sound as worried as he was and acted like he was playing along. "You challenged me. You said I'm no fun, so I'll prove to you that I am. We'll do something fun."

Eren was fooled by his playful tone. "Fine, prove it."

"I just said I would."

Eren laid his head back, giggling. Levi kissed the top of his head. He'd show him, that was for certain.

~

"So, where are we going?" Eren asked as he buckled in his seat belt.

Levi pulled out onto the street once his boyfriend was strapped in and started towards their destination. "It's a surprise."

"That's not fair, tell me," Eren insisted.

Levi shook his head. "Nope. I'm trying to prove that I'm fun, and surprises are fun."

Eren couldn't help but laugh at how seriously he was taking this. "Can I at least have a hint?"

Levi hummed, pondering it over. "Alright. A little birdie told me that you have a competitive side, so I'm taking you somewhere where we can go all out with that."

Eren wouldn't admit it out loud, but he was impressed with the amount of thought he was putting into this. His first instinct was to start guessing, but he did like surprises and he had to agree with Levi when he said it made things more fun.

After a considerable amount of time driving, they ended up in the parking lot of the nearest mall. Eren quirked up an eyebrow at Levi. "Oh yes, because I can show off my competitive spirit at the nearest clothing store or pretzel stand," he drawled sarcastically.

Levi rolled his eyes, unbuckling his seat belt. "There are other things in the mall. Just follow me."

He paused before opening his door. "Although, I would like to see you try to beat the pretzel baker in an arm wrestle."

"Don't tempt me," Eren teased.

They strolled through the mall, hand in hand, Levi aware of the exact location while Eren remained oblivious. Eren wanted to keep a stoic expression when they reached wherever their stop was to keep Levi on his toes, but that idea went out the window when he started leading him towards an arcade and his mouth widened into a Cheshire grin. Levi smirked to himself, aware that he had made the right decision.
"Did I do good?" Levi asked, already knowing the answer.

"Hmm... we'll see when we start playing." Eren didn't want to give him an inch. "I'll be honest, though. I can't wait to kick your ass."

"Watch it, don't get cocky," Levi warned.

~

Eren had every right to be cocky. As it turned out, Levi was terrible at everything they tried and the severe lack of tickets won compared to Eren was embarrassing. But the brunet was having a blast, and that was enough to keep Levi from quitting.

"Levi! We should play ski ball! Please?" he begged, tugging on his boyfriend's arm.


They maneuvered towards the game, the taller of the two bounding ahead to put in his coins to play. The game started up with lights going off and music playing to signify the ski balls were coming down the slot. "Age before beauty," Eren said, stepping away with a cheeky grin.

Levi glared back at him, stepping up. "I'm only a few months older than you," he grumbled. Regardless, he took a ball and prepared himself, eyes focusing on the holes. He swung his arm back, slinging it forward to roll the ball. Utter disappointment crossed his features when it barely gained any air and rolled into the lowest scoring hole.

Eren started cackling at his horrible skills, which had Levi shuffling away in shame. This was going to be interesting.

~

"I don't know what to get..." Eren complained at the prize booth.

Levi wished he was in his position. Eren had a whopping bucket full of tickets while he only had twenty-eight lousy tickets.

"That light up jacket is pretty tempting," Eren commented.

"I swear to god, if you get that, I'm breaking up with you," Levi groaned.

Eren laughed at his bitterness. "How about that wolf statue? That's pretty badass." He pointed to the ceramic, two foot statue of wolves in a forest scene. "I'm gonna get that." He offered up his tickets the person accepting them and told them what he'd claim as his prize.

"Out of all the things here, you choose that?" Levi asked with his pierced brow raised.

"What would you get if you had all these tickets?" Eren challenged.
Levi pondered it over. "...The lava lamp seems cool," he mumbled.

"I don't want the lava lamp." Eren grinned happily when his prize was set before him. "What are you gonna get?"

Levi weighed his options, being rather limited. He settled for something slightly useful. "I'll take the light up pumpkin." It was small, able to fit in his hand, but it served a practical function. Unlike Eren's wolf statue.

Once their treasures were collected, they headed out. When they reached the car, Eren was able to relax his arms after having to carry his prize.

"So..." Levi drawled. "Would you say that this was fun?"

"Yeah, obviously," Eren scoffed, rolling his eyes.

"So, that would mean that I'm fun for planning this, right?" Levi said, his voice laced with mischief.

Eren realized what he'd just done and gave in. "Yeah, I guess you're kinda fun," he teased.

"Kinda?"

"Okay, you're really fun," Eren relented.

Levi smiled victoriously as he drove off to bring his boyfriend back home. "Now it's your turn."

"Hm?"

"It's your turn," he repeated. "I proved that I can be fun, now you have to prove that you can be too."

Eren smirked, thinking of all the possibilities of what he could come up with to entertain his boyfriend. "I've got an idea, but we have to wait until the weather works out for it."

Levi felt a tinge of suspicion. "What does the weather have to do with it?"

"You'll see," was all Eren said.

A week later, Eren decided that the weather was in fact suitable for what he needed to show Levi that he too could be fun. He invited him over to his house, instructing him to bring shoes with good traction, to which Levi nearly replied that he had none, since his closet was filled with platforms and heels. Luckily, he found one old pair of black sneakers hidden deep within his closet.

Levi arrived, feeling a tad skeptical, but was optimistic nonetheless. He was greeted with Eren bending over to tie his new shoes that his mother had given him on his birthday. "So, what are the plans for today?" Levi inquired.

"You'll see in a bit," Eren answered, standing up, taking a packed case and slinging around his shoulder. He turned to shout into the living room. "Ma, Levi and I will be back in a bit!"
"Alright, have fun!" Carla hollered back.

Eren started walking out the door. "Let's go," he invited Levi.

The two walked out into the fresh air, admiring the warm breeze. It had started getting much warmer, but since the sky was overcast, they weren't feeling overheated. It was the perfect comfort level for the activities they'd be engaging in.

Levi followed the taller out to his back yard that led to a patch of tall grass before a slightly wooded area began. "Are we going on a walk?" Levi asked.

"Stop being impatient," Eren chastised him. "We're getting there." He adjusted the case he carried, and continued traveling through the vast expanse of grass, the dew sticking to his jeans, shoes and even on his jacket, all the way up to the elbow.

Levi wasn't overly fond of his clothes getting wet, even though they were nowhere near soaking, but he pressed on, trusting Eren's judgment. They headed into the wooded area, Eren inspecting things as he passed through, seemingly looking for something. He halted at the base of one particularly large tree, nodding to himself. "We're here," he announced.

Levi cocked a brow at him. "... Okay... and what exactly are we doing here?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Eren asked. "Follow me." He secured a hand on the lowest branch, hoisting himself up to begin ascending the trunk.

"We're... climbing trees?" Levi questioned.

"Yeah, now come on!" Eren chuckled, proceeding to climb higher.

Levi figured it could be fun, so he kept his mouth shut and started climbing. He wasn't as accustomed to this activity as Eren was, so it took him quite awhile to catch up.

Eren would look back down every so often to check on Levi, but he never slowed his pace or stopped to let him catch up. He only continued hoisting himself up with ease, having done this a million times over. At last, after a while, he reach a high point with plenty of stable and horizontal branches where he could sit. "We're here," he said. When he received no response, he casted his gaze downwards to find Levi only halfway up the tree.

"I'm stuck," Levi admitted reluctantly.

Eren giggled, hopping down to the branch beneath him, starting to come down to assist Levi. "How did you get stuck?" he asked as he descended the tree.

"There's nowhere I can move from here," Levi explained, searching for a free branch.

"There's one right above you!" Eren pointed out. "Just leap for it."

"I'm not a parkour freak like you," Levi scoffed.

Eren eventually reached the branch he was talking about and held out a hand for Levi to grab. "Come on, I'll help you up."
Soon enough, with his boyfriend's aid, Levi came to the point where Eren had already settled before. Eren took the case off his shoulder and unzipped it. He pulled out several snacks, setting some on his lap and handing the rest to Levi.

Levi smirked as he accepted his food. "This was your plan? To have a picnic up in the trees?" He teased. "How romantic."

"Don't you think it's much more fun to eat outside, up in the air?" Eren said, leaning back with a giddy smile.

"Okay, I guess you're right," Levi admitted. "Extra points for creativity."

They had their lunch in a shared silence, taking in the fresh air and whatever sun light made its way through the clouds. Levi didn't voice his thoughts, but he loved the way the world looked from that height. He mentally applauded Eren for his brilliant idea. "Okay, you're fun," he relented.

Eren simpered brightly at that. "Believe it or not, this isn't even the main thing I have planned. But we have to wait."

"I'm willing to wait."

~

Back at the house, in Eren's room, they rested from their tree climbing adventure.

"Nice spot for the wolf statue," Levi noted, pointing to it as it sat atop Eren's desk.

"Thanks," Eren replied lazily. "How are all your individual routines going?" he asked, leaning into Levi's side.

"Really well," Levi answered. "Most of them are halfway done. Then all there's left to do is practice until individuals. Which reminds me, we still need to pick a song. Once we pick one, we can wrap everything up."

"We'll find one soon," Eren promised.

"There's a specific toss I want to teach you, but it's a little difficult. If we start practicing it, we could incorporate it in our routine. But we need to find a song first to make sure it'll fit nicely."

"I get what you're hinting at," Eren chuckled. "I'll start thinking of a song."

Levi snorted. "There's no rush," he said, placing a kiss on his temple. He laid his arm around Eren's shoulder, sighing. "How is the one with your friends going?"

"Really good, were almost done too. It's gonna be a shorter routine though," he hummed. "I feel a little bad. The three of us already chose a song but we're still looking..." He trailed off, his thoughts being captured by something else. A wide grin split across his features, confusing Levi in the process.

"What are you all smiley for?" Levi asked, puzzled by his sudden change in demeanor.
"The fun part is starting," Eren whispered, moving to look out the window.

It was then that Levi focused on the patters hitting the house. He moved to look out the window along with Eren and saw the rain crashing against the glass. "What exactly are your plans?" He inquired hesitantly.

Eren jumped off the bed and headed to his door. "Come on, hurry!"

Levi watched him amusedly as he joined him at the door. The two left the room and rushed downstairs, nearly knocking Mikasa off her feet as they passed her. She gawked at them. "Slow down, what's wrong with you guys?"

"It's raining," Eren said before bolting out the door, leaving Levi to shrug at her, following him outside.

"Of course it is," Mikasa groaned, trudging back up the stairs.

~

Eren sprinted into field of grass that the two of them had been in only moments earlier. He didn't get far before he spun around to check that Levi was still behind him, and sure enough, his boyfriend trailed behind him, getting pelted by the rain, just as he was.

Eren laughed heartily as Levi reached him with his makeup smearing from all the moisture. Levi didn't understand what was so funny, but he didn't dare ask, as he was too occupied watching Eren have a hell of a time just by being in the rain. Eren, still in a giggle fit, took his hand and bounded off with no destination in mind as they ran through the grass.

"What are we doing?" Levi shouted, unsure if this was his plan.

"Nothing," Eren said over his shoulder. "Just enjoy it!"

Levi rolled his eyes with a small smile, willing to look past his skepticism in order to just let go. He normally wouldn't do things like this, but since it was Eren leading him, he voiced no complaints.

They ran through the blades of green, now soaking wet from the storm above. Eren stopped in the middle of the field without warning, making Levi collide into him, sending both of them to the ground. The grass was crushed beneath them as they fell, and the water collected in the ground seeped into their clothes. Levi settled on his back to get reoriented, while Eren sat up, cackling like a child on a playground.

Eren turned around and held himself above Levi with each of his hands on either side of Levi's head and suddenly, Levi couldn't be bothered with the fact that he was cold and soaking. He beamed down at him manically. "See? Isn't this fun?"

Levi stared up with his boyfriend partially shielding him from the rain that crashed down. He gazed into those bright eyes that stared back at him expectantly. Then, he examined that smile that never seemed to fade and he couldn't help but let his thoughts be overrun by the fact that he was so in love with this magnificent boy who was so genuine, easily entertained and pure with his intentions. "You're such a fucking dork," he murmured, shaking his head, before he leaned up to seal their lips in a kiss.
Of course, Eren couldn't help but smile into the kiss, leaning down so Levi wouldn't have to strain himself. Levi hummed happily, taking in every bit of Eren. He hadn't expected such an amazing moment to come from Eren's idea of fun, but now, all he could think of was how he never wanted this moment to end. Any other day, he'd guffaw at the thought that he'd subject himself to something so cliché as kissing in the rain, but who was he to deny himself this little luxury as the moment arose?

They parted reluctantly, but held their elated expressions as they simply stared at one another, almost forgetting the persistent rain. "And yes," Levi finally answered. "This is fun."

Eren chortled, happy as ever.

~

"It's a shame Levi had to go home so early," Carla huffed, gluing a photo onto a scrapbook page that she'd been working on. "He could have at least stayed for dinner." 

"He's getting things ready for our practice tomorrow," Eren explained, slumped on the couch.

Carla sighed. "He still could've stayed," she mumbled bitterly.

Eren agreed, he hated being apart from him, especially after having such a great time that day. But he had to leave sometime and it was bothersome coming to terms with that. He stared up at the ceiling, bored out of his mind as he reclined on the couch. At least he'd be seeing Levi again the following day.

His thoughts were blurred when he heard the front door opening and slamming shut. He shot up to see his father walking through. Realizing who it was, he fell back down, vaguely thinking 'Can't believe he showed up so early.'

"Grisha, dear, don't slam the door like that," Carla griped, cutting out shapes into paper. "It's unnecessary."

Grisha said nothing, he only set down his things carefully on the kitchen table and stalked into the living room, silent and cold. He stopped in the middle of the room, having yet to utter a sound.

"How was work?" Carla asked without looking up from her crafts.

"It was... enlightening." His first words spoken were as icy as his demeanor.

Eren turned his head lazily to look at his father, wondering what had put him in a mood.

Carla looked up from her work, perplexed. "What do you mean?"

"I had an interesting conversation with one of my coworkers today."

"Oh," Carla mumbled, continuing with her scrapbooking. "What about?"

Grisha seemed to become more rigid as he spoke. "Well... I was in the break room, having coffee, when that new interpreter came in. She sat by me and started talking about very mundane things, like we usually do at the hospital. But then she started getting personal."
Eren was barely listening, too bored to get invested in someone else's conversation. Carla on the other hand, listened with interest, curious about her husband's day.

"I've told you about how she never shuts up about her children and she did just that today. I had no interest, but it was too late, so I let her talk. Then, she pulled out her wallet to show me pictures of her kids..." He took a step closer to Eren and Carla. "She pulled out one picture and said it was of her oldest son and his... boyfriend."

It was then that Eren started listening, and he almost wished he hadn't.

Carla exhaled agitatedly, aware of her husband's extreme views. "And what did you say to her?" she asked, not wanting to hear the cold-hearted answer that would inevitably come.

"Nothing."

Carla looked up in surprise. "Oh, really?"

Eren was frozen in place. This couldn't be happening, he'd never known fear like this.

Grisha took another dangerous step forward, venom and predetermined hatred leaking from his stare. "I said nothing because of who I saw in the picture."

Chapter End Notes

Suprise.

I was originally not going to make that a cliffhanger, but the chapter just got too long. Which reminds me, the next chapter might also be late, because it's going to be a wee bit long.

Translations: Tu aimes ça? - You like that?

Ah, mon ange, - Ah, my angel,

Tu m'excites... tu est tellement sexy, - You excite me... (Scarcely used out of this context in France) you're just so sexy,

J'aime ça. Baises-moi plus fort, mon loup. - I love that. Fuck me harder, my wolf. (common term of endearment in France)

Prends-moi plus fort. - Take me harder.

Here's the promised color guard reference video for this chapter! https://youtu.be/dLXzIdFANSI

Big thanks to my spectacular beta! You're the best, tol!!! My tumblrs are dr-s--art and the-witch-daddy. Thanks for reading! <3
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Eren faces his father's rath after he's been found out. As much as he suffers through this difficult period, life won't stop for anything and he struggles to get by.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a fuckin mess.

It starts off so exaggerated then it just gets boring. I feel like my writing just keeps getting more and more simplistic as I go, and I hate it.

Also, if anyone cares, I now have a tattoo of Levi and have successfully earned a permanent weeb card. Just let me rot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I said nothing because of who I saw in the picture."

Eren lost any shred of hope he had, he'd even lost sight of any possible future beyond this night. His fear consumed him by immobilizing every muscle and clamping onto his lungs. He stared back into his father's bitter eyes and, for a brief moment, wished for a quick and merciful death so that he would not have to face his consequences.

"Who did you see?" Carla asked, still unaware of what he was getting at.

"It was that," he spat, pointing at Eren. He now even lacked the decency to refer to him as a person.

All the color in Carla's face drained as everything clicked. Her heart raced, she knew of Grisha's prejudice, but she knew not of what he was capable of doing when he was this enraged. "Grisha," she hushed, standing and holding out her hand to calm him. "Just listen for a min—"

"You worthless, ungrateful sodomite!" Grisha thundered.

Eren jumped back on instinct, hitting the back of the couch. He broke out in a cold sweat, fearing for his safety. He would've pondered why he couldn't say or do anything to help his situation if it wasn't for the fact that he was so focused on his father's actions.

"You're goddamn lucky we kept you for this long! Get out of this house! Right now!" Grisha's voice shook the house and struck Eren like a poison dart. He threateningly stomped closer to assert his demand further, which only paralyzed Eren.

Carla stepped directly between the two, broadening her shoulders and scowling up at her husband. "He's not going anywhere! What the fuck has gotten into you? He's our son!"

"That is not my son!" Grisha countered.
Eren climbed off the couch and stood back against the wall, grateful for his mother giving him a diversion. He watched as they roared at each other for what felt like an eternity.

"What is wrong with you?" Grisha asked incredulously. "Why aren't you seeing what's wrong with all this?"

Carla only stared back, daring him to continue.

"Don't you tell me..." He breathed. "You knew?"

"I did."

Steam came from Grisha's ears as he looked down at her, waiting for her to say it was a lie. "And you said nothing. You did nothing..." He panted heavily, walking back to the opposite wall, grabbing a framed photo of Eren as child from off its hook. "Carla," he said, returning to his previous spot, showing her the photo. "This is not our child. This is some hell-bound charlatan! This is a damned sinner, destined to rot! And you dare defend him? Treat him like your own?" He threw the picture to his feet, shattering the glass. "I will not live with that in my home, tainting my chance at salvation, tainting our family name! He does not belong with us!"

"Yes, he does!" Carla fired back, clenching her fists and stamping her foot. "He has every right to—"

"He belongs in hell!" Grisha boomed.

Eren ran at that, sprinting to the stairs to seek refuge. Grisha stormed after him, though much slower, screaming all the while. "Leave this house! Run into the street in front of a car! I'd rather have a dead son than gay one!"

Eren locked himself in his room just as his father found the base of the stairs. Mikasa came out to the top of the stairs, terrified. "I heard a crash," she stated, referring to the broken picture frame. Though, it was evident that she was more scared of her husband's voice than the additional noise.

"Go to your room, Mikasa!" Carla ordered, trying to protect her from her husband's rampage. She then aimed her words at Grisha. "Why the fuck would you say that?! How can you say that to him? How could ever think to tell someone to die? Especially our Eren!"

Mikasa watched in horror, wishing she hadn't come out. But she stayed put, scared to move.

Grisha paced back into the kitchen, positively fuming. Mikasa came down hesitantly, standing beside her mother.

"I don't understand how you can love him knowing what he's done!" Grisha went on. "He's an abomination! Nothing can help him! I don't want to be dragged down with him, so he goes! I'll make damn sure of that!"

Carla couldn't believe what she was hearing. She never thought it would come to this. At that moment, her main priority became clear to her once more. It wasn't to argue or prove Grisha wrong. It was to do her job as a mother and ensure her children's safety, no matter what that meant she had to do. Though it broke her heart to have to resort to this, she turned to Mikasa, who looked to be at her wits end, and grabbed her shoulders desperately, whispering. "Go upstairs and tell Eren to pack things he needs to get by for awhile. And help him along. Hurry, go." She left it as curt as possible, even though she wished she could give Mikasa the explanation she deserved.

Mikasa gave her father one last mortified look before she nodded at her mother and ran upstairs.
“What did you tell her?” Grisha gritted out, stalking over to her. “What did you just say to her?” Carla stood in front of the stairs to deny him access. Her strong expression never wavered. “That’s none of your concern.”

“What did you say?!” Grisha demanded to know. “I’ll go find out.” He shoved past his wife, heading upstairs.

“No!” Carla shouted, grasping onto his arm and forcing him back with all the strength she had, uncertain if Grisha would ever stoop to raising a hand to Eren or Mikasa. But she wasn't in a position to take chances.

~

Eren shoved random clothes and other necessities into a suitcase, only keeping himself together by a single thread. He breathed audibly, blinking rapidly to keep his vision from blurring when panic rushed through him. Mikasa helped add random things she thought he would need to his suitcase. “What did you do to dad?” Mikasa asked, only barely having a grasp on the situation.

“Nothing,” Eren rasped, shoving extra shoes, socks, and his phone charger into his case. “He knows about Levi and me.”

Mikasa understood and hurried her pace.

Eren tried to block out everything his parents were saying, but every word seeped into his ears regardless. Abomination. Suited for death. A curse on the family. The accusations piled on and wouldn't stop as he and his sister packed his things.

Eren fumbled, zipping up his suitcase and grabbing for his backpack. He stood in the middle of his room, terrified to walk out the door and of what he would find if he did. He vaguely thought of bringing his color guard equipment, but he was more concerned with making it out of the house alive, and the lanky bag full of metal and silicon would hinder his ability to do so.

Mikasa sensed his worry and peeked her head out Eren's door before stepping out. Grisha had made it to the top of the stairs and was currently still battling verbally with Carla. “M-mom?” Mikasa called.

Carla glanced back and hastily instructed her. "Get into the car with him." She turned back, screaming at Grisha.

Mikasa stepped back in Eren’s room to grab his hand. "We have to go." Eren had both his book bag and his suitcase and shakily accepted her hand, following her out of his room. He almost ran back in after seeing his father, not wanting to go anywhere near him. But he shadowed his sister nonetheless.

Grisha caught sight of him, fueling his own fire. "What did I say?! Get out of this home! Get the hell out! Out!"

Carla shoved Grisha's chest, sending him a few steps back. "Leave him be!"

The siblings rushed down the stairs, and when Carla found an open moment, she followed them.
The two ran out the door, into the rain that hadn't relented from earlier and to the car. Carla snatched her purse and car keys while she hurried out of he house with Grisha still screaming after her.

Carla entered the vehicle, soaking wet with her children already in the car and Eren's things settled in the trunk.

"Where are we going?" Mikasa asked from the backseat, absolutely shaken from what she'd just witnessed. Which was no comparison to Eren, who couldn't even process his thoughts well enough to speak.

Carla just sniffled and started the engine, unable to provide cohesive words.

~

Levi heard a knocking at the door and looked to his brother and sister, who were sitting and doing nothing as they watched television, unfazed by the noise. He stood up from his spot furthest from the front door. "Oh no, you two stay put. I'll get it," he drawled sarcastically.

"Thanks big bro," Isabel said without looking away from the tv.

Levi sighed, heading into the kitchen to greet their guest. He opened the door and was, for a second, gladly surprised to see Eren standing there. But that went away when he saw his distraught features, along with his bags, mother and sister standing behind him. "Eren...?"

Carla rested her hand on Eren's shoulder and stepped forward, taking a deep, yet shaky breath. "Can... can Eren stay with your family for a little while?"

Levi was taken aback, but stepped aside to let them enter regardless. "Of course... what's going on?"

Eren came in wordlessly along with Mikasa. Carla followed in, clearing her throat as Levi closed the door. "Is your mother home?" she asked in a quiet voice.

"No, she should be soon, though," Levi answered. He stared back at Eren, who was just standing in the middle of the kitchen with his arms cradling his stomach and his eyes staring off into space.

"Hey, Eren's here!" Farlan called walking into the kitchen. He immediately lost his excitement when he saw Eren's expression, or lack of thereof.

"He is?" Isabel bounded in behind her brother and just like Farlan, dropped her liveliness.

Eren stepped close to Levi and whispered, "Could I just... go to your room for a bit?" He kept his head low as his words stumbled out.

"Yeah, I'll come with you," Levi murmured. He tossed a look at Carla to let her know he'd be tending to Eren. She nodded, and with that, Levi took Eren's hand and led him upstairs.

Carla sat at the kitchen table, ushering Mikasa to come with her. "You two can go back to the way you were," Carla said to Farlan and Isabel. "Don't mind us, we're just waiting for your mother."

Isabel and Farlan shared a look and silently decided that it would be best to leave them to
Upstairs, in Levi's room, Eren sat still as a corpse on Levi's bed, staring at his hands blankly. Levi sat beside him, unsure of what the right course of action to take would be. "What's going on?" he began.

Eren's lip quivered and he shut his eyes. Levi could just barely hear his quiet, labored breaths. "It's my dad..." he whispered. Levi already had somewhat of an idea of what that meant, so he held Eren around his waist to comfort him. "He knows... knows I'm gay... and he knows about you..." His brows furrowed when his anger finally hit him. He started shaking, letting himself acknowledge how he felt at last. "L-Levi..." His voice cracked slightly, but he pushed through. "I can't... I can't stay there. I don't know what he'll do..."

Levi pulled him closer, letting Eren wrap his arms around him in a tight grip and tuck his head in his shoulder. "I understand. You don't have to explain if you don't want to." He started rocking Eren back and forth, trying to soothe him. His heart shattered in two when Eren's chest started convulsing and his sobs streamed out. Levi kissed the side of his head, wishing that it would make everything all better, but knowing that it couldn't do more than reassure him that he was there to take care of him.

"I fucking hate him..." Eren rasped in an enraged, yet hoarse voice. "H-he told me to die."

Levi shook his head, feeling Eren's anger. He felt pure and utter disgust with the fact that the man who was supposed to take care of him and raise him with love told him to end his life. He hated that his boyfriend was thrown out of his own home for who he loved. He felt so powerless for not being able to do anything about it. "That's terrible. Baby, I'm so sorry. You don't deserve this."

Eren dug his nails into Levi's back, just hoping for some miracle. "I wish I could move away," he cried.

"I know," Levi murmured, rubbing his back. There wasn't much else he could do.

Eren hiccuped. "I wish... my dad wasn't an asshole."

Levi nodded, letting him get everything out of his system. "I do too."

Eren thought about every trial he'd come across after he came out. The fear of when the guard found out, having to hide his relationship, his mother's tears, his fight with Jean, it was more than any person should have to deal with. He even remembered the suffering he went through before he'd came out, hearing all the slurs and forcing himself to agree with everyone to protect himself. He remembered all the internalized homophobia he had for himself due to his constant exposure to all of the prejudice. In his current moment of desperation, he accidentally spoke so hatefully of himself. "... I wish I wasn't gay."

Levi extracted himself from Eren to attempt to look him in the eye. "Don't you say that," he said. Eren wouldn't look back at him. "Don't you dare let someone make you want to change that. There is nothing wrong with you. You're perfect. I can't have someone making you think you're less than that." Levi realized his tone might have come off more harsh than he'd intended, so he sighed and pulled Eren close to kiss his cheek, and wipe away a few of his tears with his thumb. "Do you
understand? He needs to change, not you."

Eren, still crying uncontrollably, sniffled and wiped away at his cheek. He realized that Levi might have also gotten the wrong idea when he said he wished he wasn't gay. He realized how Levi may have also thought that he meant that he would be fine with the idea of not having him. And that simply was not true. "I'm sorry..." he whimpered. "I'm just... so angry."

Levi tugged him back into a hug. "I know. And I know what you meant. I just want you to know that nothing is your fault."

Eren buried his face in the crook of Levi's neck, letting him take care of him.

~

Carla stared at the surface of the kitchen table, trying not to let her thoughts overcome her. She needed to keep a level head so that when Kutchel arrived, she could speak properly with her. Eren had been up in Levi's room with him for awhile, and she only hoped that Levi was handling things well. She assumed that if Eren hadn't come down, then Levi was doing his job and taking better care of him than anyone else could. Mikasa stayed silent, unsure if there was anything she could possibly do to improve the situation.

The door opened and they snapped their heads up to see Kutchel entering the house. Once she caught sight of Carla, panic flooded through her veins. "...Carla?" she breathed. "... Where's Eren? Is he okay?"

Carla spoke quieter than she had intended. "He's upstairs with Levi—"

Kutchel didn't need to hear any more, she hurried upstairs before Carla could say anything else. The only thing she could think about was Grisha's stone features as she showed him the picture and the anger in his eyes when he looked back to her and everything clicked. Ever since that moment, all she could think of was Eren's safety and how she could've put him at a great risk.

She vaguely knocked on Levi's door to give them a few seconds to anticipate her coming in, then she opened the door. She stopped, just after entering, finding Eren simply leaning on Levi's shoulder having finished crying for some time. "Eren, I'm so sorry," she cried, running over to sit by his other side. "I didn't mean for any of this to happen, I didn't know he was your father at the time, I should've kept my mouth shut, I didn't think this would happen—"

"Kutchel," Eren cut off her rambling. "It's... it's okay. It's not your fault, he would've found out eventually."

Levi watched, not understanding why his mother was acting like she was the one to blame, but kept silent.

Kutchel was nearing the border of hysterics, but attempted to calm down for Eren's sake. "He didn't hurt you, did he? Are you alright?"

"I'm okay..." Eren sighed.

Kutchel exhaled in relief, nodding. "Why are you here? Did you just need to get away for awhile?"
Eren gulped. "I think that's something you need to talk over with my mom. She's been waiting for you to come home to talk to you."

Kutchel knew that she needed to speak with Carla, now that she knew Eren was safe, but she almost didn't want to leave him, still feeling guilty for putting him in this situation. "Okay." She gave him a quick hug, which he gladly accepted, then stood to leave. "If there's anything you need, just let me know."

Eren nodded, watching her go.

As she shut the door, Levi murmured to Eren, "What was she talking about? How did she know what was going on?"

"I'll tell you later," Eren mumbled.

Levi figured it was best to let him have some time to get himself together, and for that reason, kept quiet.

~

Kutchel set down mugs for herself, Mikasa and Carla. She poured coffee into each, asking for her guests' preferences to finish them off. Sitting herself down, she took a deep sigh, preparing herself for whatever Carla needed to talk about. "So... Eren told me that you could explain why he's here. Is everything alright?" She almost didn't want to know the answer.

Carla couldn't bring herself to lift her head to face Kutchel. She was simply worn out from everything that had happened. Shaking her head, she answered softly. "No, everything's not alright. As I'm sure you've guessed, Eren's father isn't... accepting of who he is. I can't repeat the things he said to him." Her voice started shaking as she went on. "He screamed at him to leave, amongst worse things. I knew he couldn't stay there. It's not safe for him back home." She kept her head down, not wanting Kutchel or Mikasa to see her face as she wiped away a stray tear.

Kutchel didn't have to see to know, so she patted Carla's back, hoping to ease her back to a state of calm.

"And... Eren feels so welcome here. I know you treat him like he's your own son," Carla went on. "So, I was wondering if you'd be able to let him stay here for awhile?" Her words faded out as her emotions got the best of her.

"Of course, Eren is always welcome here. He can stay as long as he needs to," Kutchel answered. There was no question, she would've let him stay even if he wasn't at risk at his home. "And if there's anything else I can do, just let me know."

Carla nodded. "Now that I think of it... would it be possible to let Mikasa stay here too? If not, I'm sure I can find someone else to take her until things get better—"

"Ma, I can go back home," Mikasa interrupted. "Dad's not mad at me."

"I don't want you around him when he's like that." Carla's words left no room for argument. "I'll bring you your things."
"She can stay here as well," Kutchel cut in. "We can figure out sleeping arrangements."

"Thank you so much," Carla whispered, wiping at her eyes again. "You have no idea how much you're helping us right now."

Kutchel felt a pang in her chest. If it wasn't for her accident, they wouldn't be in this position. "Carla, I'm so sorry about all of this. This is my fault—"

"No, it's not," Carla said, finally facing Kutchel with glossy eyes. "I know what happened. You didn't know. I don't blame you."

A silence settled between the three. There wasn't much else that really needed to be said.

After awhile, having finished her coffee, Carla stood from her chair. "I guess I should get going. Mikasa, I'll pick up your school supplies and some necessities. Is there anything specific you need?"

Mikasa shook her head.

"Okay... I'm going to say goodbye to Eren." She ascended the stairs, knocking on each door until she found Levi's when he said a gentle 'come in.' She slowly opened the door, inching inside. "Eren?"

Eren lifted his head from Levi's shoulder to face his mother.

"I'm going back to the house to pick up some things for you and Mikasa. Is there anything there specific you want me to bring you?"

Eren thought about it for a moment. He'd brought most of the essentials, now all he had to remember was his more personal items. He scratched his wrist in thought, and noticed an unfamiliar absence. The watch that Levi had given him, he'd forgotten it. "My watch... it's on my desk." Thinking more, he remembered his color guard equipment. He didn't trust it alone in the house with his father on a rampage. "And if it's possible, could you get my color guard things?"

Carla nodded. "Is that all?"

"Yes."

Carla stepped in to give Eren a parting hug, squeezing him a little too tightly, but he didn't mind. "I'll be back in a bit."

~

Eren woke up in Levi's arms, his sleep washing away the fresh memory of the nightmare that was the day prior. He reveled in the warmth that Levi was radiating and adjusted to get more comfortable. Once he felt a bit more coherent, the images and shouts from the other day came back so strong that he started shaking. It all felt so surreal, he couldn't convince himself that it really happened. He clung to Levi desperately, hiding his face in his chest and digging his nails into his back, trying to take himself away from the awful reality.

At the sudden pressure on his back, Levi awoke, finding a trembling Eren hanging on to him for
dear life. Levi shook Eren's shoulders, under the impression that he as having a nightmare. "Babe? Are you awake?"

Eren looked up at him with unfocused eyes.

Levi's heart had broken a million times over since Eren had come to his front door the previous day. "Why are you shaking?" He was sure he already knew the answer, but he asked anyway.

"I don't know," Eren mumbled.

Levi sighed and brought Eren back to his chest, kissing the top of his head. "It's okay, you're safe," he murmured. "You're okay."

Eren listened to him intently, repeating his affirmations in his head.

"Do you need anything?" Levi asked, stroking his hair.

Eren hummed at the contact. "No," he said.

Levi threaded his fingers through Eren's hair with one hand, and ran the other up and down his back soothingly. He wasn't the best with words, but he did what he could. "Things won't always be like this, mon grand. Everything will be okay. I promise."

Eren wished he could've believed him wholeheartedly. He was trying to at least. "How could you know?"

"Because I know you," Levi said. "And you're too stubborn to let someone keep you so upset for long."

Eren huffed out an amused breath. "I don't know how I can make it though. I can't go back; he could hurt me. I could move out legally, but I don't have a job—"

"Don't worry about that right now," Levi interjected. "You've got plenty of things to worry about anyway. Graduation, individuals, the banquet."

Eren looked up at him in confusion. "The banquet?"

"Yeah, the guard has a banquet every year. Anyways, you have all these exciting things happening in your life, and he has no right to ruin any of it for you." Levi placed another kiss on Eren's forehead. "You focus on you. I know everything's going to be hard for awhile, but you're in a safe place now. No one will judge you here and you have friends to help you get on your feet again."

Eren's chest ached for all different reasons. Of course, nothing was the way he wanted it to be, his father hated him for merely existing and wished death upon him, but even if his father wouldn't change, Eren would get better. And he had the most loving and supportive person to help him get to that point. "I love you so much," he mumbled in a wobbly voice.

Levi hugged him as tightly as he could without hurting him. "I love you too."

~

Eren sat curled up with Levi on the couch, with Mikasa by his side and Isabel and Farlan
occupying other chairs in the living room. Farlan thought that it could help if they all took a day off, having a film marathon, surrounding Eren and letting him take it easy. And by a film marathon, he meant a concert DVD marathon.

As it turned out, Smashing Pumpkins' live concert, Oceania, helped a grieving heart more than any home cooking could do.

Kutchel came through, setting a plate of freshly baked cookies on the coffee table. "Eren, these are for you," she announced. "Mikasa, you can have some too."

"What about us?" Isabel whined.

"Izzy, you and your brothers can have cookies any other day. Eren and his sister need them more than you."

"... You're right," Isabel said, turning back to watch the television.

"Thank you, Kutchel," Eren said, sending her a small smile.

Mikasa and Eren started eating the cookies and Eren would let Levi have one when his siblings weren't looking. Mikasa lost interest in the concert at some point and started fiddling with her cell phone. After a few minutes, she nudged Eren's elbow to get his attention. "Armin wants to know why you aren't replying," she mumbled. "What should I tell him?"

Eren sighed, completely over exhausted. "The truth."

"How much of the truth?"

"Whatever he wants to know. He's our best friend, I trust him with knowing," Eren replied quietly.

Mikasa nodded and began texting Armin her response. "And... I know this is a bad time, but are we still going to be able to have a performance for individuals? Or are you too upset to do anything more?" She asked hesitantly, not wanting to step over a line, but still too curious.

Eren huffed. "Yeah, we'll still have one. I just need some time before I can focus on it."

"I understand," Mikasa hummed.

Eren could hear the taps on Mikasa's phone as she typed to Armin. "Um, Armin wants to know if he could come over to see you. You know, to check up on you?"

Eren looked up at Levi with pleading eyes. "Can he?"

"Maybe," Levi said, craning his neck to face in the other direction. "Maman," he called. Within seconds, Kutchel came out from the kitchen with a dish towel in her hands. "Could Eren's friend come visit him for a little bit?"

"Of course," Kutchel answered, heading back into the kitchen.

"Yeah, he can come over," Levi said, turning back to Eren.

"Thank you." Eren leaned up to peck Levi's cheek, then settled back down at his side.

Mikasa hurried away to let Armin know he was welcome.
Armin sat cross legged on the ground across from Eren. He wasn't certain of how he should address his best friend's current situation. It wasn't often that he found himself speechless. "... Where will you be staying in the meantime?" Armin asked tentatively.

"Here," Eren mumbled. "Mikasa is staying here too."

"But what about afterwards? You can't stay here forever, I assume."

"I don't know," Eren groaned, rubbing his forehead. "I don't know if I can ever go back. My mom says it's not safe right now."

Armin nodded in understanding. "Will you be going to school any time soon?"

"Yeah," Eren sighed. "There's no point in me missing school. I don't want extra work to deal with on top of all this."

"Eren, there's no pressure for you to go to school," Levi said, grabbing his hand. "If you need a few days off, no one will blame you."

Eren shook his head. "No, I'll go. It could serve as a distraction too. Maybe." He gave a humorless laugh.

Those surrounding him kept quiet, unsure of how to handle the situation. Eren was attempting to maintain a positive outlook, but it was evident that he wasn't having the easiest time doing so.

"What about individuals?" Armin asked. "Are you still planning on going through with your routines?"

"Yeah," Eren hummed.

Armin gave him a skeptical look, though he decided not to argue. He didn't want to discourage his friend while he was having such difficulties finding things to be happy about.

"Do you not want to be in a routine anymore?" Eren asked.

"No, I do," Armin assured him. "I just don't want you to overwork yourself."

Eren nodded. "I won't."

~

Midway through the week, Eren stayed in Levi's room while he went to work and lazily scribbled through his homework. He'd had enough of all the guard members pitying him and treating him like a newborn bird every time they came close to him. His teachers weren't made aware of his situation but noticed his drastic change in demeanor, so they didn't bother to call on him in class or lecture him if his test grades weren't up to par. His mother called him every night, asking how he and Mikasa were doing and told him how she was trying to make progress with his father, but so far, none had been made. Guilt bore down on him, since Levi put off meeting with his other friends
to work on their individuals together. Eren would encourage him to practice, but Levi could only get himself to practice with his siblings for twenty minutes at a time before he felt bad for leaving Eren and came back to him.

At this point, Eren just focused on pushing his father out of his mind and worked on the other things stressing him out. On top of all his schoolwork, he had the color guard banquet coming up and he had little to no idea as to what he should expect.

Just as he was finishing up his last page of his assignments, a knock rapped on the door. "Come in," Eren grunted absentmindedly. Isabel peeked her head through the door hesitantly. "Hey Izzy," Eren greeted her.

"Hey," she responded, coming in and shutting the door behind her. She warily approached the bed with her hands behind her back. "How are you feeling?"

"I've been better," he responded, collecting up his papers to unceremoniously shove them into his book bag. "What's up?"

Isabel sat on the bed, bringing out her hands to reveal what she held. "Farlan and I put this together for you." She handed him a blank CD in clear, plastic case with songs sloppily written on the back in permanent marker. "I know you're probably sick of people babying you, so we thought that we'd put together some songs that make us feel better when we're upset instead of telling you 'everything will be fine' like everyone else is."

Eren gave her a faint smile, flipping over the CD to read the song titles, finding that he was unfamiliar with all of them. "Thanks," he said. "That's really thoughtful of you two."

Isabel nodded. "Anything to help." She looked down at her hands, not wanting to leave just yet. "Will you be ready for the banquet when it comes up?"

Eren rubbed his eyes, beginning to get tired. "I think. I still haven't told my mom. And I'd need to get my dress clothes, which are still back at my house. How fancy do you have to dress for the banquet?"

"It's really up to you," Isabel answered. "Some people dress like they're going to prom, while others dress like they're there for a job interview."

Eren snorted. "Could I show up in a band shirt and shorts?"

Isabel chuckled at that. "No one would stop you."

~

Levi was never happier to be home from work, seeing as his mother was already home and Eren was waiting for him. He hurried through the front door and rushed up the stairs to be with his boyfriend who was undoubtedly waiting in his room.

Eren was making further progress each day, so it came as a surprise when Levi found him choking back tears on the bed with his ear phones in, plugged into his laptop. Levi sprinted to his side, taking his hand in his and leaning into his side. "Babe, what's wrong?" he asked with pleading eyes.
Eren sniffled, pulling out one ear phone with his free hand. "... What?"

"Are you okay?" Levi rephrased urgently.

"Oh, yeah I'm alright. I'm just listening to a really good song that Isabel and Farlan put on a CD for me." He gestured to the computer screen. "Made me a little too emotional, it's okay. I've listened to it four times." He wiped at his eyes which threatened to spill over, scoffing at how he was so easily influenced by a song.

"They put a CD together for you?"

"Yeah, Isabel said its all songs that make them feel better."

Levi looked at the screen to see the song that had Eren so worked up and found it to be Holocene by Bon Iver. Levi rolled his eyes. "What made them want to add Bon Iver? That's a band you listen to strictly to cry and seep into the life of a knitted sweater wearing recluse."

Eren giggled at his boyfriend's exasperation.

Levi smiled, glad to see Eren finding amusement in little things again. "So, you're sure you're okay?"

Eren nodded. "Yeah, I am."

"Good." Levi kissed his cheek.

Eren went to put back his ear phone in, when Levi tapped the button to pause the song. "Don't keep listening to it if it's going to make you cry!" he chortled.

"I can't help it, it's a great song!" Eren whined.

Levi's grin matched his. He threw his arm around Eren's shoulder and balanced his head on Eren's. "We received an invitation from Hanji. Well, I received one, you received two."

Eren raised a brow at him. "Oh, really?"

"Mhm," Levi hummed. "We're invited along to go shopping for clothes for the banquet on Saturday with the rest of the guard and anyone else who's coming who needs clothes. And then Hanji invited you to come with them and some other people on Sunday for finding prom clothes."

"Why didn't you get invited?" Eren asked.

"They said something about how they're only inviting one person from each couple that they're fairly certain are going together. I'm going with you, so I can't go."

"Why did Hanji invite me instead of you?"

Levi shrugged. "It might be fun for you."

Eren knew what that meant without Levi having to elaborate. "Let me guess, they felt bad for me and want me to come along so I don't feel left out."

Levi regarded him sadly. He couldn't be certain, but Eren was probably right. "That's not what they told me. And so what if that's the reason? They want to include you and you can all have a good time. You can show them that you're doing better and they'll see you don't need to be treated like you're helpless or something."
Eren closed his laptop, huffing agitatedly. "... I accept both invitations."

Levi smiled, placing an exaggerated, loud kiss on Eren's temple. "I'll let them know right away."

"Also, how does Hanji know that we're going together?"

Levi fixed him with an unimpressed look. "Because it's obvious."

Eren shrugged. "Well, you never asked me," he joked.

Levi knitted his brows together, rolling his eyes. "Eren, will you go to pro—"

"Ah ah!" Eren tutted. "You have to ask me properly."

Levi snickered at how seriously he was taking this. "Fine, give me some time and I'll give you a proper 'promposal.' Happy?"  

"Very."

~

Eren answered his cell phone like he did every night when his mother called. He left to the practice room to speak with her in private. "Hey, ma."

"Hi Eren, how are you and your sister?"

"We're both doing alright," he answered honestly.

"That's good..." Carla breathed. "How are you? How are you really?"

Eren stood up against a wall, tilting his head so it gently hit the surface. "I'm better. Things aren't as hard. How are things there, are you okay?"

"I'm alright. I'm doing everything I can, Eren," she hushed. "I talk to him every night and try to get him to understand. But he's... so difficult. I swear, I'm doing all I can to get him to see reason, but none of its working—"

"I get it, mom," Eren interrupted, sliding down the wall to sit. "What are we going to do if he never listens?"

"... I don't know," Carla muttered. "You're going to have to stay where you are for now. Until I know if you'd be safe here. I know this can't go on forever, and I know I'm going to have to make a decision at some point. If he never comes to an agreement... we'll... we'll have to move somewhere. I can't stay with him if he never takes you back. I can't be with a man who might hurt my kids. I can't be with someone who... said those things to you. Yet I don't want to make any rash decisions. I want to at least try to make this work."

Eren gulped at her words. "You don't think... you don't think he'd actually hurt me or Mikasa? Do you?"

Carla released a heavy sigh. "I don't think that he would, but I also thought he'd never tell you such horrible things. And I was wrong about that. So, I'm not sure."
Eren's breath stilled. He knew better than to expect his mother to lie, but the truth was a little much.

"Let's not get into that," Carla suggested. "Is there anything you need to tell me?"

"Well, there's a color guard banquet soon. Hanji invited me and Levi to come with to get clothes for it on Saturday and I'm allowed to invite Mikasa to come with. Then the next day, we're going shopping for prom clothes. Other than that, not much. I'll text you the details you need to know for the banquet." A small silence followed. "Ma?"

"Sorry, sorry," Carla quipped. "That's just a lot to take in... I'll be by on Friday to give you both money for something for your clothes. And... do you really want to get your tux with your friends?"

"Yeah, I'd like to," Eren responded.

"Alright then, you can do that. But... not Mikasa, I'm going to be there when she gets her dress."

"Okay," Eren chuckled.

"Goodnight, Eren. Get some sleep."

"I will, goodnight ma."

~

Acquiring outfits for the banquet had been successful. Nearly everyone within their friend group had attended and all piled into Hanji's van. It took a bit longer than anticipated, seeing as they had so many people coming along, but no one really minded.

The day after, Eren and Farlan were picked up in Hanji's van along with several other people. Nanaba sat in the passenger seat, while Christa, Annie, and Marco took the back seats. Petra and Sasha took up the back of the van with Eren and Farlan.

"Okay," Hanji called everyone's attention as they drive off. "Who has a date to prom already?"

"I do!" Christa chirped excitedly.

"Everyone knows you have a date," Annie scoffed, drawing out laughter from the rest of the passengers.

"Well, Annie," Sasha sang. "Do you have a date?" she asked, expecting her to say that her boyfriend was taking her.

"Not a date, per se. More like... two people accompanying me," she answered.

"Two?" Farlan echoed.

"Yes, two," Annie confirmed. "Bertolt and Reiner."

The majority of them nodded, now reaching an understanding. "What about you, Sasha?" Hanji asked. "Are you going with anybody?"
"I'm going with Connie, but he's not my date," Sasha said. "But we all know Eren's got a date," she teased in a singsong voice.

The van erupted with scandalous 'ooh's like a herd of kindergarteners. Eren only smirked as he replied, "Actually, I don't. Not yet, anyway."

Those who could, turned around to face him in confusion. "What about Levi?" Marco inquired.

"Is he not taking you?" Farlan asked, utterly lost.

"Not yet," Eren sighed. "I told him I wouldn't go until he asked me properly. He said he would, he just needs some preparation time."

With that information, everyone calmed down and faced forward again.

"Aw," Hanji cooed. "He's going to ask you like a gentleman! How precious!"

Eren couldn't help but smile uncontrollably that. He didn't need a huge, elaborate surprise. He just liked the idea that Levi was doing something special for him, just because he could.

~

Eren seemed to be the only person caught off guard when they stopped at a craft store first. Apparently, Hanji was making their outfit for prom rather than purchasing it. It didn't, however, surprise him when they went up to the register with mismatching materials, varying in obscurity. He couldn't keep track of how many things they'd bought, aside from the fake feathers, dozens of fabrics, sequins, studs, and thread. Afterwards, they headed off to a more suitable shopping district for everyone else.

Marco, Farlan, Hanji, and Eren lounged on padded stools, waiting for the girls to come out in the dresses they selected. Eren slumped back, particularly bored. "This reminds me of when I was a kid and my mom would force me to come dress shopping with her and Mikasa."

"Not much of a difference, is there?" Farlan groaned.

"As long as they don't ask me for my opinion on some sort of dress terminology I don't know, I'll be fine."

"You two quit whining," Hanji said, patting Farlan's knee. "It'll be fun!"

"They won't ask for much," Marco assured them. "The most they'll ask is which one you prefer over another."

Soon, the girls gathered around, deciding to go one at a time. Christa went first, taking a particularly long time, seeing as she had picked out so many choices. But the group was encouraging, and she came to her conclusion soon after trying the last one on. Petra went next, being a tad indecisive, but ended up choosing one without needing much input from the others. Annie had a limited selection, looking for comfort rather than aesthetics.

Sasha went next, though, it took some coaxing for each dress. She had very specific requirements in mind that absolutely had to be met, which resulted in her picking dresses she didn't care much
She tiptoed out timidly, receiving pleasant gasps that didn't match her nerves.

"You look beautiful in this one!" Nanaba beamed.

"I don't know..." Sasha looked down at herself, then over to the mirror provided. "I think I need the next size up. And I don't like how it shows my back."

"Sasha, if you get the next size up, it'll be too long," Farlan noted. "You'll trip."

Sasha sighed and scurried back into the changing room. "I'll try the next one."

"Why didn't she like it? I thought it looked fine," Eren mused.

"Sasha doesn't like showing skin," Petra informed him quietly. "And she's worried about her weight, which she shouldn't be. She doesn't want something that shows her figure."

Eren frowned and crossed his arms. "That's dumb, she looks great."

Petra nodded with a sad smile.

Sasha returned on a glittering, forest green dress that hung off the shoulders and reached the ground. Her face portrayed her lack of confidence.

"This one looks great on you," Hanji commented.

Sasha shook her head as she gazed into the mirror. "This one is worse. All of the ones with long sleeves are too tight."

"Why do you need one with long sleeves?" As soon as the question left Eren's mouth, he remembered the answer. Sasha stood silent, her eyes downcast in shame.

"I've got an idea," Christa piped up, standing to help Sasha in finding something else.

While they left, Eren hung his head in his hands. "Why did I say that?" he groaned rhetorically.

"You forgot, it happens." Marco tried comforting him. "She'll be okay. I'm sure once she finds something she really loves, she'll forget all about it."

"What if she doesn't?"

"Have faith in Christa," Marco whispered with a wink.

Eren wasn't entirely at ease, but he waited with everyone else, hoping for the best. It didn't take them long before the two girls came back, Christa excitedly walking Sasha to the changing room. Christa came to sit by Hanji, smiling giddily. "I think we picked a good one," she whispered.

Minutes passed and they heard the door creak open, signaling that Sasha was finished. "Come on out!" Marco called.

With great hesitance, Sasha slipped out of the room with her hands behind her back, wearing an orange, strapless gown that was heavily beaded at the top and led off into satin that gathered at the sides and fit her beautifully without being too tight or too loose. After the satin had ended around the hips, there laid layer after layer of tool, splaying out and reaching the ground.
"Oh, Sasha it's perfect," Petra breathed.

Sasha smiled sheepishly, bringing her hands out to reveal matching satin gloves that attached at her middle finger and ended just above her elbows. She moved to go look in the mirror and tried her best to not show how excited she felt.

"What do you think?" Christa asked.

Sasha bit her lip, thinking over her answer. "... I like it. I really like it."

Annie shoved Nanaba's shoulder a little too forcefully. "She's made her decision, it's your turn."

Nanaba playfully smacked her hand. "We don't know that yet. Sasha, do you want to keep looking?"

Sasha shook her head. "Nope, this is the one."

Annie shoved Nanaba again. "Get going."

~

Nanaba nearly refused to come out of the changing room, which made the majority of the group worry to no end. She'd only picked one dress, her excuse being that it was the only one she thought would look nice.

"Why won't she come out?" Eren wondered aloud.

"She's self conscious about her body," Annie replied. "I'll get her out." She stood to go and assist in any way she could.

With some coaxing, Nanaba exited in a simplistic, dark blue dress that shimmered with gold. She looked down at her feet while the group sent her their praises.

Farlan whistled while Eren, Marco and Hanji clapped for her. Everyone else shouted how beautiful she looked and she couldn't help but shy away near Annie. Annie was having none of it and led her over to the mirror.

"I'm not sure..." Nanaba mumbled.

"What don't you like about it?" Petra asked incredulously. "You look amazing!"

"You really do," Eren agreed.

"My shoulders," Nanaba provided with a shrug. "They're really broad and... masculine. And the dress doesn't hide it well."

"Who cares?" Hanji scoffed. "You're gorgeous."

"I'd date you if I wasn't gay," Marco said.

"You look like a princess!" Sasha hollered.
"Annie has broad shoulders and she still looks great!" Petra pointed out. "There's nothing wrong with broad shoulders."

Nanaba eased up after all the reassurance, though she wasn't completely convinced. "... I probably won't even get a date looking like this. No one would ask, I'm just too masculine."

"Blasphemy!" Christa shouted, stomping her foot.

"Any guy would be lucky to take you to prom," Annie told get sternly.

"I don't think you look very masculine at all," Eren said.

Nanaba stopped and looked at Eren. "Really?"

"Yeah," Eren confirmed. It had occurred to him that no one had negated the notion of her having broad shoulders, but instead told her that she looked just fine with them. And he realized that that would help her more than lying to her. "You're just toned, that doesn't make you masculine," he said as if it was obvious. "I think you look very feminine the way you are. You can still be feminine with broad shoulders."

Nanaba considered what he had said while examining her form in the mirror. "You're not just saying that?"

"No, I'm serious."

Nanaba took one last long look and nodded to herself. "Well... I do like the color."

~

The group hurried to the first suit shop they could find, in search of tuxes for Eren, Farlan and Marco. Eyes were drawn to the group as they stumbled into a rather quiet establishment.

"Any ideas for what you want?" Sasha asked Eren.

"Well, no—" Eren began.

"Are you and Levi planning on matching?" Nanaba chimed in.

"Not that I know of..."

Hanji grabbed onto Eren's shoulders, alarming him in the process. "This is going to be fun, we'll help you find something."

Eren had no idea what was coming to him. The group split up into three groups, taking him, Marco and Farlan into different sections of the store. Eren was off with Hanji and Christa, while Marco left with Annie and Nanaba, leaving Farlan with Sasha and Petra.

"Any favorite colors, Eren?" Christa asked, scanning all the racks. "Or any colors you have in mind?"

"Uh... I guess I like blue and green. I can't have a tux with those colors though, right?"
"Well," Hanji hummed. "We can still incorporate those colors somehow. Now, do you want a black tux, white tux, or a grey tux?"

Eren snorted. "Anything but white, I'm not getting married in the eighties."

Hanji and Christa chuckled. "We'll help you find something really good within your budget." Christa said. "We need someone to help with measurements..."

~

Eren checked his tux in the mirror within the dressing room. Hanji and Christa really did know what they were doing. He ended up in a dark grey tux, with forest green dress shirt, and a deep blue tie with a matching cummerbund. The only thing he was missing was a nice pair of dress shoes, which he didn't need to buy any more of.

Taking a deep breath, he turned and stepped out the door to see his friends. He found the area where they were all sat in a half circle, chattering about mundane things. That was until they noticed Eren arriving. They all quieted, smiling brightly as he stepped into view. He felt a bit nervous being the center of attention, but he knew it was for a good reason.

"Oh my gosh, Eren, you look so handsome!" Petra praised him.

An umpteen amount of declarations of agreement followed, making Eren beam with joy. He turned around to face the cove of mirrors to see himself in better lighting than in the dressing room. "Do you think Levi will like it?" he asked no one in particular.

Everyone responded positively, affirming that Levi would absolutely love the way he looked.

Given the setting and overall crowded atmosphere, he couldn't prevent his mind from wandering to melancholy places. This was something for his family to see. His mother should've been there, and his father too. This was a moment that people typically shared with their parents and kept as a fond memory. Of course, nothing was unpleasant about this moment, but the fact that he couldn't experience it the way most do caused his grin to slowly fade.

Farlan, noticing his expression falter, spoke up from where he sat. "Do you like it, Eren?"

Noticing his error, Eren plastered a false smile on his face and nodded. "Yeah, it's great. I'll... go change back, I think I'm going to get this one." Before anyone could question him further, he snuck off to change back into his normal clothes.

~

The rest of the fittings went well, everyone being enthusiastic about Marco and Farlan's suits. It was a good time had by all, but ever since Eren had his turn of trying on a tux, he went on through the day feeling a bit jaded. Hanji dropped him and Farlan off back at the Ackerman household and they thanked everyone for the day.
The two entered the house, one more content than the other. Kutchel greeted them excitedly, asking them about their day and wondering if she could see their purchases. Eren answered everything politely, but felt rather exhausted, wishing he could just go to sleep.

He marched into Levi's room, finding it vacant. He set the bag containing his tux over the chair at Levi's desk before running back downstairs. "Kutchel?" He called, stepping into the kitchen. "Where's Levi?"

Kutchel took the spoon she was cooking with and pointed behind him. "He's in the practice room."

"Thank you," he said, turning on his heel to head towards the practice room. He went through the door, finding Levi, as well as Mikasa and Isabel, all practicing with saber. Eren smiled to himself, walking closer to see what they were doing.

Isabel stood across from Mikasa, showing her how to toss in a slowed down way, explaining the process, whereas Levi stood to Mikasa's side, make sure she was holding it right. Eren had never seen his sister so determined and focused.

Eren took one step too close before they all noticed his presence and stopped to meet up with him.

Levi walked right up to him, wrapping his arms around Eren's waist and giving him a quick kiss. "Did you find something you like?"

"Mhm."

"Can I see it?"

"Are you kidding? You haven't even asked me to prom properly yet, I'm not showing you my tux."

Levi frowned halfheartedly.

"Eren, I'm learning how to do a toss," Mikasa announced. "Watch for a minute." She steadied herself once Isabel stood back and the attention was on her. With little hesitation, she lifted it into the air, but fell short in catching it, letting it clammer onto the ground. "That wasn't it!"

"She's been getting closer," Isabel informed him. "She almost had it."

Eren nodded. "You're getting good, Mikasa."

"Thanks," Mikasa mumbled in frustration, giving up on doing a toss and instead starting doing consecutives lazily to make up for it. "Did you have fun today?"

"Yeah," Eren answered curtly. He didn't have much else to add, considering that even though he did have fun, it was overshadowed by the fact that he had starting feeling distant for the second half of it.

Sensing a subtle tension, Levi excused himself and Eren, leading him back up to his room. Eren sat himself on Levi's bed near the head board, staring down at his hands. Levi shut the door and made his way over to sit behind Eren and wrap his hands around him, setting his chin on his shoulder. "Did something happen today?"

"No," Eren sighed. "I just got thinking and let it bother me."

Levi held him a tad bit tighter. "What were you thinking about?"

Eren took a moment to reply, feeling as if voicing his thoughts would make it worse. "... I was
thinking about how my mom would've wanted to come. I thought about how if things weren't the way they were right now, both my parents would've come. Not that I wanted my dad to be there either way, but that's how things would've been."

Levi nodded in understanding, feeling Eren hold onto his arms as he talked. "He doesn't deserve the privilege to share that moment with you."

Eren huffed out an amused breath. "... But still."

Levi knew there wasn't much he could do or say to help him, other than listening. "I understand. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Eren shook his head. "I'm just tired. I just want to go to sleep."

"Well, you can't do that without having dinner first. My mom is making it right now, you're not going to bed on an empty stomach."

Eren's lips curved into a faint smile. "If you say so," he said, placing a soft kiss on the side of Levi's face.

~

Time had passed and unfortunately, Eren's mental state wasn't improving one bit. If anything, it had worsened from the day he'd left to buy a tux. His feelings had shifted from self-hatred to guilt and blame. After that day, he pondered over the effects of his father's outrage and thought that it was his fault his mother was hurting, that his sister was taken from their home, and that Levi and his family were being inconvenienced. He was under the impression that if he wasn't gay, then everyone around him would be so much happier. Their family wouldn't be so torn. Kutchel wouldn't be worried sick. Levi wouldn't be stuck with a helpless boyfriend. Eren couldn't help but be overcome with a different kind of self-hatred.

He tried his damnedest to pull his own weight and act like he wasn't suffering in silence, but Levi had a knack for seeing right through his façade. Eren felt even worse when Levi would show him more affection, aware that he was doing it to make him feel better. He hated worrying him.

Eren's mother would call every night, speaking with him and Mikasa. She'd tell him how his father was calmer by the day, but was still adamant about distancing himself from his son. Carla seemed to be at her wits end, hoping for some miracle, but kept her voice steady and strong for her children's sake.

On the day of the banquet, Eren woke up, feeling no different. He almost considered not going as a form of self-punishment.

Laying on the bed he shared with Levi, he stared up at the ceiling, putting off getting ready for no other reason than lack of motivation. Levi reentered the room, coming back from brushing his teeth and laid down next to Eren. "We should be getting ready soon."

Eren sighed, not taking his eyes from the ceiling. "Okay."

It killed Levi to see him so disinterested, so different from his normal character. "Hey," he said, turning to face him fully. "Tonight is going to be fun. It's a special time for everybody. There's
good food being catered and there'll be music and everyone's excited to see everyone. It's a big night for the guard. It's a big night for you."

Eren nodded, trying to convince himself that he could enjoy the night and not bring anyone else down. He turned into his side and hid his face in the crook of Levi's neck. "My dad won't be there," he mumbled.

"He's not welcome there," Levi told him.

"I know... but if he didn't know what he knows, he'd at least be there."

Levi held him close. "You don't want him there, do you? Would he even want to go if he didn't know about you?"

"No. I don't want him there and he wouldn't want to go. But he'd be there."

Levi couldn't understand. Eren had a relationship with his father, though it wasn't much a relationship. Even though he didn't care much for his father, as a person or a member of the family, he had expectations. He wanted him to try. He wanted a father who would be present no matter how much he was disinterested in Eren's activities. Maybe Eren was wrong for having those specific standards, but that's how he felt, and he couldn't help it.

Levi had no relationship whatsoever with his father, whoever he was, and therefore couldn't understand what Eren was going through. His mother had always been enough for him. He'd never wanted to know his father. Regardless, he would stay by Eren's side and listen intently, ready to do anything he could to be of aid.

"Well... I'll be there. Your friends will be there. Your mom will be there. Everyone who matters will be there. Please don't let an empty chair ruin your night."

Eren knew he was right. He knew he couldn't let something unchangeable get in the way of him enjoying such a special evening. "... Okay."

~

Eren was a bit surprised by how formal Levi could be when he got dressed up for certain occasions. Levi came downstairs in a black suit jacket, dress pants, a clean, white dress shirt and a cravat. It wasn't the most typical attire for a formal event, but Levi made it work.

Levi approached him, observing Eren's black dress shirt, slacks and red tie. His rolled his eyes, smirking all the while.

"What?" Eren asked, smiling.

"Your tie is crooked," Levi explained, reaching to fix it for him. As he refolded the fabric, he told him something that had settled into the back of his head as soon as he saw his outfit. "Your suit is making me a bit suspicious with those color choices."

"What do you mean?"

"Black clothes, red tie... it seems like you're trying to look a bit like Billie Joe Armstrong."
Eren looked down at his clothes after Levi'd finished tying his tie. "I didn't even notice until you pointed it out."

"Sure you didn't," Levi teased.

Kutchel came from around the corner, her heels clicking with each step as she hurried, staring at her watch. "Eren, is your sister ready?"

"Yeah, she's sitting in the living room."

"Okay, good." She moved to stand at the base of the stairs. "Farlan, Isabel, dépêchez vous!" She stared back down at her watch. "Oh, I hope we're not late."

"We have plenty of time," Levi assured her.

To keep things moving, Eren fetched Mikasa from where she sat and waited in the kitchen with the others. Eren observed her dress that appeared black at the top and merged into a ruby red. "You look nice. I almost forgot you had a neck," he joked.

"What's that supposed to mean?" she spat, hitting his shoulder.

Eren chuckled at her defensiveness. "Well, your hair is up and you're not wearing that scarf. It's not hidden anymore."

Mikasa rolled her eyes, muttering "Yeah, I might beat the asshole who gave me that scarf for that comment."

Their conversation died down when Farlan and Isabel came running down the stairs, out of breath and all dressed up for the banquet. "Is everyone ready to go?" Kutchel asked. Everyone nodded affirmatively. "Perfect, let's go."

~

Arriving at the banquet hall, Kutchel gave a sigh of relief when they weren't, in fact, late. Eren gazed around at all the floral decorations and banners all throughout the vast space. A large area was open that would - without a doubt - be used as a dance floor. Taking up the rest of the room were long tables with beautiful center pieces and were set simple, yet eye catching, plates and silverware.

People who had arrived before them were already taking their seats and chatting up a storm. Eren could see Sasha conversing with Connie, while Petra sat across from them, talking with Erwin, Gunther, and Erd. Even Marco invited Jean, which irked Eren, though he decided to let it slide.

He found Ymir and Christa at the other end and he realized that Isabel wasn't kidding when she said some people dressed like they were attending prom. Christa was indeed enthusiastic over the event and came in a blindingly bright purple gown.

Many people had yet to arrive, but Eren could see people he didn't expect. Hannes was there, sitting next to Mr. Bozado. He wondered what they were doing there, but wasn't about to protest.

Eren couldn't help but wonder where his—
"Eren!"

He spun around to face the two voices that called out to him. Smiling, he walked to greet his mother and Armin, who's grandfather was following not far behind.

Carla took her son in her arms and squeezed him half to death. "I missed you," she murmured.

Eren hugged her back just as tightly. "I missed you too."

Carla pulled back, wearing a manic grin. "I'm so excited, tonight is all about you!"

"Well... all about the guard," Eren corrected.

"Shush! All about you," Carla repeated.

Eren snickered as she left to greet Mikasa and he went to see Armin. "I'm glad you could come."

"Please, I wouldn't miss it," Armin assured him.

They all took their seats, Kutchel and Carla sitting away so they could let their children be surrounded by their friends. Christa was excited to have everyone meet her older sister, Frieda, who'd been in the guard many years ago. Hanji eventually showed up, dragging along their old friend Moblit. Annie and Bertolt showed up with Reiner, who was more than happy to come and support them and friends from their old school were soon to follow. Annie's father had decided to meet every one of the team members after he'd arrived, and thanked them for being so welcoming to his daughter, which Annie huffed at, feeling a tinge of embarrassment, but was too happy that he showed up to say anything about it. Bit by bit, everyone and all their friends and family showed up, just like at the championships.

Eren leaned close to Levi, looking over to where some guests were sat. "Why do you think Mr. Bozado came?"

"Well," Levi began. "He is our neighbor, our teacher and a family friend, so my mom invited him."

Levi followed Eren's gaze. "He likes to see our achievements and— oh god, he's here." Levi groaned, setting his face in his hands.

Eren searched over by Levi's mother. "Who's here?"

"Him." Levi pointed at a man coming to sit down who had a five o'clock shadow and slicked back hair. He appeared rather disinterested in being there, and sat across from Kutchel. "My uncle."

"Uncle Kenny is here?" Farlan asked, overhearing Levi. He turned to look and sank in his chair upon finding him. Isabel also seemed to be disappointed with the news.

"Is that a bad thing?" Eren wondered aloud.

"No, he won't really do anything or annoy us here," Levi explained. "We just don't like him much."

Eren nodded in understanding.

Levi thought over his attitude and just how easily Eren had accepted it and quieted down. As much as his uncle's presence was enough to get most people down, he thought it would be better to be positive. Not just so he could enjoy his own evening, but also in the hopes that Eren would see that others shouldn't affect his night. "It doesn't matter though. I'm happy here with you," Levi said, sneaking a kiss from Eren.
Eren blushed as expected from Levi and tucked in his chin shyly.

"Aww," Mikasa cooed, catching their display of affection.

"They're a happy couple!" Armin added onto her teasing.

"How precious!" Isabel squealed. And soon, everyone in the surrounding area joined in to their harmless fun.

~

After everyone had shown up and became settled in their seats after a bit of socializing, Rico had approached the microphone standing near the music board. She cleared her throat, grabbing everyone's attention. "Excuse me? Thank you all for coming to our banquet, we're glad to have had such a great turnout this year. I'm sorry to keep you waiting, but now we'll be serving food. Scouts has catered our meals for the night, so - one by one - a server will call your table up. After everyone has eaten, we'll be distributing awards."

Luckily for Eren, and those who shared his table, they were called upon first. When they all went in a single file line to retrieve their meals, they noticed just who was providing them. Mike was uncovering all the hot dishes and setting out everything they had to choose from. "Hey, it's Mike!" Eren pointed out.

"Hey, it's me!" Mike chimed after hearing him.

Several people in the line giggled at Mike. He smiled, serving everyone that came. "Glad you made it," Petra told him, accepting her plate.

"Well, I was coming anyway, then Rico asked us to cater," Mike said. "So, I'm getting paid and seeing all my friends. I'll be sitting with you guys when all the food is passed out."

"And with that, the old team will be back together," Levi remarked.

"Do you think they'd let us do a makeshift routine? For old times sake?" Mike suggested.

"Not likely," Levi replied curtly.

Mike pouted for a good five seconds before he was cheerfully attentive again.

Once back at their seats, they enjoyed their meal, leaving only a dull murmur to fill the room. After a considerable amount of time, Rico walked up to the microphone once more, grabbing their attention. "I hope everyone is enjoying their meal, desserts will be made available at the bar after the awards are passed out. Right now, we'll be handing out the plaques that every member has earned that shows recognition for their participation on the team. I'll be calling up each member in alphabetical order by last name." Rico turned to pick up the first plaque set out on the table adjacent to the music board. "Farlan Ackerman."

A round of applause sounded as Farlan stood, walking up to Rico to accept his plaque. Once there, he took the plaque with a gracious smile and shook Rico's hand. They turned to face the rest of the room, both with beaming smiles to allow pictures. Eren figured Farlan had been through the process before, which would explain why there was no hesitation when he turned for photos.
Farlan sat back down at his table, and Rico was on to the next person. "Isabel Ackerman."

When Isabel stood to retrieve her plaque, Eren asked to see Farlan's. Farlan was happy to show him, and slid it over for him to see. The plaque was simple but pristine. It had Farlan's name, along with the year and their team's title engraved below the professional picture of the team at the championships.

Rico made it all the way through, ending with Hanji. "Now that all of the members have been individually recognized, I'm going to give out the awards. Before I begin, let me say that this year, it was particularly difficult to choose each of these awards, since each member worked so hard and did so well."

"Obligatory," Farlan mumbled, making several others chuckle.

"Quiet," Levi hissed. "She's right, we have a lot of great members. Now shut the fuck up."

"The first award is the most improved award. This one goes to a veteran of the guard that has shown significant growth from the year before." Rico picked the plaque up in her hand. "It's been decided that this year, the awards goes to..." Pause for dramatic effect. "Isabel Ackerman."

Isabel's face lit up like a Christmas tree, and she gladly shot up out of her chair to take what was hers. Kutchel would been clapping the loudest if it wasn't for the fact that she was occupied taking pictures.

"The next award is for constant crowd favorite. This is for the one guard member that was a consistent eye catcher. It was a bit difficult to decide, considering we had quite a few members that fit the description, but after much deliberation and review, we've come to our conclusion. Our constant crowd favorite is Sasha Braus."

Sasha's initial reaction was pure and utter shock. She looked like a deer caught in headlights. She shook as she stood, completely unprepared to win anything, but after Connie and her family started shouting for her, she made her way up to Rico with the brightest smile many had ever seen on her. Most of them couldn't believe just how happy she looked.

"Now for equipment. We'll begin with the flag. The person who exhibited best flag work and performed the best with that equipment piece is Bertolt Hoover."

Another pleasantly surprised member found his way to accept his award.

"Wouldn't it be cool if you won something?" Armin whispered to Eren.

Eren snorted. "Yeah, but that's not gonna happen."

The next awards came as no surprise to anyone. Levi won the award for best saber work, while Christa won for best rifle work.

"Next, we have the award for best team player; the person who was willing to help out any person at any moment and supported everyone. I'm happy to say that we found this quality in all our team members, but one person showed this more than the rest. This award goes to Nanaba—"

Rico couldn't even get out her last name before people started cheering and making a deafening ruckus. Mike was particularly loud, banging on the table and whooping for her. Nanaba laughed at all the praise as she stood to accept her plaque.

"Next is for our rookie of the year. The person receiving this award wasn't the most enthusiastic at
the beginning, and struggled with the material, but that is understandable. But as time went on, they grew to love the sport and showed that they were a quick learner and a good sport. Our rookie of the year is Eren Jaeger."

Eren paused. He couldn't fathom it. It dawned on him that he needed to stand when Levi and Mikasa started shoving his shoulders, encouraging him to get up. He walked up to meet Rico and quickly glanced at his mother, who looked like she couldn't have been more proud. With his heart pounding, he shook Rico's hand and grinned brightly, taking his plaque with his other hand. Rico nodded at him before turning for photos, giving him a look of approval, which was more than anything he'd ever been given from her.

Eren waltzed back, feeling as if he was walking on air. He hadn't expected to win anything at all. Sitting down, his friends offered him their congratulations and he only barely processed what they were saying.

"Wait," Mikasa said. "You're the only new member, right? So, you had to win that award."

"Not exactly," Levi cut in. "Annie and Bertolt may not be new to color guard, but they're new to the team, so they also qualified." Levi looked into Eren's eyes, taking his free hand in his. "You earned it, mon grand."

Eren beamed at him, having forgotten all his previous worries. "Thanks."

Rico couldn't stop for Eren's celebration, so she kept moving. "Now, for our last award of the night, the all around award. This is a special award for someone who exceeded in many areas. They did well with flag, rifle and saber. They worked well with the team, had good grades, showed good sportsmanship, and always did their best. Our all around member is Hanji Zoë."

Hanji nearly screamed and trotted up to Rico, happy as can be.

"That concludes our award portion of the night," Rico announced. "If you'll look to the wall behind me, there will be photos of the team throughout the year projected for the rest of the night. Please enjoy yourselves, desserts will be served shortly. And now, our DJs will get things going." She nodded to one of the tables.

Farlan and Isabel nodded at each other before hurrying to the music board. Eren chuckled as they left. "I can't believe they're allowed to be the DJs."

"Please, with their music taste and persistence in begging Rico, there's no way they wouldn't be," Levi scoffed.

~

Throughout the night, Isabel and Farlan played a medley of the guards previous songs and other songs that people requested. Levi would tell Eren what year they performed to certain songs and describe what their routine was like. People slowly started to get up on the dance floor, including Armin and Mikasa, but Eren declined when they invited him up. He wasn't much of a dancer to begin with. Mostly, he just talked with other guard members and watched the photos being projected.

Nanaba eventually came to sit by Eren and Levi and chat for a bit. "Congratulations on your
awards you two."

"Thanks," Eren replied.

"Thank you, and congrats on yours," Levi said.

"Thanks," Nanaba gushed. "I wasn't expecting to get anything, it was a nice surprise."

"I didn't expect to get anything either," Eren added.

"Well, you definitely earned it. I'm glad you got something. Not everyone won an award tonight, but the members who didn't have won something before. And this is your last year, so you're going out with a bang."

Eren chuckled, nodding. He was glad that he wasn't leaving empty handed. The three fell into a brief silence after that, but Nanaba kept fidgeting in her seat, unable to remove the toothy grin she was wearing. Eren raised a brow at her. "What's got you so excited?"

Nanaba chortled, delighted that he had asked. "I'm just really happy. When I got up to get my dessert, I was talking with Mike and out of nowhere, he asked me to prom."

"Really? That's great!" Eren knew how it was such a big deal for her to get asked, so he rejoiced with her.

"It's about fucking time," Levi groaned. Nanaba and Eren looked at him inquisitively, so he deemed it appropriate to elaborate. "He's been waiting to ask you, I don't know what took him so goddamn long."

If it was at all possible, Nanaba's simper only widened. "Has he really?"

"Yeah, it's not often that he waits this long. Glad he finally did it, though."

"I feel so lucky," Nanaba breathed. "I finally got asked, and it's by someone so funny and so nice. This night can't get any better."

"You don't know that," Levi said.

Nanaba laughed at that. "You're right." She looked over her shoulder for a fleeting moment. "Well... I'm going to go sit back with my family. See you guys."

They said their goodbyes and watch her go. "Would you look at that? Dreams do come true on banquet night," Levi joked.

Eren playfully shoved Levi's shoulder, rolling his eyes. Levi reacted by scooting his chair closer to Eren's and wrapping his arm around him. "Are you having a good night?"

Eren leaned into him, thinking. For the majority of his night, he didn't even think of his worries from earlier. Granted, when the night was over, he'd have to go back to his life no matter how much he wished he didn't. But in that moment, he didn't care. "Yes, I am." He looked around, watching his friends having a great time dancing, and then looked to his mother, who was talking and laughing with Kutchel. His life might've been nearing the edge of ruins in his mind, but allowing himself one night to ignore that and spend time with his favorite people was just what he needed. "I'm having a great night."

"Considering the light mood, I think it's okay if I say I told you so," Levi murmured next to his ear.
Eren smiled into Levi's shoulder. "That's fine." He became a tad overwhelmed with gratefulness for Levi always being there to make everything better. "I love you so much, Levi."

"I love you, too, Eren." Levi planted a kiss on top of Eren's head, stroking his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, the dress trying on scene was completely necessary. I used to watch My Fair Wedding With David Tutera religiously, and it never left my brain. (Also, someone email WeTV and make them get that show back, I NEED MY DAVID TUTERA! LET MY GAY ASS DIE IN EVENT PLANNING HEAVEN)

Gosh, I miss guard a little more with each chapter. I was only able to attend two banquets in my guard days and I won the same award Hanji won one time uggghhh I miss color guaaarrrrddddd I'm gonna cry

Here's the chapter-ly color guard video and this one is so fucking magical, it makes me feel so inadequate as a color guarder. https://youtu.be/B61V2-y3ROM

Big shoutout to my beta for working so hard and being so awesome!!! You're a saint, bean.

My tumblrs are dr-s--art and the-witch-daddy, in case you're interested. Thank you so much for reading!!! (P.S. Check out my fic Counterclockwise if you haven't, shit just went down in the last chapter.)
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

The school year is winding down. Prom and individuals have finally arrived!

Chapter Notes

Fuuuuccckk.

This is so terribly late I am so sorry. I struggled through this chapter like no other. I wanted this of all chapters to be big and grand and though my super special awesome beta thinks otherwise, it totally fell short of my own expectations and I'm a corpse.

I'm sure a few of you might have noticed that there is an end chapter number now... yea, we're almost there my sweeties. And if my calculations are correct, this is now longer than any Harry Potter book and still going kiLL ME.

Translations at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A week after the banquet, Eren was sitting at the base of the stairs with his phone in his hand. His mother never failed to call every night to update him on her progress at home and to check up on him and Mikasa.

"Your father is calming down and he's getting easier to talk with," Carla said. "I was speaking with him this morning and he said he was above hurting you two and he wouldn't do anything violent if he ever saw you. I tried getting more out of him, but he had gone off to work. I'm trying to see if he can grow to accept you again. It's hard... but I promise I'm trying—"

"I know you are, ma," Eren cut in. "What'll happen if he doesn't hate me anymore?" He asked with a bitter tone.

"I'm hoping you and your sister can come home."

Eren became silent. He was perfectly content staying far away from his father. "... I don't want to go home."

Carla sighed. "I know you don't. I know Mikasa probably doesn't either. But if you both come home, we can start working on things and go back to normal. We can be a family again."

"Things will never be back to normal," Eren told her with great certainty. "Ma, he said he'd rather me be dead. I don't see him as a father anymore. Even if he did learn to accept me, I want nothing to do with him. Maybe... maybe I don't want things to be better between us. To me, there's nothing worth getting back if he accepted me again. He's never home, he's judgmental, and even if he changes his mind, he still told me to die and I don't want to be around him."
Carla took her turn to be silent. She didn't disagree with anything Eren had said, so there wasn't much she could say to appease him. "Well... I'm not going to ask you to be close with him. I won't ask you to try to bond with him or forget anything that happened. I just hoped that you both could at least tolerate each other. I just want you and Mikasa to come home and be safe here."

Eren rubbed his face in agitation. She wasn't being unreasonable and he knew he'd eventually end up doing whatever she decided was best, be it staying with the Ackermans or heading back home. "Alright. If he changes, I'll do whatever you ask, but don't expect me to be on good terms with him."

"I wouldn't ask anything like that of you if you come back. I know things won't change overnight."

Eren nodded, forgetting she couldn't see him. "Okay... I have homework to do."

"Alright, let me talk to your sister."

"Kay." Eren hoisted himself up and started walking up the stairs. "Love you, mom."

"I love you too, Eren."

Eren took the phone away from his ear, knocking on Isabel's door, knowing that her and Isabel were about to go to bed. He knocked on the door and waited until Isabel opened up the door. He looked past her and over to Mikasa as she played on her DS. "Mikasa, mom's on the phone."

Mikasa jumped up to retrieve the phone from Eren and sat back down on Isabel's bed. Eren backed away and left to Levi's room, finding him sifting through his CDs. Levi looked up at him. "How are things at home?"

Eren huffed out a heavy breath, bringing his book bag to the bed. "My mom says my dad is getting calmer and he won't be violent."

Levi rolled his eyes, having nothing but hatred for Eren's father. "I guess that's a start."

Eren started pulling out things to work on from school. "Right? She says if he ever 'learns to accept me,' then my sister and I will go back, but I doubt that'll happen soon."

Levi gave up looking for the CD he wanted and moved to sit with Eren. He placed a quick kiss on his cheek, but stayed in his personal space, setting his head on his shoulder. "I don't want you to go home. You should be with people who'll support you no matter what."

Eren's lips twitched upwards as he started on his math homework. "I don't want to go home either. I don't even want to look at my dad." Eren's nose crinkled as he finished his sentence. "I hate even calling him that. He's not my dad."

Levi looped his arm around Eren's waist, nuzzling the crook of his neck. "You deserve better," he murmured. Trying to lighten the mood, he decided to joke around a bit. "That's it; I'm your father now. Get good grades. Eat your vegetables. Don't hit girls. Brush your teeth."

Eren giggled uncontrollably at his boyfriend. "Are you gonna tell me dad jokes?"

"Of course," Levi promised. "Do you remember boo?"

Eren looked at him quizzically. "Huh? Boo who?"

"What're you crying about, kid?"
Eren snorted, covering his face with his hands. "God, that was terrible."

Levi grinned, happy with his success in making Eren laugh. "Do I make a good dad?"

Eren stared at him, trying to keep himself from laughing. "Yes... daddy."

Without missing a beat, Levi's face became void of any and all emotion as he got off the bed and walked to the door. Eren started cackling, watching as Levi left the room. Through his wheezing, he called after Levi. "Stop kink shaming me!"

"I'm breaking up with you," Levi hollered back monotonously.

~

Levi had been acting rather odd in school the following Friday, in Eren's opinion. And if he thought about it, so did some of the guard members. Levi seemed to be a little uptight and the other members would send him smiles as they passed him before catching themselves. During science class, Eren asked Hanji if there was anything going on that he didn't know about. They only failed to hide their excitement and denied all his inquiries.

Eren sat at lunch, as usual, only Levi and few others were absent for some reason. Mikasa kept going on about their living arrangements.

"Isabel almost had a heart attack last night because Buster came in her room," she said. "She found a mouse behind her bed and she's trying to find a place to put it where it'll have a chance. I mean, I'd offer to keep it, but we can't go home and that defeats the purpose of me offering."

Eren vaguely nodded, taking another bite of his food.

"Are you even listening to me?"

Eren looked up, sealing his bite. "Of course, I was just thinking."

"About what?" Armin asked.

"Just... everyone's acting so weird today. Levi's a bit nervous about something but he won't tell me what. And all the members of the color guard are being weird too. I think they're hiding something from me."

Armin shrugged. "Maybe it's nothing. I'll be right back, I have to go to the restroom."

Eren and Mikasa waved him off. And then there were two. "So anyways, Isabel said she thought about putting the mouse in with her rabbits, but she doesn't want them to sit on it."

Eren huffed out an amused breath. "We wouldn't want that." After not hearing Mikasa build on the conversation, he gazed up at her, finding that her attention was focused behind him. He followed her eyes to find Hanji and Bertolt standing behind him, peering down at him with maniacal grins. "Hey guys, what's up?"

Bertolt and Hanji only nodded once at each other and went to grab Eren by his arms, hoisting him out of his seat and dragging him along with them.
"W-wait! I didn't finish my lunch!" He watched Mikasa stare at them, absolutely perplexed as they left the cafeteria.

"No time!" Hanji chirped.

Eren's heels dragged along the ground as the others didn't give him a chance to stand on his own. "What's going on?"

"We can't tell you!" Hanji sang.

Bertolt looked over his shoulder to face Eren. "It's a surprise."

Eren huffed in agitation. It seemed like that was all he would get out of his friends, so he kept quiet. As they traveled, several people passed them, including Reiner, who stopped to ask, "What's going on?"

Hanji faced him but kept walking. "It's a surprise!"

Eventually, they passed Armin as he left the restroom as he stared at them in utter confusion. "Eren? What—"

"It's a surprise," Eren filled in for him.

Within minutes, it became clear wear they were taking him. They entered the gymnasium, adding to Eren's perplexity. He was dragged to the center of the room and sat down on a fold out chair. He took in his surroundings and found Levi standing with his hands behind his back in the center of the gym on a white floor. Behind him stood Isabel, Annie, Petra, and Sasha all smiling brightly at him.

"Levi?" Eren went to stand but was pushed back in his chair by Hanji and Bertolt.

"Just sit back and watch," Bertolt advised him.

Hanji kneeled by his side and pulled out their video camera. "This'll make the cutest YouTube video!" they squeaked.

Eren locked his gaze on Levi trying to suppress the smile that worked its way onto his face as his boyfriend sat down. Levi did what he could to keep a stoic composure and maintain the integrity of the performance.

Bertolt stepped over to the wall and leaned down to press play on the CD player they had brought in. Two quick beats, then Levi and the others were in motion. Eren immediately recognized the song and couldn't help but let out a soft chuckle, realizing the subtle joke Levi was making. He watched eagerly as the girls in the back began a synchronized dance that kept in time with the song while Levi lowered to the ground to retrieve his saber.

~Baby I, I'm fiendin' I know you got your reasons

~For keeping it to yourself

It wasn't long before Levi was set into a steady rhythm, spinning his saber, moving in swaying motions. When he'd back up enough, the girls had parted to allow him to stand in the center as they picked up their own sabers.

~But you got plenty honey I don't think it's funny
~Gotta give it give it give it or else

~I might just lose my mind.

A manic grin worked its way onto Eren's face. The fact that Levi and the others took the time to put this together had him overwhelmed with joy.

The five tossed their sabers as the chorus hit, catching them flawlessly and moving to a new position. They all made their way to the front edge of the floor as they did consecutives in sync with each other. Levi let a small smile show for the sake of the performance, but still held himself back, trying to keep his focus.

~ I think I'm entitled to your body

~ Got a little problem with personal space

As they swapped out their savers for rifles, Eren's mind wandered as he watched, imagining how Levi would've normally scoffed indignantly at such lyrics. He might've rolled his eyes at them too, but at the moment, he couldn't have cared less. And by the next line, Eren's suspicions about why Levi had chosen this song were confirmed.

~ And I've been poundin' the Jäger

Before Levi set off his rifle into a horizontal toss, he took a second to send Eren a wink at that specific lyric. That simple action had his boyfriend turning bright scarlet as he hoped to god that Hanji and Bertolt didn't see that. Bertolt's stifled giggle and Hanji's snicker proved him wrong.

~ My breath and behavior have been driving the patrons away

The girls cleared off to to let Levi do somewhat of a solo performance as they waited by the sides. Levi attracted all of Eren's attention as the song slowly faded out during the next verse and when all went quiet, Levi stood still. Eren was about to start applauding, but another song started up in a more cheerful tone and the girls came back out to the center of the floor with white flags. Eren had a bit of a flashback to Valentine's Day, when Levi had done a similar performance for him. And he couldn't have been more pleased knowing Levi would do things like this just for him.

Levi moved to switch out his rifle for a red flag and as they words began, Eren realized he was already familiar with the song.

~ I don't care if Monday's blue

~ Tuesday's grey and Wednesday too

The girls stood ahead of Levi, going into drop spins with their flags while he stood in the back, doing the same.

~ Thursday, I don't care about you

~ It's Friday, I'm in love

The girls lowered their flags and bent down to show Levi as he tossed his flag, catching it with no difficulties. He was hidden again as the others stood, tossing their flags as he did. The ripples of the silk seemed to only complement the song rather than disrupt it.

~ Monday you can fall apart
~ Tuesday, Wednesday break my heart

Eren couldn't sit still, all the colors and energy he was seeing took him back to when they still went to competitions. Only this time, it was all in exhibition and so much more sentimental.

~ Thursday doesn't even start

~ It's Friday, I'm in love

Spinning their flags continuously, they gradually made their way to the back of the floor.

Hanji kept the camera on the performers, occasionally glancing at Eren to see his expression and was glad to see him beaming every time they looked. Bertolt stayed near the back, also keeping an eye on the brunet.

~I don't care if Monday's black

~Tuesday, Wednesday heart attack

~Thursday never looking back

~It's Friday, I'm in love

The girls remained at the back and kneeled to the ground, setting down their flags. Levi came forward once again, taking his moment to go into another solo.

~Monday you can hold your head

~Tuesday, Wednesday stay in bed

~Or Thursday watch the walls instead

~It's Friday, I'm in love

The song broke down into the bridge and as Levi winded down with his performance. He kept his flag to his side and walked to the end of the floor, setting down his flag. Eren's attention was directed to the girls in the back as they each pulled a piece of paper out from under the floor, standing up straight with the paper behind their backs.

Eren cocked his head as the performance came to a halt when the girls walked to the front of the floor again. The music faded and Levi took his turn to reach under the floor to pull out a red slip of paper from under the floor, along with something Eren couldn't quite make out from where he sat.

They aligned themselves side by side with Levi at the end, and all at once, it became clear to Eren what was going on. They pulled the sheets of paper out from behind their backs, showing the letters written on them, spelling out 'PROM' with Levi holding the question mark and a rose at the end.

Eren folded over in his chair with a wild smile stuck on his face. 'I should've seen that coming,' he thought to himself. He looked up, chuckling, watching as Levi mirrored his grin and came walking over to him. Eren stood up to meet him, accepting the rose. Everyone crowded around the two was happy for the both of them. Hanji was a bit too eager, wanting to get everything on camera.

"That was so cheesy," he said through fits of giggles.

Levi rolled his eyes. "Just shut up and say yes."
"I guess I can go with you," Eren joked.

"HE SAID YES!" Hanji shouted out to the camera, causing everyone to break out in laughter.

Levi gave Eren a kiss, bringing him into a hug.

"That was amazing, you guys," Eren complimented the other girls who had helped Levi with his presentation.

"We're glad you liked it!" Sasha chimed.

"I'm just glad you said yes," Annie admitted. "How awkward would that have been if you said no?"

Eren rolled his eyes, chuckling. "As if I would've actually said no."

Levi leaned back, but kept Eren in his arms. "Even though I know you wouldn't have said otherwise, I'm glad you said yes."

---

Carla sat with Kutchel in their living room, sharing a pot of tea and waiting for their children.

"How are you getting along back at your home?" Kutchel asked, taking a sip of her tea.

Carla shook her head. "Grisha's just not listening. He's not the most open minded person. I'm not doing overly well. I have to sleep on the couch every night because it's hard to be with someone like that. Plus he's never home. The kids aren't home. Everything's just been so hard."

Kutchel nodded in understanding. "What will you do if he never comes to terms with things?"

"I don't know," Carla sighed. "What is he acting like at work? Are you having an easy time around him?"

"Well," Kutchel began. "It's not very often that we work on the same end of the building. But whenever I see him, he just looks miserable."

Carla nodded. "I suppose there's not much we can do. Could we... change the subject?" Her broken family was all she could ever think about since the incident; she'd rather not drone on the subject.

"Of course," Kutchel agreed. "The kids will probably be late tonight, would you like to stay and make some scrapbook pages?"

"That would be nice." Carla smiled, taking a sip of her tea.

"We could run to the store after the kids leave when we have our pictures and develop them. And when we have pictures from the actual prom, we could finish the pages, or make more."

"That's a great idea! Gosh, I wish they'd come down already. I want to get plenty of pictures before they leave."

As if on cue, Isabel came sprinting down the stairs, neatly tripping over herself once she reached
the bottom. Carla and Kutchel jumped from the couch to see who was causing the commotion and Kutchel rushed over to help her daughter stand upright. "Oh mon dieu, tu es la plus belle fille du monde!"

"Maman," Isabel whined, rolling her eyes. She let her hair down out of her pigtails and thoroughly brushed it out for the special occasion. She was dressed in a purple gown that reached her knees and was easy to move in, but despite the mobility she had in her dress, her heels were giving her a tough time. She raised her foot to adjust her shoe, using her mother as something to lean on. "I don't know how I'm gonna dance in these."

"You were the one who decided on heels," Kutchel reminded her. "You should bring an extra pair just in case."

"Yeah, I will," Isabel promised. She finally got her shoe to fit and looked up at her mother and Carla.

"Did you do your own makeup?" Kutchel asked.

"Nah, Mikasa and Levi tag teamed it."

"They did a great job, you look beautiful!" Carla said.

"Thanks, Mrs. Jaeger!" Isabel beamed.

Kutchel ushered Isabel over to a blank wall and started taking pictures while they waited for everyone else to come down.

Levi was the next to come down, though, at a much slower pace than his sister. Of course, he didn't bother to get a tux that would pass as ordinary and take away from his unique style. As expected, he dressed in all black, with a layered cravat made of lace, a double breasted tailcoat with silver buttons and tails that tapered to a point, perfectly ironed dress pants and slightly pointed shoes that had a bit of a heel. As per usual, he had on his eye makeup, though it was done a bit more heavily than normal. Overall, he looked dark and classy, just like he wanted.

Kutchel had been in the middle of taking a picture of Isabel holding Buster when she noticed Levi's arrival. She quickly snapped the photo, then turned to meet her son. "Oh Levi! You look so handsome!"

"Thank you, maman," Levi said, grinning.

One by one, the teenagers came down from the stairs, ready for prom. Mikasa came down after Levi, wearing black dress that had a square top with silver straps and ended in a handkerchief cut with silver linings, along with low heels and a red jeweled necklace to add color. She kept her hair down as she usually did, only taking stray strands out of her face. Her mother, of course, started getting emotional, demanding an umpteen amount of photos and going on about how she'd pictured this moment forever.

Farlan came down wearing the suit he'd gotten when he went with Eren and the others. It was a more traditional style of tux, being only black and white, but - as traditional as it was - it certainly wasn't bland or boring. Kutchel yanked him along with his siblings to take separate pictures of each of them, and even more with them all together.

"Is Isabel allowed to go to prom?" Mikasa asked. "She's a sophomore."

"I can go as long as an upperclassman invites me!" Isabel chirped.
"She wouldn't stop begging," Farlan groaned.

Kutchel chuckled at his exasperation. "I'm glad you did invite her. This will be the only year all three of you can go together." She snapped a few more photos and went to check each, making sure they weren't blurry.

A few short minutes later, Eren finally descended the stairs, making his appearance. He wore the only suit he'd tried on when looking for a tux, but now he decided he made a good choice with how happy his family looked and how Levi couldn't take his eyes off him. Under all the stares, he couldn't help but become frozen in place.

"Well, don't just stand there!" Kutchel said, raising up her camera. "We need pictures!"

Grinning like a fool, he strode over to the wall where everyone else was placed. His mother and Kutchel took a few pictures of him by himself, just like the others. Then Carla had him stand with Mikasa for several photos. As the flash stung his eyes, an itching thought at the back of his mind crept forward. His mother had probably envisioned this moment at their home. His sister had most likely pictured coming down the stairs in her prom dress to be seen by both their parents. As much as his father may or may not have hated him, he probably still wanted to see his daughter on the night of her senior prom. Was he ruining all of their plans? Was he compromising their lives? Was he tearing the family apart? He wasn't sure, but that's what it felt like to him.

With waning enthusiasm and a plastic smile, he waited until his mother had put down her camera to attempt to collect his thoughts. But it wasn't long before Kutchel was urging Levi to stand by him for another hundred photographs.

Levi stepped beside him, simpering widely and settling his arm around Eren's waist, while Eren set his on Levi's shoulders. Eren put on a brave face, forcing his invasive paranoia away as he looked into the cameras.

After two or three photos, just for the hell of it, Levi leaned in to sneak a kiss on Eren's cheek, causing the latter to start chuckling and unsuccessfully hide a blush. When a chorus of 'aw's erupted from their siblings, Eren stared down at his feet and tried wiping his bashful smile with his hand, while Levi just looked utterly proud of himself and happy as can be.

"Those are the smiles we want, keep it up!" Carla encouraged them, taking more pictures.

Kutchel had already started going through the photos she had taken, trusting Carla to get more. "Oh my goodness, I got a picture at the exact moment he kissed him! It's so adorable!"

"Let me see!" Carla stood next to Kutchel to see the picture and immediately started beaming. "That's the best one we've taken! It's perfect."

"I can't wait to see it when it comes out," Levi whispered to Eren.

Eren could only roll his eyes. Levi couldn't take away all his burdens and troubles, but he certainly did a great job of distracting him and helping him stay in the moment.

~

"Our limo has arrived!" Farlan announced, giving his mother one last hug before heading out the
door.

One by one, they all left the house, saying goodbye to their mothers.

"You guys actually... rented a limo?" Mikasa asked, skeptical.

"The best kind of limo there is," Levi replied.

Once outside, Mikasa understood exactly what they meant. Waiting for them was Hanji’s van, the dragon mural bright and vibrant as ever and horn wheezing out a sad excuse for a honk as Hanji excitedly let on the steering wheel. "Hop in!" They shouted out the window.

For once, the van was completely empty aside from Hanji when they all entered. Eren and Levi took the front seats, while the other three occupied the back seats.

"Fear not everyone," Hanji said, switching the gears. "I've thoroughly cleaned out the van for this special occasion, so there will be no evidence that you ever stepped foot in here when you get out. I even vacuumed out the back for future passengers."

"Thank god," Levi sighed. He turned his head to look at the eccentric outfit Hanji had created. A collared suit jacket complete with fake feathers, materials of all kinds - lined with studs, lace, and spikes - and of course they had pants and platforms to match. Their makeup was usually rather unconventional, but they’d outdone themselves for this special evening. They even bothered to add random coloring and accessories to their hair. "Looking great as usual," Levi commented.

"Aw, thank you so much, Levi! You're looking like a striking elfin prince, yourself!"

Levi scoffed. "That's not how I would put it, but thank you."

"Oh, by the way," Hanji continued. "Some people may have to fit on other people's laps. I have an extensive list of passengers to pickup and I want there to be enough room."

Eren eyed Levi. "You can sit on my lap if you need to."

Levi snorted out a laugh. "How noble of you to offer."

~

At their next stop, Petra, Sasha, and Connie came into the van, ready to go. Petra curled her hair and placed a single flower on the side and wore a ruffled, knee length, strapless dress with a floral pattern and high heels. Sasha had on the orange dress with added sleeves that she had bought and let her hair down and to the side. Connie wore an orange tux to match, catching everyone’s eye.

"Ladies," Hanji called. "As gorgeous as you both are, I have to address Connie first. That tux is bangin', where did you find such a thing?"

Connie laughed in response, taking a seat on Sasha's lap. "Thanks, I found it at a costume store. I wanted to match my date and so I went balls to the wall orange."

Sasha snickered beneath him. "I told you, we're not dates! We're buffet buddies."

"Oh shit, right. I forgot," Connie excused himself. "I wanted to match my buffet buddy. I call it..."
orange soda couture."

The van was off in no time after they'd all shared a laugh, heading for their next stop.

~

Levi had ended up on Eren's lap as Petra sat next to them at the window seat. Rearranging was going to be a habit every time they stopped at someone's house.

Stopping at Marco's house, he came out with Annie, Bertolt, Reiner, and even Jean.

Mikasa and Petra were the only ones, besides Hanji, who didn't have someone under or on them in their seat, so people starting piling in the back. Annie tried to sit in the corner so she wouldn't wrinkle her sky blue gown. Reiner and Bertolt sat at her sides, while Marco and Jean sat against the back seats.

"Everyone comfy?" Hanji asked, starting up the engine. They only received groans, uncertain pondering noises, and a flat out 'No' from Jean. "Good enough!"

~

Next stop was Armin's home. Mikasa had the door open and ready for him to come in. Armin stopped right before the vehicle. "... There's a dragon on the van," he pointed out.

Hanji spun around in their seat. "Do you like it?!" they asked eagerly.

"Are you kidding? I love it," Armin answered.

"Armin, buddy," Mikasa grabbed his attention. "Sorry, but you have to sit on my lap. We need as much room as we can get."

Armin looked rather perplexed, but didn't argue and climbed in. "Is it safe?"

"Perfectly safe!" Hanji assured him. "As long as you share a seat belt with Mikasa."

Eren craned his neck to look at his friend, seeing that he chose to wear a white suit jacket and hoped to god no one would bring up how he complained about white tuxes when they were shopping. "Looking suave, Armin."

"Thanks, you look pretty snazzy too."

"Nobody says 'snazzy.'" Mikasa said.

"I say 'snazzy.'" Armin, Hanji, and Connie all corrected her simultaneously.

~
Petra got out to let Christa and Ymir share a seat in the front. "I hope you two are comfortable," she muttered, feigning bitterness as she gave up her seat.

Christa giggled at her friend. "Sorry!"

"I'm not sorry," Ymir mumbled.

As expected, Christa's dress was incredibly elaborate, being bold shades of pink, heavily sequined and buried in bows and layers of all sorts. As if the glimmer of her dress wasn't enough, she was dripping with jewelry and shimmering with her makeup. Ymir was just about the opposite, wearing a navy blue dress shirt with a black tie and pants. As conflicting as they looked, they went well together as a pair.

Not far from Christa's home was Nanaba's house. She entered through the back, accompanied by Mike. She looked to be about as happy as can be in her glittering gown with Mike by her side.

"If everyone chips in," Mike began. "How much effort do you guys think it would take to tip over the van?"

"Don't you fucking think about it, Zacharias!" Hanji hollered, whipping their head around to face him.

"I mean, hypothetically—"

"Don't!"

Mike held up his hands in defense, drawing out laughter from the entire group of passengers.

"How much room do we have back there?" Hanji asked.


"Good, because this van will be a little more full by the end of the night." They received a few skeptical stares and cackled in response. "It's a surprise!"

~

At long last, the group had made it successfully to the banquet hall where the prom was being held. Exiting the van like clowns out of a miniature car, the herd moved into the building, each of them beaming with joy.

Once in the building, they all observed their surroundings and the theme of that year's prom became evident. The Enchanted Forest. It may have been an overused theme, but the execution of the decor was immaculate and jaw dropping. Petra, for one, was very happy to see the nature inspired venue.

Levi studied the artificial foliage around them and tugged Eren's arm to get his attention. "Eren, look at all the big ass—"

"Look, there's where we give them our tickets, let's hurry," Eren ushered him along.
The group migrated to give up their entry tickets and move into the main room. Once inside, they all looked around at the towering trees and all the green lights aiming in every direction. "Oh thank god," Mike breathed out. "They have a disco ball. I was getting worried."

Moving along, they headed to the area cluttered in tables. With room for only eight people at a table, Levi sat beside Eren, with Armin and Mikasa next to him. Christa and Ymir took place beside Levi. With Hanji and Petra being the only ones without 'dates,' they decided to take up the last chairs at that table.

"I think this is the best theme we've had," Petra mused, admiring the bouquets and lights on the table.

"Everything's so pretty!" Christa chimed in.

"Not as pretty as you," Ymir said.

"Aw, how cute!" Petra commented.

"Ymir wins girlfriend of the year award!" Hanji decided.

"No, Christa does," Ymir corrected, winking at her girlfriend.

"Exhibit A," Hanji laughed, gesturing to Ymir.

~

After the meal portion of the night, the lights increased in brightness and mobility while the DJ started playing music.

Levi folded his hands together at the sound of the pop music playing and leaned his elbows on the table. "Fuck, I hope Isabel and Farlan get to the DJ and take up all the request sheets."

Eren snickered beside him. "Why don't you just request music you like?"

"The DJ probably wouldn't play any of it."

Eren nodded in understanding. "Do you want to dance sometime tonight?"

"Yeah, I'd like to wait for a song I like, but we can dance any time you want." Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Farlan and Isabel sprinting over to the sound boards, Isabel being barefoot and holding her heels. He watched them, feeling a new sense of hope. "Save us," he whispered, praying they'd leave no room for other people to request songs.

Eren shook his head amusedly at his boyfriend's desperation. He felt a tap at his shoulder and turned to face his sister.

"Armin and I are going to dance, wanna come with?" Mikasa asked.

"Yeah, definitely." Eren turned back to leave. "I'm gonna go dance with my friends, I'll be back." He gave Levi a quick peck and stood to leave.

Levi watched as he left with a soft smile resting on his features.
"If you two don't share a dance tonight, I will cease to believe in true love," Hanji commented.

Levi glared at them, but lacked any venom. "We'll dance, don't worry. Just don't watch closely. That's creepy... and what do you mean 'cease to believe in true love'? You're aromantic, what do you care?"

"I want something to believe in, Levi," Hanji whined.

"Sasquatch is a nice alternative," Levi mumbled.

"Or the Loch Ness monster," Petra added.

Hanji almost started considering the suggestions before they began laughing uncontrollably. "I'll keep those in mind."

The conversation was cut short when Isabel and Farlan crashed into the chairs next to Levi, panting with exhaustion.

"We did our best," Farlan wheezed. "People got to the request sheet faster than us... and we'd only filled out one page before he went to check the updated requests."

Levi patted his shoulder. "It's alright, you did a good deed. I suppose it's not the end of the world if there is a bit of garbage music, as long as some of it isn't bad."

"We made sure we had a couple slow songs for the couples," Isabel told Levi and the couple beside him.

"Are they good ones?" Ymir asked.

Isabel and Farlan rolled their eyes. "Ye of little faith," Farlan scoffed.

~

Eren stopped dancing with his friends to take a break and wander over to the snack bar. There he met up with Sasha who was already loading up two plates. "Hey, Sasha," he greeted her.

"Hey, Eren! Did you know they were gonna have tables filled with nothing but candy? I didn't!" she raved.

"No, I didn't," he chuckled.

Sasha took her plates and was about to leave, but remembered she needed to remind him of something. "Oh! I almost forgot, Eren. Isabel wanted me to remind you that the guard is going to go and dance together for a couple songs, along with anyone else who wants to. So, if you and your friends want to join in, be somewhere where we can all find you easily. She told me the songs they requested are coming up soon."

"Okay, I'll join in. Thanks."

"Awesome!" And with that, Sasha left with her plates.

Eren smiled with excitement and took a small cup of candy before returning to his seat. Levi,
Mikasa, and Armin were the only ones there when he came back, the others were presumably socializing or dancing. "Have you gone up to dance yet?" Eren asked his boyfriend.

"No, I haven't," Levi answered. "I've been waiting for my date."

Eren tried not to look a tad guilty at his words. "Well, you won't have to wait much longer. I heard the guard is going to be dancing together in a little bit."

"I guess I can dance with you then." Levi shrugged.

Eren playfully slapped Levi's arm.

They were soon joined by Farlan and Petra, who seemed to have been out of breath, most likely from dancing.

"Hey, Farlan," Levi called. "What songs did you guys choose for when we all go up to dance?"

"Don't Stop Me Now, Come On Eileen, and Planetary (GO!). We thought most people from the guard would know those songs. What do you think?"

"I think they're good choices. So when I hear Freddie Mercury, it's time to get on the dance floor?"

"Precisely," Farlan answered happily.


After hearing the song titles, Eren turned to his friends. "Do you both want to come dance with the guard when it comes time?"

"Yeah!" Mikasa answered.

"Of course we do!" Armin agreed. "When are we doing that?"

The music of the current song faded and a low voice came over the speakers accompanied by a piano.

"Right about now," Levi said, grabbing Eren's hand and leading him into the dance floor.

Everyone else at the table was soon to follow and they could see several other members of the guard walking casually to the center. Since the song started so slow, nobody appeared to be in a rush.

~ So, don't stop me now
~ don't stop me

A fair amount of guard members and their friends had reached the edge of the dance floor, then all hell broke loose once the song picked up its pace.

~ 'Cause I'm havin' a good time
~ Havin' a good time!

With no warning, the entire guard broke out into a sprint for the center of the floor, alarming nearly everyone they passed. By the time the song had reached the fast tempo, they were all clustered into the center, most of them dancing without bothering to acknowledge any concept of rhythm or
control. Normally, Eren would've concerned himself with the stares from all the onlookers and how judgmental they seemed, but he couldn't bring himself to care.

Beyond this night, he couldn't guarantee that he'd have another time to let everything go. He'd been kicked out of his home, his family was hanging on by a thread, and he'd experienced more than any teenager should have to endure. But tonight, he was surrounded by his friends, all of which were making fools of themselves by flailing their limbs to classic rock. Tonight, he had no one to impress or to fear. He'd let himself have this song, he'd let himself have this entire night to simply stop caring. Onlookers laughing at their expense or looking down on them were unimportant.

~

Not a single person took a break during the three scheduled songs that played for them. At one point, Isabel convinced everyone to get in a circle with their arms linked and start spinning, half of them nearly tripping after awhile, but none of them minded. Connie even broke the link to stand in the middle, performing his amateurish interpretation of some type of ballet, causing them all to break into laughter and end the link.

Once those songs were over, most of them scattered, either heading to the snack bar or going back to their tables. But at the beginning strums of guitar in the next song, Levi grabbed Eren's hand to keep him from walking off.

~ You cannot quit me so quickly
~ Is no hope in you for me?
"I know we just got done dancing," Levi murmured. "But this is a slower song..."
~ No corner you could squeeze me
~ But I've got all the time for you, love
"Are you asking me to dance?" Eren teased, stepping up to Levi.
"I might be." Levi put one arm around Eren's waist and held the other out to offer him his hand. "Shall we?"
~ The space between the tears we cry
~ Is the laughter keeps us coming back for more
Eren accepted his hand, placing his free arm over Levi's shoulders. They began swaying to the music, and just like the night of their homecoming dance, Levi showed that he actually knew how to slow dance and not just shift his weight.
~ We're strange allies with warring hearts
~ What a wild-eyed beast you be
Levi leaned up to give Eren a slow kiss before backing back down. "You know I love you, right?"
Eren nodded, smiling. "Yes. And you know I love you too, right?"
"Of course." The corners of Levi's eyes crinkled whenever he smiled and Eren absolutely loved it.

~ The space between the wicked lies we tell

~ That hope to keep us safe from the pain

Eren leaned his head on Levi's shoulder, sighing contentedly. He liked songs like the one playing. It wasn't a love song saying that everything was always going to be perfect and that there wouldn't be time when people would hurt. But just because things weren't always perfect didn't mean that there weren't ever any perfect moments. Like the one he was sharing with Levi.

~ The space between where you smile and hide

~ Is where you'll find me if I get to go

Levi looked past Eren to see that the dance floor was fairly empty. He didn't expect it to be full since this wasn't the type of music their generation typically listened to. He didn't care anyway. Full or empty, Eren was right beside him and wasn't going anywhere. He'd found someone who cared for him as much as he did. He wouldn't trade that for anything.

The song faded out eventually, much to their dismay. It had to end, of course, but they wished that something could prolong the moment. They began walking back to their table when the next song started playing and Eren started lagging behind.

Eren recognized the song and nearly began jumping in place, insistently tugging on Levi's hand. "Oh my god, levi. We have to dance to this one! I've known this song since I was little!"

Levi listened for a few beats before he was groaning as his boyfriend yanked him back out to the dance floor. "Seriously? This song? It's so cheesy."

"Please?" Eren begged, giving him puppy eyes.

Levi sighed, hanging his head for a few seconds. With a sour look, he gestured for Eren to take his hand again and Eren would've clicked his heels in the air if he could've.

~ And I'd give up forever to touch you

~ 'Cause I know that you feel me somehow

~ You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be

~ I just don't want to go home right now

Levi looked around as they danced, finding Ymir spinning Christa a ways away and seeing Mike with Nanaba not too far from them. He even found Bertolt dancing with Annie, who'd switch to dance with Reiner every so often. There was no doubt that the song was overplayed, but he'd dance to it for Eren.

~And all I can taste is this moment

~And all I can breathe is your life

~When sooner or later it's over

~I just don't wanna miss you tonight
"Do you not like this song?" Eren asked as Levi spun him.

"I wouldn't say that," Levi answered. "It's a good song. But it's become cliché to play it at proms and weddings."

Eren rolled his eyes. "So? Allow yourself a cliché every once in awhile. Have fun with it." He pecked Levi's forehead and soon, Levi gave in, ceasing to care about how ridiculous he may have previously felt.

~And I don't want the world to see me
~'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
~When everything's made to be broken
~I just want you to know who I am

Back at their table, Hanji hadn't put their phone away since Levi and Eren had first started dancing. "Don't you think they might yell at you for filming them?" Marco asked.

"Oh, please," Hanji scoffed. "They'll thank me later. This way they get to watch the magical moment years down the line when they're old and grey."

Marco shrugged, figuring they were right.

"It'll be great to watch. I even got the part where Levi threw a fit when Iris came on," Hanji laughed. "Gosh, they're so cute together."

Marco smiled in agreement. "Yeah, they really are. I'm glad Levi found someone who makes him so happy."

"Me too," Hanji said.

~

Awhile later, everyone was seated back at their tables. The DJ announced that their teachers would be deciding the prom kings and queens within a moment.

"I hope we don't get another mishap like last year," Ymir commented quietly.

Eren turned to face her. "Why? What happened last year?"

Ymir and Christa started chuckling at his question. "Well, you know how they try to make sure the prom king and queen are each other's dates?" Ymir asked, waiting for Eren to nod. "Well, last year, Christa won prom queen for the junior class and some other guy won prom king. So, when it came time the kings and queens to dance, she just ditched him and started dancing with me. Poor guy just stood around not knowing what to do." The two girls started laughing again.

"And I got the whole thing on tape," Hanji added from where they sat.

"Stop laughing; I felt really bad!" Christa whined despite being in fits of giggles herself.

"Not bad enough to dance with him," Ymir added.

"Hopefully they learned from their mistake," Eren said, also laughing at their story.
The group was silenced when they heard the familiar voice one of their teachers speaking into a microphone. They went into explaining how the teachers decided who won and all of the obligatory statements like how it was a tough decision.

They first went through who had won prom king and queen for the junior class, along with the first runner ups. Then, they moved onto the senior class.

Eren moved to whisper to Levi. "I didn't know they had a place before the king and queen."

"Me neither," Levi replied. "I think it's nice, though. Giving people a chance to be the prince or princess, so there's at least a little less disappointed people."

"I think that's a good idea too," Eren agreed.

Their teacher cleared their throat and went to list off who had won. "For the junior royalty, the prince and princess of the senior class are Connie Springer and Sasha Braus."

Several people at their table had to cover their ears as Hanji whooped and hollered and started hitting the table in excitement. They all watched as Connie and Sasha stood up from their seats and walked up to receive their crowns. Connie had a little spring to his step as he high fived his friends that he passed, while Sasha just looked like she was on top of the world. She sent a smile to every table she passed and it made them so happy to see her so excited.

Their teacher went on to announce the king and queen, but the guard didn't care much after Sasha and Connie had won.

~

Isabel and Farlan came to stand by Eren and Levi after the dance between all the winners was shared. Farlan kneeled down between the two and set his elbows on the back of their chairs. "The last song we requested is coming up. Do you think we should all have a dance with our prom prince and princess?"

Levi grinned up at him. "I think that's a great idea."

The idea was discussed amongst all the guard members and their group of friends. Table by table, they stood up and migrated over to where Connie and Sasha were. Isabel tapped them both on the shoulder to gain their attention. "How Far We've Come is playing in a bit and we'd all like a dance with our royalty. Would you do us the honor?"

"Hell yeah, we will!" Connie answered, shooting up from his chair.

"We'd love to!" Sasha chirped, repeating Connie's action.

Rushing back to the dance floor, they celebrated Sasha and Connie winning their titles and finished off the night. Everyone took turns to dance with the two, congratulating them as they stepped up. It was the perfect way to end their prom.

~
After the dance was shared, Hanji suggested that they all go to get their professional pictures taken as a group and with their dates. The background for everyone to stand in front of was placed right near the front entrance, framed with trees and fairy lights.

All the couples went first, followed by the small groups of friends. Eren, Armin, and Mikasa took their turn, wanting a photo of just themselves, seeing as they'd been friends since childhood. And Levi had taken a photo with his siblings. Hanji waited at the side with their hand over their pants pocket where their phone was hidden. They were about to go and take a picture with Petra, when their phone buzzed in their pocket. Pulling it out, they scanned the new text they received and started beaming at the rest of the group. "Attention everyone!" They hollered. "That surprise I talked about has arrived! They're at the door!"

Everyone raised their brow at them, wondering what on earth they meant as they ran to the front entrance of the building. Their befuddlement cleared up as soon as they noticed Ewrin, Moblit, Erd, and Gunther coming through the door, all dressed in tuxes. Half of them ran to meet them as they came through.

"Well, now that everyone is here, I think we can take a proper group photo!" Hanji explained.

The crowd flocked together in front of the setup. Some had to wedge between other's and some had to stand in front of others so everyone would fit in the photo. "Did you reuse last year's tux?" Levi asked Erwin.

Erwin chuckled and nodded. "Yeah, we all had to. We wanted to look the part for your photo but you know how it is in college. No money for anything."

Levi nodded in understanding.

The photographer smiled at the group as they adjusted themselves. "Big smiles!" They reminded everyone.

With a single flash, they relaxed and scattered, ready to finish the photos for smaller groups.

With their photos taken and their receipts collected, people started leaving the venue and the DJ winded down, but none of them were prepared to let the night end. Hanji led everyone outside to their van. "Alrighty, time to go home." A few groans and complaints followed and they had to reveal their secret plan. "Okay, the jig is up! Who actually wants to go home and who would like to go on an adventure?" they asked, standing in front of their group.

"I wanna go on an adventure!" Mike shouted from the back.

"As do I!" Isabel chimed, hopping in place.

"What kind of adventure?" Levi inquired skeptically, squinting at his friend.

"Oh you know, just the 'I know a mini golf course that's open until two' kind of adventure." A round of gasps sounded and Hanji knew they had everybody convinced. "So, who wants to go home?" When no one replied, they started walking towards the van again. "Call your parents and tell them you're spending the night under my supervision!"
"I wonder what the employees must be thinking," Eren mused, examining the small golf club in his hands.

"They're probably thinking 'hm, a bunch of teenagers in tuxes and dresses this late at night? I bet they're coming back from their prom.'" Armin provided sarcastically.

Eren snorted. "Well, obviously. I just mean it's probably a funny sight to see so many people dressed up all fancy playing mini golf in the middle of the night."

"Agreed," Armin said.

Levi wrapped his arm around Eren's waist. "Which course do you want to go on?"

"I'm having trouble deciding between Pirate's Cove and Meteor Mountain," Eren hummed. "I mean, I've been to pirate themed golf courses before and they're pretty cool, but I want to know what this so called 'Meteor Mountain' looks like."

"I'm gonna go out on a limb and say it's space themed," Levi teased.

Eren glared at him. "I know that!"

Mikasa came to interrupt the two. "Which course are you guys going on? I'm going to the Dragon's Lair."

Eren rolled his eyes. "All these courses are built for little kids. Adults play mini golf too. What are they thinking?"

"True, but it seems like you're still making up your mind on which one you want to go to most," Mikasa pointed out.

Eren avoided eye contact with her. "... Shut up."

Levi tugged him gently to start walking. "Since you're so curious, we can go to the Meteor Mountain."

"I guess we're going to Meteor Mountain," Eren told his sister.

"Okay, see you guys at the end." Mikasa waved as she headed in the other direction.

As they worked through the golf course, they could see the others from across the man made rivers. Seeing as they were the only ones at the course this late, it wasn't hard to spot their friends.

As it turned out, Levi was lousy at mini golf. Getting around all the obstacles was hard enough for him, but for some reason, putting the golf ball into the hole was the most difficult part for him. He hadn't gotten a single hole in one and he had to putt the ball at least four times every try.

"I honestly thought you'd be better at mini golf than ski ball but I guess I was wrong," Eren commented from the side. "I think you just have issues with putting balls in holes. I think that's it."

Levi glowered at him, muttering quietly. "I know one hole I don't have any trouble fitting things in."

Eren's face became dusted with pink as he straightened up, falling silent to let Levi finish the hole they were on.
Moving onto the next hole, Eren was the one to start off. He took his first swing and stood aside to let Levi take his turn. "Do you think Hanji will have plans for after this?"

"Absolutely," Levi replied. "They've always got something up their sleeve." He took a swing, using great concentration and ended up getting hole in one, causing Eren to drop his jaw. Levi played it off like it was nothing, sauntering past Eren, completely expressionless. "Suck on that ball,” he deadpanned, leaving his boyfriend dumbfounded.

~

After they'd finished the course, they met up with the rest of their group as they finished their rounds. In the end, Eren won against Levi, though Levi was the only one of the two to get a hole in one, even if it was a lucky shot.

Into the van they went, ready to make their next stop. Hanji stopped at the nearest convenience store and instructed everyone to get whatever snack and drinks they pleased.

Running into the store, they realized that it was nearly as vacant as the golf course. The few customers that were there gave them strange looks as they flooded in, on the hunt for food. Sasha and Connie led the way, making a mad dash for the snack isles. Hanji and Moblit ran to the back to carry out cases of soda by the arm full. Everyone else just grabbed random things that they craved at the moment.

The herd lined up at the cash register with eager smiles, setting down everything they'd picked out. The employee behind the cash register appeared to have had a long day and was not prepared to see so many people in formal attire shove food in front of him in the middle of the night. As quickly as he could, he bagged their items to get them out of the store and accepted Hanji's payment.

Each person wished him a good night as they exited the store and ran back to the van. "Where are we going now?" Mikasa asked.

"My place, of course!" Hanji replied, buckling in their seat belt. "Everyone can spend the night if they want."

"Could we play dungeons and dragons like we did at your Halloween party?" Armin asked.

"You know it kid," Hanji answered.

On their way to Hanji's, Levi ended up sitting on Eren's lap again, only they were seated in the back row next to the window. Levi angled his head to look back at Eren. "Are you having a good time?" He murmured.

"Are you kidding?" Eren responded, beaming. "This is the most fun I've had in forever."

Levi mirrored his grin. "Good." Craning his neck, he planted a quick kiss on Eren's cheek.

Eren tightened his grip on Levi's waist and smiled into his shoulder. He knew Levi was constantly worried about his wellbeing was just as affected by the incident with his father as he was. Feeling as if it was his responsibility to reassure Levi when he was feeling alright, he never missed a chance to show him how happy he was and make his appreciation clear. And knowing that the night ahead of him was going to be just as fun as it had already been, he knew that Levi would be
relieved of his worries.

~

Life went on as normal after prom night, with everyone heading back to school and preparing for individuals on the side. Carla became more frequent in her visits, missing her children more and more by the day. Eren did what he could to take his mind off of everything by focusing on his school work and his routines with Levi and his friends. When Levi would come home from work and he had spare time, he'd fill it with spoiling Eren and staying close to him. Overall, everyone was coping and trying to make everything work.

The night before individuals, everybody was buzzing at the Ackerman's home, getting everything together so they wouldn't be rushing the next day. As excited for the next day as everyone was, Kutchel was probably the most eager of them all.

"I hope all my cameras will be charged enough," she mumbled to herself, plugging everything in.

"Maman, you have four cameras charging. I think you'll be just fine," Levi said.

"There's no shame in being extra prepared. I don't want to miss a single performance."

Levi rolled his eyes smiling faintly. He crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, watching his mother scramble around. "Do you need any help with anything?"

"No, thank you though," Kutchel hummed as she scanned the room looking for something to prepare. "I have everything under control. You get to bed so you're well rested."

"Okay." Levi gave his mother a hug and headed upstairs. As he walked to his room, he came across Eren being pestered by his sister and he couldn't help but attempt to hide his grin.

"I just don't know what to expect, I need specific details of what I need to do and how I need to do it—" Mikasa went on and on while Eren was stuck against the wall with no idea how he should begin answering her.

Levi swooped in to save his boyfriend by gaining Mikasa's attention in an attempt to sort everything out for her. "Calm down, everything will be okay. There's nothing you really have to do. Just get enough sleep, eat a good breakfast, and have fun when you go to perform. We don't have individuals to stress everyone out. There's no big trophy or title on the line; it's all just for fun."

Mikasa nodded, taking in every word. "Just for fun," she parroted, embedding it into her mind.

"Just for fun," Levi repeated. "There are no expectations for you to live up to."

"Okay... sorry, I've just never done this before so I don't know what to do."

"All you have to do is the routine that you, Eren, and Armin have made. Nothing else. Just have a good time."

Mikasa sighed heavily, feeling a bit of stress fall off her shoulders. "Alright, I'll do that."

"Good. Now we should all get to bed," Levi said.
"Okay, thanks for the help." Mikasa walked off to Isabel's room.

Levi took the hand of a relieved Eren and entered his own room. "I didn't expect someone as confident as her to be so nervous."

Eren yawned, scratching the back of his neck. "Yeah, well, she can do anything asked of her; she just needs strict details to follow." He climbed into bed, more than ready to get to sleep.

Levi followed him, clicking off the light and pulling the sheets over them. "I can understand that." He shuffled closer to Eren, wrapping his arms around him. "Is your mom coming tomorrow?"

"Yeah, she wouldn't miss it," Eren sighed, pulling himself closer to Levi. "I can't wait for tomorrow."

Levi was glad that Eren was finding things to look forward to instead of dreading things. "Me neither. Tomorrow's going to be a good day."


Levi kissed the top of his head before settling down. "I love you too, babe."

~

Levi and Eren finished practicing the most difficult toss from their routine in the practice room and packed the rest of their equipment into their flag bags. They left the practice room to gather their clothes that they'd be changing into for other performances, then waited in the living room with everyone else until it was time to go.

"Does everyone have their equipment, their uniforms, and their CDs?" Kutchel asked, putting her cameras into her purse. Everyone answered affirmatively. "Good, now let's go."

They all headed out the door, hopping into Kutchel's car and headed to the school. All their nerves had withered away to nothing and were replaced with anticipation and eagerness.

Once they arrived at the school, they entered the building and walked down to the gym, where the individuals were being held. Eren and Mikasa observed their surroundings, finding the bleachers pulled out and seeing several teachers chatting at the opposite end of the room.

"Is that a piano?" Mikasa asked, gazing past their music teacher, Mr. Bozado.

"Hm? Oh, yeah," Levi answered. "Some people want a live piece to accompany their performance. So some years, Oluo offers." He began walking towards said teacher, gesturing for the rest of them to follow.

Approaching the teachers, they headed more towards Rico as she was engaged in conversation with Hannes.

"Hannes!" Eren called. "I didn't know you were going to be here."

Hannes turned to him, smiling brightly. "I didn't know either. Until last week, that is. Heh," he chuckled. "So, are you going to be performing today?"
"Yeah, twice actually," Eren said. "Mikasa's going to be performing with me."

"Hi, Hannes," Mikasa greeted from behind Eren.

"Hello, Mikasa." Hannes waved to her.

"What are you doing here today? Just watching?" Eren inquired.

"Actually, Rico asked me to be the announcer. I'm also in charge of handling the music and the order of the performances. So, if you have CDs or sheet music for Mr. Bozado, hand 'em over."

The group gave him their CDs and he handed over the sheet that kept track of which order they'd be performing in. Levi could only sign up for three of his four performances, seeing as he'd need his other friends' input, just as Eren needed to wait for Armin to show up to write down their place.

While they signed up, Rico studied the group from beside Hannes. Her eyes landed on Mikasa, vaguely recognizing her. "Are you new to color guard?" she asked.

Mikasa looked up at her. "Yeah... why is Hannes announcing if you're the coach?"

"I can't multitask and we still need someone to judge."

Mikasa's eyes widened in horror. "... We're going to be judged? Levi, what the hell? You said this was just for fun," she hissed to Levi.

"It is just for fun," Rico assured her, holding out a hand to calm her down. "But we need somebody to give you scores so we know which medal to award you."

Mikasa's lungs deflated with relief. "Oh, okay."

Rico exhaled an amused breath. "Relax, I won't judge you too hard."

"I appreciate it," Mikasa breathed.

Everyone who was present signed in and walked back towards the bleachers only to be immediately tackled by other members of the guard. Eren was being smothered by Christa, Hanji was nearly suffocating Levi, and Mike took Isabel and Farlan up into his arms. Mikasa watched the exchange, grateful that she wasn't close to anyone in the guard.

Eventually, the other members had let go, giving them some air.

"Who is as pumped as me?" Mike shouted in question.

Isabel beamed and went to answer. "I—"

"No one, that's who," Mike deadpanned.

Hanji slapped his shoulder, cackling. "So, anybody know who's going first?"

"Ymir and I are!" Christa announced, shooting her hand up. "We already signed up to go first. When is everyone else going?"

The group engaged in a bit of chatter, discussing their performance schedule. Since Eren was only a part of two routines - and Mikasa was only in one - they strayed from the group after their input was no longer needed and walked along the edge of the bleachers.
"Not to be condescending, but I wasn't expecting so many people to come," Mikasa commented.

Eren observed all the strangers that were already seated, presumably being family members and friends of the guard. "This is a really special day for everyone in the guard. If you weren't doing a routine with me, I'd be upset if I didn't see you in the crowd."

"This means that much to you guys?"

Eren nodded. Their conversation faded as they walked, but their attention was soon occupied by who was walking in the door. Armin, followed by his grandfather and their mother came through the entrance and headed straight for them. Armin came rushing over to meet up with his friends.

"Hey guys, do you have the equipment?"

"No," Eren joked. "We came unprepared. You can't do the show with us anymore."

For a moment, Armin's enthusiastic expression faltered.

"I'm kidding, Armin, of course we brought the equipment," Eren scoffed.

Armin let out a sigh of relief. "Don't mess with me; I'm nervous about today! I've never done this before."

"Hey, I've never done this before either," Eren said, hoping it would comfort his friend.

"Well, you've competed before and you know more about color guard than Mikasa or myself."

Eren chuckled. "Okay, that's fair, but don't be nervous. It'll be fun."

Carla and Armin's grandfather finally caught up to them and Armin's grandfather decided to go and take his seat.

Carla stayed behind to see her children. "I'm so excited for you three! I'm ready to get everything on camera. I charged up my phone and I can't wait to see what you came up with!"

"I can't wait for you to see it. We worked really hard," Eren said. "Also, do you think you can film Levi and his mom's performance? She obviously can't film it if she's in it."

Carla's eyes went wide at her son. "Kutchel is..." She broke off her sentence, starting to understand what Eren was saying. "Why the hell didn't you tell me parents could do routines too?!!" she cried. "I want to do one with you both too! We could've made one together."

"Sorry, I didn't think to mention it to you..." Eren stepped away.

"Well, we are doing one together next year, and that's that." Carla walked off to go sit with Armin's grandfather eyeing her children, feigning bitterness.

Eren and Mikasa looked at each other warily. "I guess we're doing a routine with mom next year," Eren mumbled.

"Guess so," Mikasa agreed.
A few minutes before it was time to start, Marco took a seat next to Eren to chat before anyone went on. "Hi, Eren," he greeted with his typical friendly smile.

"Hey, Marco."

"How many routines are you doing?"

"Just two," Eren replied. "One with Levi and one with two of my friends."

Marco nodded. "Nice, I'm doing two as well."

"Who with?"

Marco adorned a devious smile that Eren didn't recognize. He didn't think Marco had the capacity to scheme. "Well, I'm doing one by myself... and one with Jean."

Eren's mouth dropped. "You're kidding."

"Nope, it's the truth," Marco said.

"How the fuck did you trick him into doing it?"

"I didn't trick him, he agreed to it," Marco explained, crossing his legs with a smug grin. "I'm sorry if it brings back bad memories, but the day after you guys fought I was still furious with him. I still am upset about the whole thing, but I've made peace with it now. But the day after it happened, I wouldn't talk to him, so he said he'd do anything to make up for it so I'd forgive him and so I knew how much he regretted it."

Eren listened intently, enjoying where this story was heading.

"And what he said... it was terrible. Obviously, it insulted you, but it also insulted the sport, insulted everyone who's gay and, in turn, insulted me. So, he promised to apologize to you, but I didn't think that was enough. So, I thought I'd make him do something to pay respect where he owed it. I told him to do an individual routine with me. He was really against it at first, but he eventually understood it was the only thing he could do so I could forgive him."

Eren had to keep himself from cackling. At this moment, nothing pleased him more than to know Marco had gotten Jean to do this. "Did he throw a fit? Was he miserable practicing? Does he hate it?"

"Better," Marco replied, leaning in. "After he got over hitting himself with the equipment..." Marco lowered his voice to emphasize how he wasn't supposed to tell anyone. "He started liking it more than he'd ever care to admit."

Eren couldn't believe it. "Wait, he actually enjoys it?"

Marco nodded. "Yup. Of course, now he doesn't want to do it in front of a crowd, but he doesn't hate it."

Eren began chuckling. "This is priceless. Now he knows not to make fun of it or the people in it."

"That's right, and if he ever thinks to mock it again, I'll just pull out the pictures that I'm having Sasha take while he's performing."
Eren shook his head in amusement. "I didn't think you were capable of blackmail."

"I wouldn't call it blackmail, but rather... an incentive to stay in his lane." Marco winked.

"This is going to be the best day of my life," Eren breathed.

~

Eren loved watching all the routines his friends had put together by themselves. Each one had shown off their own personal strengths and a bit of their personality. Petra went after Christa and Ymir, performing entirely with her flag that had a floral pattern on it, all to a song she'd given to Oluo to play while she performed. Sasha had created a routine with Connie using the song Take On Me, which they performed after Petra. It wasn't the most skillfully put together routine, but the crowd could tell they were having a blast and it was fun to watch. After their routine, Levi went on with his largest team, consisting of Hanji, Nanaba, Petra, and all their graduated friends, including Erwin, Gunther, Erd, and Moblit. Their piece was accompanied by a song played by Oluo, though it was a rather short routine.

Then, it was time for Eren and his friends to go on. Their parents wished them luck and Levi gave Eren a kiss on the cheek, assuring him they'd do great. The three of them had arrived in their uniforms, so they had no need to change. They couldn't afford professional uniforms, so they stuck to old clothes they already had that were easy to move in.

Setting up their equipment, Mikasa and Armin reminded themselves to not look to the audience, scared to lose focus. The song they chose was White Winter Hymnal - something that Isabel had showed Eren - which he had shown to his friends.

They'd set up in a line, prepared to begin.

"The judge is ready. Is the guard ready?" Hannes spoke into the microphone excitedly.

Eren gave the 'okay' signal.

"You may take the floor in individual competition." Hannes clicked play on the sound system, playing the CD Eren had brought.

Levi watched from beside his mother as their routine began. They started off with rifles as Eren executed a triple toss, earning the crowds applause. Levi figured since the other two were so new, Eren would be the only one doing anything advanced.

"They're not half bad," Kutchel commented, recording their performance.

"Mhm," Levi hummed, pulling out his phone so he could have his own pictures. He adored watching his boyfriend, knowing that he'd come up with the routine all by himself. "I knew they'd do a good job."

The three went on using their sabers and flags with red silks. Mikasa was clearly more comfortable working with her saber than Armin, but he did his best to not show his uneasiness.

Eren would take a few glances at his friends to see how they were holding up and was glad to see that for the most part, they kept in sync with him. Overall, everything was going well and it was
just as fun as Levi promised it would be. He vaguely noticed Rico sitting in the back row, speaking into a recorder, but he forced his gaze away, focusing on the routine. He didn't really care how they placed, he was just happy to be with his friends, doing what he loved.

Considering how short the routine was, it only made sense that it ended quicker than expected. The audience erupted with applause and the three felt incredibly relieved. Eren and Mikasa looked up to their mother, who showed nothing but pride in her features, while Armin looked to his grandfather as he clapped for him excitedly.

After taking a moment to listen to the crowd, they gathered their equipment and rushed to get off the floor.

~

"You did so good," Levi praised Eren as they waited for Hanji and Moblit to begin their routine. He gave him a quick kiss to emphasize his statement.

"Thanks," Eren replied, blushing. "We all worked really hard."

"And it showed. I think you'll end up getting a really good score."

They watched Hanji and Moblit's performance in silence and did the same when Annie went on next. It wasn't long before Levi and his mother got up to get ready for their performance. Eren, his mother, and Levi's siblings wished them luck, and they were off. Eren sat closer to Isabel and Farlan as they waited for them to appear on the floor.

When they reentered, Levi was in a black v-neck and black leggings, while Kutchel wore a simple white dress and also adorned black leggings. Levi set out his flag with the ouija board silk that he had gotten for Christmas. Kutchel laid out a flag with a feather print on it, being one of Levi's many flags. Hannes went through the same process, checking their preparedness and letting them begin.

An old song began playing and they started their routine. Their movements were slow paced and well timed as Eren would expect, considering Kutchel didn't do this all the time. As the lyrics came in, Eren noticed it wasn't in English, but rather French, and felt that that should've been expected of them.

Eren held out his phone to take short videos as well as a few photos for himself. He leaned over to check that his mother was filming for them as she promised, and luckily she was. He looked over to Isabel and found that she was also recording on another one of her mother's cameras.

"What song is this?" Eren whispered to Isabel.

"Chanson D'automne," Isabel replied quietly, not wanting her voice to get on the recording. "It's by Charles Trenet. It's one of our mom's favorites."

Eren nodded in acknowledgement, turning back to watch them perform. He loved how Levi and his mother looked to be having the time of their life. Kutchel loved sharing her children's interests and spending time with them, and it was evident by the smile on Levi's face that he felt the same way.
It was Nanaba and Mike's turn after Levi and his mother, and Eren stood to congratulate them as they came back. "You both did amazing! And Kutchel, I didn't expect you to be so good at it!" Kutchel didn't do badly. It was easy to spot when she was hesitant, but she did well for someone who wasn't used to performing often.

Kutchel smiled sheepishly. "Thank you so much!"

They took their seats and Eren set his arm around Levi's shoulders. "You did so good," Eren said, kissing his cheek.

"Thanks, you sap," Levi hummed, kissing him back. "You know, I walked past Marco on our way back and he said he's doing a routine with Jean after Mike and Nanaba."

"I know, he told me. I'm gonna take so many pictures," Eren beamed. "I hope he hates it; it'd serve his sorry ass right."

Levi rolled his eyes. "He's trying to make up for what he did. Give him a chance."

Eren frowned but dropped the subject, figuring he was right.

Jean ended up being every bit of miserable as Marco said he'd be, causing Eren to force down his laughter from start to finish. However. He decided that he wouldn't bring the topic up around Jean, figuring it'd be better to try and make peace.

Afterwards, Annie did a routine with a couple of her friends from her old school, then Hanji went to do their solo routine. And going after Hanji, it was finally Eren and Levi's turn to do their routine.

They used the song 'Skinny Love,' it being Eren's suggestion. After hearing some of the music that Isabel had put on a CD for Eren, he'd looked into the bands a little further and stumbled upon this song. Levi didn't understand why his boyfriend wanted a sad song for their individual's at first, but he liked it as much as he did and they agreed upon it.

Their performance was fluid all the way through. Levi had taught Eren how to exchange tosses in several ways, standing back to back and switching spots to catch the others flag, facing away from each other and tossing backwards to turn around and catch the other flag, all sorts of techniques. Levi deemed him experienced enough to execute them in their routine, and they did so without a flaw. Their family and friends watched with their recording devices out, catching every second on tape. The crowd loved their performance, applauding every time they'd catch a tricky toss or do anything advanced, just like with every other team.

The rest of the groups went. Annie went on to do a solo routine, Marco did his solo performance after, and Annie went back on with Bertolt and Reiner, surprising many of the guard members. When they came back in the audience, they explained that back at their old school, Reiner would do one individual routine with them every year. Christa went on again afterwards, doing a routine
with her sister. Some of the graduated members went on to do their own performance as well. Then it came time for the last performance of the day.

Levi, Farlan, and Isabel went to change into their uniforms and put on their makeup for their performance. Eren was particularly eager to see what they had come up with after Levi had told him they'd put together a routine just for their mother. He sat by Kutchel specifically to watch her reaction and offered to film for her.

They came out onto the floor in the most elaborate uniforms they'd seen all day, with Isabel in a layered, red dress, Farlan wearing green clothing and an orange scarf, and Levi in an aviators jacket with the rest of his clothes in black. Isabel had put on a bit of red makeup, Farlan had put gold hairspray onto the crown of his head, and Levi wore dark makeup spotted over his face to resemble dirt.

Upon seeing them, Kutchel let out a gasp and grinned widely. "It's Le Petit Prince!" she murmured.

"It's what?" Eren asked.

"They're dressed as characters from a book I read to them when they were little," she explained. "Oh my goodness, I can't wait to see what they put together!"

"We have a special performance to end the day," Hannes announced. "The three about to perform have dedicated this routine to their mother."

Kutchel let out another gasp and held her hands to her heart.

Hannes went through the same procedure, asking if the guard was ready and starting them off. Another old-timey French song came across the speakers, much to Kutchel's delight. "This is my favorite song," she breathed, humming along to the tune.

Eren remembered back when they would see some teams at competitions portray a well known story through their performance, and they were doing just that on the floor. It was incredible to see how each movement added to the telling of the story without any words needing to be said. He looked over to see how Kutchel was reacting and was happy to see how overwhelmed with joy she was. Her eyes were swimming with pride and gratefulness for her children. She felt like the luckiest mother in the world to have three children who loved her so much.

~

When all the performances were finished, everyone who had been on the floor was called back down to line up for awards. The order was completely random due to the fact that some members were on several teams, but Levi stayed by Eren's side, holding his hand throughout the awards.

Hannes stepped forward with Rico by his side with her notes in hand, telling him the scores and how each team placed. Oluo followed closely with the medals, ready to hand them off.

"God, I really hope we win," Mikasa whispered.

Eren fixed her with a confused stare. "What are you talking about? No one wins, we all just get medals."
"But still," Mikasa hissed.

Eren rolled his eyes and returned his attention to Hannes.

"Now, if you're new to coming to individuals, we take votes for crowd favorite by measuring the audience's applause. So, when we announce the score of the teams, make sure to make a lot of noise for your favorites," Hannes said. Rico whispered to him the first score and allowed him to begin. "We'll go in chronological order. So, the first team, Christa and Ymir—"

He went down the line, calling out the scores and waiting for Oluo to offer each of them their medals. The crowd rarely ranged in volume when they cheered, but it was clear when they favored one or two teams above the others. Carla was in the audience, screaming her head off every time her children, Armin, or Levi were being given their medals. At the end of the line, Eren had ended up getting a gold medal for his performance with Levi, and a silver medal for the one with his friends. Levi ended up with two silver medals and two gold medals.

Mikasa nudged Armin with her elbow. "Hey, look. I got a silver medal!" She whispered, holding up her medal.

"No way, me too!" Armin hushed, holding up his own.

Eren chuckled, watching his friends get excited over their win. He was glad they could share the rush of receiving their own medal with him, even if it was on a smaller scale than the championships.

"Alright, I think we can pick out the team that had the loudest applause," Hannes concluded. He took a moment to confirm his assumptions with Rico and Oluo before facing back. "The crowd favorite this year is Annie Leonhardt!"

The audience roared once more as Oluo handed Annie her ribbon. She thanked him, smiling and received pats on the back and side hugs from those surrounding her.

"And that concludes this year's individual competition."

~

Carla came back to the Ackerman's home after individuals, and stayed for hours, spending time with her children. Kutchel fixed dinner for everyone, preparing desert for afterwards as a celebration of the day's prior events. A more perfect day couldn't have been planned for the two families and they were all glad to have been together for it.

After dinner, everybody dispersed throughout the house. Carla said goodbye to the Ackermans but led her children back to the kitchen to have a private conversation. She sat across from them, fidgeting with her fingernails, unsure of how to begin get explanation.

"I wanted to wait until after individuals to tell you both this, so you wouldn't be distracted. I wanted you to have fun in the moment, so I figured it would be best to tell you both now."

Mikasa and Eren exchanged hesitant looks, but turned back to face their mother, waiting for her to continue.
"So, after all this time, we've made incredible progress," she began, grinning. "And as soon as next week, if you'd like, you both can come back home."

Eren and Mikasa stiffened at the news. "... Is that supposed to be good news?" Eren asked.

Carla sent him a warning stare. "Eren, please. I know now that your father isn't going to hurt either of you or do anything like what he did before. The only catch is... we have to start going to church again."

Mikasa watched her mother, befuddled, while Eren's features contorted into a glare. "Oh, is that all?"

Carla let out an impatient sigh. "Your father says he won't harass you, he won't speak badly of you, you just have to go to church with us. He's willing to have things go back to the way they were."

"Things can't go back to the way they were, ma. What if we don't want to go home? You might think it's safe there, but I don't feel safe going back," Eren spat defiantly.

"Eren, you told me you'd do whatever I asked when I decided if it was safe. I promise you're not in any danger. I wouldn't let you come back if I was even the slightest bit unsure. All you have to do is go to church. What's so wrong with that?"

"Going to church isn't the problem! It's the fact that he's making me go. He wouldn't have made us go if he didn't know about me. He's doing this to try to... to try to fix me or something." Eren's voice shook as he spoke. He didn't know why his mother couldn't understand.

"Ma, I don't think going home is such a good idea," Mikasa added quietly.

Carla started rubbing her temples in an attempt to soothe her frustration. "Eren, he's not asking anything of you. It's a small compromise, he doesn't expect you to change, he only wants you to come along."

"Why, though?" Eren challenged. "If he doesn't expect me to change, then why do I have to go?"

"I have been trying to fix this family ever since you left. We all have to make sacrifices if we want things to be okay again. You two can't live here forever, and I want my children back. Now, your father may have ulterior motives, but if that is the case, then prove him wrong. Prove to him that we can function again, prove to him that there's nothing wrong with the way you are. Show him that you're the son we raised and that you'll do just fine in life no matter who you love. Please." Carla was absolutely desperate, wanting nothing more than for her entire family to be together and happy. "Please, come home. Show him there's nothing wrong with you."

Eren stared into his mother's eyes without a shred of compliance, folding his arms over his chest. "I have nothing to prove to him. He chose to kick me out for one reason, and that reason isn't changing."

Carla deflated, overcome with exhaustion. "... Mikasa, will you come home?"

Mikasa shook her head. "Not unless Eren goes too."

Carla looked over to her son, only to find him holding his determined expression. She nodded to herself. "Okay... call me if you two change your minds." She stood to hug them both goodbye and give them a kiss in the sides of their heads. "I love you both, I'll call you tomorrow night."

They said their goodbyes to their mother and watched her leave in silence. After a few moments,
Mikasa left the table without a word. Eren stayed behind, staring at the table while deep in thought.

Levi came down the stairs, heading off into the living room, but halted after seeing Eren spaced out and alone. He approached him, setting a hand on his shoulder. "Babe? Is something wrong?"

Eren gazed up at Levi, studying his features and committing them to memory. He didn't want to leave the person, or family rather, that he felt loved by and safe around, no matter what the circumstances.

Chapter End Notes

Fuck me in the asshole that was terribleee. Regardless of what I think, I really do hope you guys liked it and I hope it was worth the wait.

Translation: Oh mon dieu, tu es la plus belle fille du monde! - oh my god, you're the most beautiful girl in the world!

So, there's the next chapter, then there's the epilogue and then we're done. I'm ready for death. HOPEFULLY, I'll have this entire thing done by mid November but honestly, the last chapter will be so long I'll probably go into cardiac arrest halfway through.

I'd like to thank my beta for being, um, perfect?? I can't do this without them, many hugs!

I don't think anyone will ask this, but just in case, parents can actually do individual performances. My mum learned how to do consecutives (and can still do them at 53 y.o! Yay for Coco!) and I remember one girl did a Pirates of the Caribbean themed one with her mom when I was in guard, it was wicked!

Here's an individual routine for the chapter-ly video! https://youtu.be/REL5290xaL4

If you liked this, it would mean the world to me if you left a comment or kudos! My tumblrs are dr-s--art and the-witch-daddy. Thank you so much for reading!!!
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Eren and his sister return home after their long stay.

Chapter Notes

This chapter isn't overly spectacular, so sorry about that. I can't believe there's only one chapter left and I'm NOT OKAY.

This chapter isn't edited, so I'm sorry in advance if there are any errors!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Levi let Eren curl up at his side and let him nap half the day away the Sunday after individuals. He'd been far too mentally exhausted to do much else. Levi felt him stirring and adjusted to give him room to allow him to stretch.

"Did you sleep well?"

"I guess," Eren mumbled. "I had a weird dream."

"What was it about?" Levi asked, stroking Eren's hair.

"Something about an octopus taking me in and raising me as its own," Eren grunted, knitting his eyebrows together.

Levi snorted. "Well... that's definitely creative."

Eren nodded, tucking his head under Levi's chin and clinging onto his shirt. He sighed heavily, taking in all of Levi's warmth. "What do you think I should do? About going home or staying?"

Levi pondered it over for a few moments. "I think you should choose whatever you think is best for you."

Eren frowned. "That doesn't help me at all. I don't know what's best."

Levi held him closer. "I don't want to force a decision on you. You could weigh out the pros and cons."

Exhaling deeply, Eren attempted to do as suggested. "If I go home my mom will be happy. I'll get to see her again and she'll get to see my sister and me. I won't have to live off of you guys like a freeloader."

"Hey, you're not a freeloader," Levi interjected, poking Eren's cheek.
Eren huffed out an amused breath. "But I'd have to face my dad. I wouldn't get to see you as often. I'd have to go to church and could possibly hear homophobic garbage. So, either way, it's going to be tough. I don't want to hurt my mom and I don't want to go home."

Levi nodded understandingly. "Whatever your decision is, make it for yourself. Don't make a decision thinking you owe anybody anything."

Eren thought about it long and hard. He knew Levi was right, but he also knew that no matter what happened, he'd end up making up his mind for what was best for others. His mother missed him and his sister terribly. Mikasa probably wanted to go back home and sleep in her own bed. Kutchel might've been inconvenienced by having them stay. Was Levi getting sick of him? "I think... I think I'm going home."

Levi kissed the top of Eren's head, rubbing his back soothingly. "Is that what you want?"

Eren let out a shaky breath. "I thinks that the best choice."

"Okay. And I'll still see you at school and I'll visit you and you can come by on the weekends if you'd like. It's not like I'm going to disappear," Levi assured him.

"I know. It's just that it's been so nice getting to always see you," Eren mumbled.

Levi nodded. "It really has been. When do you think you'll be going home?"

"I don't know. My mom said we could go back as soon as next week. That's probably when she'd want us back home."

~

Just as Carla asked, Eren and Mikasa were packing their belongings the following weekend, getting ready to go home. Eren took much longer than his sister, moving along lethargically to put everything away in his bags. Levi helped him, though he wished he wouldn't so he could prolong his stay as much as possible. With a heavy heart, Eren put away his medals that he had won with the thought resurfacing in his mind that he'd been to his last color guard performance of his senior year. So much had passed since he started living with Levi's family.

They finished packing a few minutes before Carla was said to show up and headed downstairs. Kutchel, Isabel and Farlan said their goodbyes to Eren and Mikasa and left them as they waited in the kitchen. Levi wrapped his arms around Eren in a tight hug, patting his back. "Everything will be alright. You can come over any time and I'll visit whenever you ask."

"Thank you, Levi," Eren mumbled into his shoulder.

Levi leaned back to give him a lingering kiss. Eren gladly accepted and returned it. "I love you so much," Levi said when they parted.

"I love you too."

It wasn't long before Carla showed up to take her children home. She didn't stay for long, she only thanked everyone for letting her children stay there and left. She was rather silent on the ride home, but spoke up right before they pulled in the driveway. "Your father isn't home yet, but he'll
be here for dinner. Neither of you have to speak with him if you don't want to."

Eren and Mikasa remained silent, staring out the windows.

Carla sighed, parking the car. She went to get another word in, but her children were already exiting the vehicle and moving to the trunk to retrieve their bags.

Carla helped them bring in their things and settle everything back into their rooms. Once they were finished, she lingered in Eren's room for an extra moment. "I'll be making dinner shortly. Is there anything specific you want?"

Eren sunk down, sitting on his bed and shook his head.

Carla wished he or his sister would say something. Anything. "Okay, I'll make your favorite, then." She was about to leave, but instead decided to sit by Eren's side and wrap him in a hug. "I know things will be hard for now, but I'm so glad you're home." She placed a kiss at the top of his head. "We can get through this, things won't be this difficult forever. I'll make sure of that."

Eren couldn't say that he completely believed her, but he knew she was going to do everything in her power to keep that promise, even if she fell short in the end.

Carla stood to leave, but paused at the door. "I'll call you down once dinner is ready."

Eren watched her leave and laid down on his bed once his door was shut. He folded himself into a ball and gazed around at his walls, studying the posters he hadn't seen in so long. He tore his eyes away and looked down at his watch, the very same one that Levi had given him ages ago. He opened it to look at the picture within and it hit him that as much as his mother wanted it to be, this was no longer his home.

~

During dinner, Mikasa and Eren sat at either side of their mother, but slid their chairs over so when their father arrived, they wouldn't be near him. They all remained silent with only the sound of their silverware hitting the plates breaking the quietness.

The front door opened abruptly and Carla cursed under her breath. Grisha walked through, halting as he saw who had returned. For a moment, no one dared to speak. Eren didn't even look up. Grisha moved along, so he could get things settled in before coming back to the kitchen.

In his absence, Carla whispered, "You two can eat in your rooms if that's what you'd prefer."

Mikasa shrugged.

Eren shook his head. "S'fine," he mumbled.

Grisha came back and served himself his own plate, sitting down at the opposite end of his family. The air was thick with tension and nobody knew how to break through it. But Carla thought she'd try.

"How was work?" She asked, keeping her eyes down.

"The same as usual," Grisha answered briefly.
Eren hated how they were trying to make everything normal again so quickly. It was so obvious that there were things to settle, conversations to be had. Rushing into it headfirst was making Eren sick.

"How have you two been?" Grisha asked, setting his silverware down.

Mikasa and Eren froze, hesitantly facing him. "... Fine, I guess." Mikasa muttered.

Eren gave up on keeping eye contact and went back to eating his dinner. "I've been better."

Grisha nodded understandingly and Eren could feel his stomach turning while his father acted like everything was okay. Like he hadn't wished death upon his own son. Like he hadn't forced his own children out of their home because of his prejudice.

"How has school been for you both?"

Mikasa and Eren shared a wary look at each other. "It's been alright," Mikasa answered for them.

Another emotionless nod from their father.

"Eren and Mikasa put together their own color guard performances for an event," Carla said, filling her husband in on what he had missed. "All the kids were able to make their own routine for a thing called individuals. They both won medals too. Mikasa has a silver medal. And Eren has silver and gold." She wanted him to care, she wanted him to show support.

"That's nice," Grisha said. Unenthusiastic as it may have been, it was the kindest thing he'd ever said about the sport.

But as much of an 'effort' as Grisha may have been making, Eren couldn't bear being in his presence anymore. He stood up to clear off his plate.

"Eren, is everything alright?" His mother murmured as he got up.

"Yeah, I'm just full," he lied. He left his family and headed up to his room, ready for the day to be over already. Nothing would change between him and his father, no matter how hard either of them tried. He was certain of that.

~

Eren ended up on the phone with Levi for hours, seeking comfort in his voice. They talked about Eren's father, how readjusting was going and how things were going to be from then on.

"You just try and focus on yourself for now," Levi said. "You have plenty of things to worry about, like graduating, you shouldn't have to put up with him."

"I know, it's just... everyone is pretending like everything's fine and it's making me sick," Eren explained. "He... he told me to die and everyone's acting like that doesn't matter or it didn't happen. They're acting like it's okay that said that to me and kicked me out. He hasn't even apologized yet. Not that I expect him to, but I'd at least expect my mom to not ignore that."

"... Do you think your mom would let you come back?"
Eren sighed, hugging his knees up to his chest. "I don't know. Maybe. But I need to get used to living here, because I have to for awhile."

"You're under no obligations—"

"I know, Levi. But this is just the easier option."

"... If you're sure."

They both fell silent for a short while. "I should get to bed. I need to get up early tomorrow to go to church." He rolled his eyes at the idea.

"If you want out of that, I can pretend to kidnap you," Levi offered.

Eren chuckled. "Thanks, but no thanks."

Though Eren couldn't see, Levi had a smile from getting him to laugh. "What church are you going to?"

"The one near the elementary school. Why?"

"Just in case you change your mind on the kidnapping."

Eren let out a more hearty laugh. "Good thinking. I'll call you tomorrow, Levi. I love you."

"I love you too, mon grand. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." Eren hung up feeling a bit more at ease than when he had first called Levi. Levi always had a way of calming him.

~

Eren hadn't gone to church since he was young, and the memories he had of it were blurred. But he did remember that his mother always made him dress nicely. So, he threw on a dress shirt and slacks on Sunday morning and waited downstairs for everyone else. Guilt weighed down on him as Mikasa sat by his side, looking utterly annoyed that they had to go. None of them would have to go if it wasn't for him.

He and his sister didn't have to wait long before everyone else was ready and left. The drive over didn't take long, since they lived so close to the schools and consequently near the church. Their church wasn't big and grand, it was a compact white building that looked like many others. Once parked, the family migrated inside, Eren staying close to his mother, following behind her. She waited until they fell in step to put her arm around his shoulders in comfort.

"It'll be over before you know it," she whispered to him. "You don't even have to listen if you don't want to."

Eren nodded in acknowledgment, but otherwise kept quiet.

Stepping through the doorway, Eren took in his surroundings. Everything was just how he remembered, with the tall windows, the wooden pews, it was like he was transported back to his childhood. He and his family went to sit down in one of the pews closest to the front, as the church
was rather empty for a Sunday. Eren took his seat next to his mother and Mikasa sat at the other side of her. Grisha sat next to Mikasa, having yet to speak a word to his family since that morning.

Eren noticed the priest out of the corner of his eye, going around to get well acquainted with everybody who wasn't yet seated. He hoped that he wouldn't come around to talk to him or his parents. While he waited for the sermon to begin, he allowed his mind to go blank and wish for the best. There was no getting out of it now.

His moment of mental stillness was interrupted as she heard clammering coming from behind him, followed by loud, familiar voices.

"Fuck, I feel like I'm gonna get struck by lightning any minute. Wait, are we allowed to swear in a church?"

"Shit, I don't know."

"Shush you guys! And you're not gonna get struck by lightning, that's ridiculous."

"What if I burst into flames? I'm walking sin, here."

"I can't with you guys."

"This goes against my religion."

Taking his eyes off the slightly annoyed priest, Eren craned his neck around to confirm his suspicions. And sure enough, the entire color guard team was huddled up together, making their way through the pews.

Eren's lips split into a wide grin as he saw all his friends coming for him, each of them bearing different expressions. Half of them were as calm as ever, smiling as they came towards him while the others were looking around like someone was after them.

Levi marched in the front of the group, heading straight for Eren and silently sat down next to him. The rest of the guard followed closely, filling up the pew behind them when they ran out of room.

"What are you guys doing here?" He whispered.

"Levi told us you were being forced to go to church," Petra answered from behind him. "We knew we probably couldn't get you out of it, but we weren't going to let you sit threw this alone!"

Eren was completely taken aback. He couldn't believe they'd sacrifice their Sunday going to the place half of them wouldn't be caught dead at, just for him. "You guys didn't have to—"

"We wanted to," Levi cut in. "I just sent the message, coming to support you was Izzy's idea."

Isabel leaned forward to address Eren. "Any pointers for church-ing right?"

Eren snickered. "Not really, just be quiet and listen from what I can remember."

Carla and Mikasa turned around to start chatting with the group after they'd noticed them and Eren was left looking at everyone in disbelief. Levi interlocked their hands and scooted closer to him. Eren mouthed the words 'thank you,' and Levi responded by kissing his cheek.

"Sorry, is that frowned upon in church?" Levi asked jokingly as he pulled away.

"Who cares?" Eren replied, grinning like a fool and dove back in for another kiss.
Most of the guard completely tuned out during the sermon, some even discreetly pulled out their phones to occupy themselves. Eren did the same, focusing on Levi beside him rather than listening to the priest. Halfway through the sermon, Carla gladly switched seats with Mikasa so that their father wouldn't yell at her for pulling out her DS.

Once the sermon, prayers and songs were all over and done with, some people stayed behind for their own purposes and spoke with the priest, while Eren, Mikasa and all their friends headed outside. Grisha waited near the car and Carla stayed back to speak with the priest.

While outside, the guard huddled back up together to hang out.

"Holy crap, I'm so glad I got out of there," Annie huffed.

Petra, being a Christian herself, lightly elbowed Annie. "It was not that bad and you know it!"

The guard let out a bit of laughter, it wasn't nearly as bad as some of them had made it out to be.

"So, Eren," Nanaba spoke up. "We're going to Scouts in a bit to discuss plans for a trip! A celebration for graduating one might say. Do you and your sister want to come?"

Eren looked over to Mikasa, who nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah, sure. We'd love to."

"Awesome!" Nanaba chimed.

"I just have to tell our mom," Eren said, turning back into the church to find his mother. Seeing her speaking with the priest, he felt a bit of apprehension, but he knew whatever they were saying couldn't be bad. He stepped up to her just as the priest finished talking with her and walked hastily out the door with a book in hand. "Ma?"

Carla turned around, letting out a relieved sigh. "Yes?"

"... What were you two talking about?"

"Nothing," Carla replied, smiling. "I was just telling him how we'd be coming regularly and why we're coming. He's going to speak with your father now. Is there something you needed?"

Eren felt slightly puzzled but asked away anyways. "Yeah, Mikasa and I want to go to lunch with our friends, is that okay?"

"Of course, are they bringing you home too?"

"Yeah."

"Then go ahead."
At Scouts, the tension from church had left entirely and they were back to their constantly loud state. They were crowded into the biggest round booth that the restaurant had to offer, and those who didn't fit were in the surrounding booths, leaning over to be a part of the conversation. Even Mike had took advantage of his break to meet up with the group.

"Alrighty," Hanji spoke, clearing their throat and slapping down a pad of paper in the center of the table. "So, Nanaba and I have been scheming, and we've come up with two options for our big graduation trip. We could either go camping, or go to the beach."

Before they could further their statement, everyone was already shouting for the beach.

"Okay, okay," Hanji chuckled. "I guess it's decided."

"I wanna go to the beach," Mike pouted.

"Don't worry, big fella. We're taking you with us!" Hanji assured him.

"Can Armin come with us too?" Eren inquired. "He'd love to go to the beach."

"Everyone can come," Hanji said. "Now, let's figure out the day and what time we'll be heading down."

~

The weeks started to blur together. A routine had set itself in place as time passed. Schoolwork began flooding in, overwhelming Eren to no end. He followed Levi's advice and worked as hard as he could, just trying to make sure that the end of the year went by with little to no issues. Studying for finals was exhausting and actually taking the finals was incredibly stressful, but luckily Eren's time studying hadn't been in vain as he had passed everything. But aside from school, he had other new obligations, such as attending church every Sunday. Eren wasn't sure why, but ever since their first time going to church again, his father was acting rather strangely. He'd avoid eating dinner at the table, he'd barely breathe a word to anyone in his family, not only Eren. He seemed beside himself, though no one could imagine why. Grisha appeared to be heavily invested in frustrating thoughts every time they saw him. But as time went by and his children's graduation day came closer, he grew calmer. He'd speak more often with Eren. Mostly about mundane or insignificant topics, but he initiated the conversations nonetheless. Eren and Mikasa would question it, but Carla seemed content to not bring it up.

The day of their graduation ceremony came sooner than expected. Eren and Mikasa were more than ready for this day, but Carla was having none of it. 'The next step is moving out' she'd say, 'I'm not prepared for this, I want my babies back.' But the day wouldn't stop for anyone, not even Carla. So, the whole family headed over to the school, the siblings in their caps and gowns, dressed for the ceremony.

Carla and Grisha parted from their children, leaving to take their seats in the bleachers out on the football field. Mikasa and Eren went inside and waited with their class. Eren headed for Levi as soon as he spotted him and was confused as to why he looked so grumpy. "What's wrong?"

Levi frowned up at him. "I look fucking stupid in this cap and gown," he grumbled.

Eren giggled and in all honesty, he agreed that the attire didn't suit him, but he didn't think he

"You're damn lucky I'm in love with you or I'd smack you for that."

"You're too nice to do that," Eren pointed out.

"I'm not," Levi argued, crossing his arms.

A teacher hollered for everyone to get in a line in alphabetical order. As they arranged themselves, Eren and Mikasa passed Armin and wished him luck on his speech, remembering that he'd been selected to be the salutatorian. He gave them a nervous smile, thanking them, and went to the front of the line behind Levi.

Levi hated to be the first one out, sporting the ridiculous ceremonial clothes that were required. He despised having a last name beginning with 'A.' He looked out to the crowd, trying to spot his mother and of course, she was right in the front row taking an umpteen amount of pictures. He groaned at how his current image would be captured forever, but pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind as he caught her elated expression.

Taking his seat, he turned around to see if he could spot Eren in the crowd. He wasn't hard to find, especially since he was only a couple rows back, sitting beside his sister. When they locked eyes, Levi sent him an encouraging smile. After Eren had mimicked his features, Levi turned back.

He began searching for Eren's parents in the bleachers and was happy to see Carla finding Kutchel and rushing over. Levi hadn't been updated on the situation with Grisha, but he at least hoped he'd have the decency to show up to his children's graduation. Fortunately, he did find him after skimming through and hoped that he wouldn't say or do anything that would ruin their day.

The principal stood up at the podium to begin his speech and Levi had never been more ready to tune out. He let his mind wander and ended up trying to find more people that he knew sitting in the audience. He recognized some parents who would sometimes come to their color guard competitions or other school events. He was happy to find his old friends returning for the special occasion, watching in the front row next to his siblings. Unfortunately, his gaze settled upon one attendee seated in the back that put a damper on his mood. His uncle. He had the nerve to show up. Sighing heavily, Levi decided to ignore him, not wanting to ruin the ceremony for his family or anyone else.

A few guest speakers went after the principal and then, it was time for Armin to go up and give his speech.

"Good luck," Levi whispered, receiving a smile and a meek 'thank you,' from Armin.

Levi looked back once more to see Eren and his sister beaming as they watched their friend. He knew this must've been a huge moment for all of them. He faced forward again and listened to Armin intently. He actually had a lot to say about the importance of knowledge and pursuing education after high school that wasn't the boring old 'it's a good thing to have in the work force' spiel. With how nervous he was beforehand, Levi was surprised to see how confident he was speaking to the audience.

Once Armin had finished, Levi made sure to tell him how well he did and sat back to see Hanji approaching the podium, ready to give their speech as the valedictorian. Levi heard several snide comments and murmurs coming from his classmates, followed by chuckling as Hanji started talking. He wasn't about to allow such a thing to be ruined his best friend's big moment, so he
adjusted himself once more to glare at those who were being disruptive and shushed them. They still under his cold stare and quieted immediately. Levi continued to listen to Hanji's speech and vaguely smiled at their words.

They took a different route than usual and instead of praising their school, they paid respect to everyone who struggled in getting through their high school years due to other people putting expectations on them. Expectations on terms of grades, their personality, how they look and other things that had no place being decided for somebody else at the end of the day. They were completely honest without lying about how terrific high school was for them or going for jaw drops, saying how terrible high school was. They went on about how people are free to live their lives how they want and have endless opportunities regardless of things they can't change, but in a high school setting, it certainly didn't feel that way. Hanji ended their speech wishing their classmates success in all aspects of life, without needing to conform. Levi couldn't be sure from where he sat, but at some points in their speech, he thought he saw Hanji staring pointedly at some people in the bleachers.

Levi was the first to applaud them as they walked off. The message was one that could be applied to anyone in school as well as calling out classmates who had made people feel limited. Levi felt so proud that they could find such a happy medium in their speech, while still refraining from letting their negative experiences get the best of them.

After receiving their diplomas, the principal returned to the podium asking everyone to stand. The class switched the tassels on their caps from one side to the other, and at their principal's word, they tossed their caps into the air.

~

Everyone was caught up with saying goodbye to teachers and taking pictures with classmates they'd miss. Levi sought out Eren in the mess and wrapped his arms around his waist. "Hello, fellow graduate," he greeted him.

"Hey there," Eren chuckled. "How do you feel now that we're officially graduated?"

"I don't know, I've only been graduated for two minutes," Levi scoffed.

"Fair enough." Eren leaned down to give Levi a quick kiss. "Should we go find our moms? They probably want more pictures."

"Yeah, you're probably right," Levi sighed. He took Eren's hand in his and started searching for their parents.

They first spotted Kutchel hurrying towards them with Isabel and Farlan trailing behind. Though, Levi started gritting his teeth together when he saw his Uncle Kenny lagging behind, following the rest of the family. Eren vaguely recognized the man from the banquet as he still wore the same hat and grumpy attitude.

Without waiting a second, Kutchel began situating the boys side by side to get pictures of them together. "Smile!" She chirped, clicking a few photos.

Kenny stood by Kutchel's side while she took pictures of Levi with his siblings. "Okay, now one with your uncle." Levi and Kenny both let out a groan. "Please!" She begged. Guilt settled over
them and they reluctantly posed for one picture, only barely attempting to show any emotion for Kutchel.

Kenny turned to Levi, pulling an envelope out of his pocket and handing it to him. "This is for you... congratulations and whatnot." He tipped his hat and went on his way.

"Your uncle seems... nice," Eren commented.

Levi briefly examined the envelope. "Yeah, he's a very curt man." He refrained from using more vulgar language to spare his mother's feelings.

They were soon joined by Eren's parents and went through the same process with getting pictures. Carla lastly took pictures of Eren with his father, and though they didn't frown in the picture, it wasn't hard to see how uneasy they both felt.

Carla went on to find Mikasa, and Eren would've went along if his father hadn't started steering him in another direction. Levi grew suspicious and lingered closely, watching in case any problems arose.

Grisha stared at his feet as he walked Eren over to a less crowded area. Eren, having no idea what his intentions were, followed hesitantly. He eyed Levi, noticing his lack of distance and was grateful for his presence.

"First off, congratulations..." Grisha mumbled.

"Thanks," Eren muttered. His father's words felt so distant. There was no tone of familiarity. Even though Eren didn't look at him as a father anymore, his voice made him feel like they were complete strangers at this point.

"I don't expect anything to come from this conversation, but I feel that it's necessary," Grisha began, still refusing to make eye contact, almost as if he was ashamed of something. "After our first time going back to church, I had a short, although thorough conversation with our priest. He went over a very specific verse in the bible in great detail with me."

Eren nearly walked away. He wasn't in the mood to speak about their religion and he wasn't going to stand and listen to his father telling him what an abomination he was.

"And at first I didn't want to listen to what he was telling me, because I've spent so long believing different. But to believe what I've always thought and still live my life by the bible would make me a hypocrite. Our priest showed me the passage explaining what our savior died for and what was... in turn, forgiven." He finally lifted his head, raising his gaze to his son. "I was conflicted at first, but I've cleared my thoughts. And I don't want to disgrace our lord's sacrifice by saying it wasn't good enough to save people like you."

Eren started to understand what his father was saying. And he wasn't sure how to take it.

"He died for our sins, but many... including myself didn't know what that meant. You've already been forgiven." He paused in his explanation, not sure if he could ask for Eren to forget everything. "I'm sorry."

Eren clenched his fists and labored his breathing. He didn't need to be forgiven. He hated that his father had to be told by a priest that he was the one in the wrong. He wished he had a father who would just accept him no matter what, not caring about who he was without having to be told to do so. But, this was the only father he had. This man wasn't a perfect parent and their relationship would never be mended, but he could build a tolerance. Grisha was his only chance in having a
father and he may not have been able to love his son unconditionally, but he could correct his mistakes and become civil. Eren would take a mediocre father over an abusive one.

"I will never forgive you for what you did to me," Eren said. He tried recalling everything Levi had taught him about being the bigger person and making the best with what you have. His immediate instincts told him to scream and express every ounce of pain he had stored away, but he had more patience to think this through. "But I can move on. And I see that you're doing the same."

Grisha nodded slowly. "I didn't expect you to forgive me. What can I do to prove that I regret what I did?"

"Nothing," Eren answered calmly. "Just know where I stand with you and that I won't allow you to put me through that again."

Grisha nodded again. "Alright." That was the most he would get, but at least his conscience was cleared. "Let's go find your sister."

~

Levi tended to Eren before they had to go home. He sat with him at the bleachers, holding his hand and listening to what had happened. "So, does this mean he doesn't mind that you're gay?"

"I guess," Eren sighed. "Honestly, I don't even care if he minds or not. If he didn't care about me enough to say all those things and throw me out without a second thought, then he never should've mattered to me."

Levi nodded, bringing Eren's hand up to his lips, placing a soft kiss on the knuckles. "I'm just glad he's not a danger to you now."

Eren let out a humorless laugh. "Yeah, me too." He brought himself to his feet, taking Levi with him. "I don't want to think about it anymore. Things are going to get better, I'm not going to waist my time focusing on my dad."

"Good." Levi grinned up at him. "Ready to move on?"

"As ready as I'll ever be."

~

Levi wished that being brought to wakefulness on a Saturday morning didn't involve getting a pillow thrown at his face, but that was just his luck.

"Big bro, come on!" Isabel whined. "I wanna go to the beach!"

Levi rolled over to look at his clock. "We're not getting picked up for another hour, relax a little."

"Well, I don't want them to have to wait because you're still not ready."
Levi rubbed at his eyes, willing away his exhaustion. "I have plenty of time to get ready."

"Leviii," Isabel groaned. "We're gonna be late 'cause of you, you take forever to put on your makeup, and we won't get the best spot, so we'll be stuck really far from the water next to a loud family—"

Levi silenced her by throwing her own pillow back at her. "I'm up! What more do you want?"

"Get a move on!" Isabel left the room to finish getting ready herself, much to Levi's relief.

Levi didn't end up taking as long as his sister said he would. He skipped applying his makeup, seeing as he would be going in the water and he had yet to invest in waterproof eyeliner. He packed his phone, his wallet, sunscreen, extra clothes and a towel into a large bag after he'd gotten dressed in black swim trunks and a tank top. Taking a pair of dark, circular sunglasses, he deemed himself ready and headed downstairs.

As he passed his sister's room, he noticed her still putting things into her own bag. "Who did you say takes forever again?" He mocked, earning a door in his face.

In the end however, Farlan was the one making them late, (albeit only by two minutes) since he'd lost his sunglasses. The flooded into Hanji's van like so many other times before and took up the back three seats. Gunther and Erd were already occupying the front seats beside Hanji, so it was their only option. "Who's ready for the beach?" Hanji hollered.

"I am, I am!" Isabel shouted.

"I'm ready!" Farlan added.

Hanji spun around in their seat, smirking at the oldest of the three. "Levi?" They whispered. "Are you ready for the beach?"

"... Yes."

"Perfect!" Hanji sat back, buckling their seat belt. "And we're off!"

~

It amazed everyone from time to time how easily Hanji's van could fit so many people inside. Though, it might not have been the most comfortable seating. Especially with picking up all their previously graduated friends, non-guard members like Armin, Mikasa, Jean, Reiner and Connie and also Annie's old friends Marlo and Hitch.

Once again, they had to fit two in a seat and leave the back for the rest of the passengers. Levi insisted that Eren be the one to sit on his lap this time.

The drive down to the beach took around three hours, and they filled the time by joking around like they always did. After arriving, Hanji parked the van and asked everyone to go a grab a good spot in the sand. The herd sprinted to the beach, claiming the few empty spaces left.

Eren and Levi set up their own spot, putting up an umbrella at Levi's request. Eren plopped down on their shared towel, admiring the view of the crashing water. "If graduated life looked like this
everyday, I would've graduated sooner,” Eren sighed.

Levi took his seat next to him. "I don't think you'd have a say in it," Levi said. "Especially since you didn't get in your extracurricular activity until this year."

"A guy can dream," Eren muttered, feigning bitterness.

"I'm glad you did wait until the last minute, though," Levi added, leaning over to kiss Eren's cheek.

"So am I," Eren agreed.

Levi took a moment to take in the view before pawing through his bag in search of his sunscreen. He pulled it out and tugged off his shirt to apply it. "Do you need to borrow some?" He offered to Eren.

"Nope, I'm good," Eren declined.

Levi gawked at him. "Are you using your own?"

"No."

"Then use this, you'll burn."

Eren shrugged. "I'll just tan."

Levi rolled his eyes. "If you turn into a lobster by the end of the day, I'm not gonna feel sorry for you."

Eren threw his weight on Levi, laughing all the while. "Yes you would! And you'd take care of me too!"

"... I know," Levi grumbled.

~


Levi glared up at his friend, still applying more sunscreen to his legs while Eren helped with his back. "I don't stay inside all day for nothing. I'm not throwing that away to get tan or burned."

Hanji cackled at him. "Might as well stay under the umbrella all day. Eren, if you get bored of this killjoy, just come join us in the water."

Eren chuckled, earning a stern look from Levi. "I'm good right here, thanks."

"Suit yourself!" They ran off, meeting up their old friends at the shore.

"You really don't have to stay with me the whole day," Levi reminded Eren.

"I want to. But will you at least go swimming with me today? I don't want you to spend the whole day sitting here."

"It's okay, I brought a book." Levi huffed out an amused breath at Eren's unimpressed stare. "Yeah,
I'll go swimming with you. But I'll need to reapply my sunscreen after."

"Just shut up and get in the water," Eren said, slapping Levi's shoulder.

Levi grinned, throwing on his sunglasses. "Alright, let's go." He hoisted himself up, bringing Eren with him. They walked hand in hand on their way to the water.

Eren pointed over to Connie and Sasha building sand castles. "Do you think they'd let us borrow their buckets later? We could make our own castles."

Levi normally would've scoffed at the idea. "Sure, if you want to."

Eren was happy to see everyone having a great time. Him, his sister and Armin had never been to the beach, so staying home wasn't an option. Before reaching the water, he noticed Armin and Mikasa collecting shells right where the waves started. Perhaps, he thought, he'd join them later on.

The two finally reached the water, shivering at its cold temperature and relentless current. "Have you ever been to the beach before?" Eren inquired.

"No."

"I haven't either. I think it's beautiful."

Levi looked out to the horizon transfixed by how there was a perfectly straight line cutting the sky, regardless of how many waves there were. "Yeah, it really is." He fixed his gaze on Eren who was looking outward as well, absorbing the sight. Nothing made him happier in that moment than seeing his boyfriend so relaxed and content.

The moment of course wasn't destined to last.

"Levi!" Isabel shouted, trudging through the water to get to him. "Hope I'm not ruining anything," she said teasingly, stepping ahead of them. "Erwin is grilling up our lunch, do you guys want anything?"

Levi and Eren both nodded. "Sure."

"Cool, I'll let him know..." She wasn't done intruding on their privacy. "So Eren, what's it like dating a vampire who can't go in the sun without sixty layers of sunscreen?"

Levi scowled at her, shoving her shoulder with enough force to push her off her feet and into the water.

Isabel resurfaced, splashing Levi up to the waist in retaliation.

Eren snickered at the siblings. "Meh, it's alright I guess," he joked, hiding his laughter as Levi sent him the same glare. After his smart ass remark, he suffered Isabel's fate, being pushed off his feet by Levi.

Levi turned around to head out of the water. "I hate you both," he muttered.

"You love us!" They hollered back in unison.

~
Before it was time to leave, the entire group gathered around while Isabel passed out bottles of cream soda. "Man, it feels good to be graduated," Marco sighed contentedly.

"Izzy and I still aren't graduated," Farlan said, taking a swig of his soda.

"I guess that just means we'll have to do this again next year, and the year after that," Sasha decided.

The group hummed in agreement, making it unanimous.

"I just remembered," Nanaba spoke up. "We're all going to be going off to college or moving away. How often will we get to do this again?"

"Yeah, and how often will we get to see each other at all?" Petra asked.

Everyone was silenced by the question, letting the realization hit them. They all knew that it was rare to keep friends from high school after graduating, but that didn't help the fact that the idea of them all drifting apart was painful to think about. But what was there to be done about it?

"We'll make it work," Hanji declared, drawing in everybody's attention. "I know it'll be hard if we're all busy with school or work, but we can figure it out. We'll get together for birthdays and other important days. I mean let's face it, Christa and Ymir are probably getting married tomorrow, so that's one thing we can go to."

The group burst out in laughter, but agreed with Hanji.

"Yeah, and there's a ton of holidays in Hanji's religion, so we can meet on those days," Eren suggested. "That's an easy way to remember when we can get together."

"Exactly!" Hanji beamed.

"We can figure out a specific day every year where we get together and just have fun," Christa added. "Like an anniversary or something!"

"We can continue participating in individuals," Levi said. "There are no rules that say we can't."

"That's the right idea!" Sasha chimed. "Once a guardie, always a guardie."

"True," Hitch commented from the side.

"And you guys will all still visit me at work, right?" Mike asked, pretending to sniffle.

"Of course we will," Isabel assured him.

"I guess we're all stuck with each other," Gunther chuckled.

"For all time!" Connie hollered, holding up his soda.

Hanji repeated his gesture, proposing a toast. "To friendship, holding us all back like anvils, keeping us together!"

Through fits of laughter, everyone held up their glasses for a toast and drank together.

"It's getting late," Hanji pointed out. "And we have a long drive back. We should get going soon if
we want to make it back before dark."

"Before we leave," Armin spoke up. "I think we should plan our next get together, even if it's small. Just to carve it all in stone."

"Great idea!" Hanji agreed.
And with that, plans, as well as a promise to stay together had been made.

~

Hanji dropped off Eren at Levi's home at his request long after it had gotten dark. Isabel and Farlan went inside and Levi stopped Eren just before the entrance. "Wait here," Levi instructed him, walking inside for a short minute.

Levi returned with his car keys in hand and walked towards his car. "Hop in."

Eren raised a skeptical brow at him. "Where are we going?"

Levi shrugged. "Just taking a little drive."

Eren followed him, sitting in the passengers seat. They drove off in whatever direction Levi had in mind. Eren wasn't sure if they were simply going for a drive like Levi said or if he had a destination planned. For a short while, Eren had no idea where they were going, but once they'd gotten into a winding road bordered with trees, he had a feeling he knew.

Just as he suspected, Levi ended up turning into a familiar field with tall grass endless trees fencing them in. Levi drove a bit further into the area than the first time they'd been there, parking in the center of the field. "Do you remember this place?"

Eren couldn't suppress the mad grin that formed. "How could I forget?"

They were parked in the very same field where they'd had their first dance on their homecoming night. "I thought it'd be a nice way to end the day. And the stars are all out. Wanna just... stay here for a bit?"

"I'd love to."

They were laid out on the hood of the car, side by side, watching the sky. Every few minutes, one of them would complain about the sand that was still in their clothes and they'd share a good laugh. Then for awhile, they'd remained silent, with only the sound of their breathing reaching their ears. But Eren broke that.

"Who did you want to marry when you were little?"

Levi fixed him with an amused stare. "... What?"

"Who did you want to marry when you were little?" He repeated. "Like, who was your celebrity crush? Or your first crush?"

Levi snorted, folding his arms under his head. "Why do you ask?"
"I'm curious," Eren stated simply.

"Fine." Levi pondered it over, searching as far back in his memory as he could go. "My first crush on someone I knew was when I was in preschool I think. It was this boy named Tod and I don't remember much about him other than the fact that he was a redhead. Then my first celebrity crush was Lydia from Beetlejuice."

Eren giggled at that.

"What? Is that funny?"

"No, it's just that... that makes perfect sense. And explains a lot."

Levi rolled his eyes. "Alright, alright, who were your first crushes?"

Eren thought back, having a hard time remembering. Especially since he'd been taught that it was wrong to think that way about boys, so whenever he did find himself liking someone, he pushed those thoughts away. "Um.. I think my first crush was this boy I met at a playground when I was little. I think I ended up punching him. Then my mom took me home."

Levi snorted. "You're such a charmer."

"Shut up," Eren laughed. "And my first celebrity crush was... Greg from The Brady Bunch."

Levi let out a bark of laughter.

"Shut the hell up! I was like six!"

Levi muted himself for his boyfriend's sake. "I'm sorry." He was glad to see Eren was also hiding some giggles. But the topic being brought up was still a mystery to him. "Why are we talking about this again?"

Eren shrugged, staring into the stars. "I don't know. It's just that when I was a kid, I didn't think I could be happy dating a guy. Because of my family. And the last time we were here, I didn't think I could ever tell anybody about us without my parents killing me. And now everyone knows."

Levi reached for Eren's hand, interlocking their fingers. His first concern was still left unaddressed. "And are you happy?"

Eren's heart melted at the genuine concern in Levi's voice. "Well, things aren't ideal right now. But... they don't have to be. So, yes. I am happy."

Levi became overwhelmed with all his rushing thoughts. Why couldn't Eren live in his ideal world? Why couldn't he protect him and give him everything he wanted like he wished he could? Why were they settling? "Babe?"

Eren faced him.

"If you're ever unhappy for any reason, please tell me." He kept speaking before Eren could question him. "I don't want you to hurt. And I want to give you everything."

Eren stared into Levi's eyes, utterly confused. He slid closer to him, turning in his side as Levi mirrored him. "Levi, I don't want everything, I don't need to always be happy. That's unreasonable —"

"I know." Levi wrapped his arms around Eren. "But I want you to be happy. I don't ever want to see
you upset." He looked into the eyes that never failed to captivate him. "You mean more to me than you'll ever know and I want nothing more than for you to be happier than you've ever been."

Eren's brows knitted together in confusion, despite his smile. "Why would you focus so much on me?"

"Because I'm in love with you," Levi stated like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Eren couldn't believe how lucky he was to have somebody like Levi who valued him so much and treated him so kindly. "I'm... I love you so much Levi. I just don't know what I did to deserve someone like you. You're too good to me."

Levi shook his head, bringing Eren's hand to his lips. "No, I'm the one who's undeserving of you."

"Levi... if you had never shown up in my life, I'd still hate myself. No one would know about a huge part of me and I'd be so miserable. I know it sounds cliché, but you kind of saved me."

Levi casted his gaze downwards. "I've done bad things to you too. I outed you to the whole guard. I put you in a terrible position with your father."

Eren chortled at the memory. "I can laugh about being outed that way now. And what happened between me and my dad is not your fault. Even if it was, I'm glad it happened. He's knows better now, and I don't have to keep hiding myself. You have done nothing but make me happy since I met you. Don't ever think any different."

Levi felt skeptical, but chose to believe him. "I still feel like there's something more I should do for you. Something to keep you happy forever."

"All you have to do is promise me one thing," Eren said, maneuvering closer, leaving only mere centimeters between them.

"Anything, what is it?"

Eren leaned his forehead against Levi's. "Promise you'll never leave me?"

Levi smiled widely at him, overcome with joy. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt so strongly, which was why there was no hesitation in his voice when he said, "I promise."

Chapter End Notes

Cheesiness everywhere.

The next chapter is the epilogue, but that'll take a very long time to get out because it's going to be so long (it'll probably be a novel in itself) and I'm in the middle of a writing/creative block. I'll try to get it out asap! This also means all my other fics will be on hold, just for a little while.

I don't know how I'll be able to handle finishing the next chapter, I want it to be perfect but I'm scared it'll fall short. Regardless, thanks to everyone who has stuck around this long, you guys are the best!

A big thanks to my supportive, hard-working beta! Many hugs, my bean!!!
Please leave a comment or kudos if you liked this, it would mean a lot! My tumblrs are dr-s--art and the-witch-daddy. Thanks for reading! ^-^
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Eren and Levi spend the rest of their lives together, maybe not as planned, but neither could complain.

Chapter Notes

IMPORTANT PLEASE READ: in this chapter there are times skips, and each time skip adds on to the previous one. I just wanted to clear that up just in case.

I went too far with this chapter, I could not help it. I originally planned this to go much farther, but it would be a nightmare for everyone. I'm sorry it's so long and it's all too much.

I'm so sad this has come to an end and I wish this chapter was written better, but this is the best I could do. And the smut is terrible, it's been awhile, guys. (I'm sorry, but this is not edited) Translations are at the bottom.

Thank you so much to everyone who has stuck with this, you guys rock, bless your sweet souls.

I made a playlist for this fic bc why not? Music was really important throughout the fic so here you go. (It's so long, help me) http://dr-s--art.tumblr.com/post/156097105298/dlygd-playlist

AND SENDYOUREUSES ON TUMBLR MADE A SPOTIFY PLAYLIST, THEY ARE LITERALLY MY HERO
https://open.spotify.com/user/little__prince/playlist/6Oa8YiRWMyPXMUYvRvB8zdI?si=MySM-07XQkmTxEVuOWC1jQ

I also made a trivia post in case you're interested! http://dr-s--art.tumblr.com/post/153905652513/dont-let-your-guard-down-trivia-there-are

Songs in this chapter are The Lovecats by The Cure & Riptide by Vance Joy (bc I'm a sentimental nerd who loves that song.)

Slurs are used in this chapter, but lightheartedly, you'll see what I mean.

My tumblrs are dr-s--art and the-witch-daddy. There are a couple more announcements in the end notes, but go ahead and read! I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

~One year later~

Levi waltzed into his shared dorm room, whistling to himself and slinging his bag off his shoulder
and onto his desk. He took a moment to raise his arms and stretch out his back, tired of being stuck in the same position for so long.

"Your exam went well, I take it?" Eren inquired looking up from his laptop as he lounged on their bed.

Levi flopped down on the mattress, beside Eren's feet. "Yeah, went really well," he sighed.

"If you didn't get a perfect score, I'm making you switch dorms," Eren joked.

"Why would you say such a cruel thing?" Levi asked, clutching his chest in mock pain.

Eren chuckled at his boyfriend. "I'm just kidding. Besides, you probably did get a perfect score. You've been fluent in French since birth."

Snickering to himself, Levi moved up on the bed to sit by Eren's side and leaned his head on his shoulder. Eren hummed contentedly. "You know, Sasha called today. She said she's taking archery classes."

"That's cool, I didn't know she liked archery."

"Yeah, she says it's really helping with her stress."

Levi cuddled up closer to the brunet, latching his arms around his waist. "Speaking of stress, do you think you could help me out with mine?" He purred, kissing his shoulder.

Eren shut his laptop and stared down at Levi, unimpressed. "Why are you always horny? And what do you mean you're stressed? That test was probably the easiest one you took. And you don't have any left."

"You sure know how to kill the mood, babe." Levi dropped the subject, but remained wrapped around the other. "Can I get a reward if I do get a perfect score though? Or close to it?"

"Are you serious? Giving you a reward for acing an exam on something you've known your whole life?" Eren scoffed. "That's like giving me a reward for explaining how to breathe."

Levi sent him his most convincing puppy dog eyes he could muster. "Please? It'd make me really happy."

Eren pondered it over for a moment. "Alright, if you get a perfect score, and no less, I'll pay for your next tattoo."

"You literally had a meltdown last week because you couldn't afford that almond milk you like so much, so you had to eat your cereal dry. You're not paying for my tattoo."

"Just... delay your tattoo," Eren suggested. "I didn't say I had to pay for it immediately. What would you want to get next anyways?"

Levi looked down at his arm, examining the cobweb he had inked on his elbow. "Dunno. Maybe something for my mom."

"Aw, what would it be?"

"Well, nothing too... morbid, because I want her to like it too. Maybe that cheesy heart that people get with a banner that says 'mom.' Only I'll have it say 'mère' instead."
"Oh my gosh, please do that," Eren laughed.

Levi smirked up at him. "I just might."

~

That weekend, since neither of them had exams to study for any longer, they decided to pay Levi’s family a visit and stay for dinner. Life had gotten so busy since their finals began and it became more difficult to visit.

As they entered through the doorway, they were met with the sound of Farlan practicing on the piano and the scent of dinner cooking. Before either of them could process what was happening, Kutchel rushed over towards them, throwing her arms around Levi first, kissing the side of his face. "Mon fils! Tu m'as manqué!"

Levi grinned widely, returning the hug. "Tu m'as manqué, aussi."

Eren stood watching the exchange, having no clue as to what they were saying.

"Pardonne-moi," Kutchel said as she parted from her son. "Je suis désolé pour le désordre." She gestured to the kitchen and living room sheepishly.

"Ferme ta bouche," Levi hushed her. "La maison est parfait comme toujours, Maman."

Kutchel waved him off, gushing all the while. "Tu es toujours trop sympa." She turned to face Eren, pulling him into a hug. "Eren, it's so good to see you again!"

"It's good to see you too, Kutchel," Eren chortled, returning her embrace. "How have you been?"

"I've been, great! How are you, dear?"

They got themselves caught up on each other's lives, being greeted by Farlan soon after when he'd heard the chatter. Kutchel announced that dinner would be ready any second and went to fetch Isabel from upstairs. Everyone was moving to be seated at the table and just before Levi had enough time to pull out a chair, he was halted by the sound of stomping feet and turned on his heel to find Isabel leaping into his arms.

Luckily, he had enough time to catch her. "Hi to you too, Izzy," he wheezed.

"Stop going to college, I miss you too much!" She whined.

"Ugh, I wish I could," Levi groaned, setting get down on her feet. "But I gotta graduate to get the job I want."

Isabel put on a pout and walked over to the table, grabbing her seat.

Levi was once again kept from seating himself when he recognized a faint bell closing its distance. He looked down to see Buster rubbing against his shins, begging for him to pet him. "Aw, it's been awhile. Huh, big guy?" He cooed, leaning down to pick Buster up, bringing him to the table. He finally sat down, petting the feline that happily settled in his lap.

"Are you coming to my graduation?" Farlan asked his brother anxiously, filling his plate.
"Of course, I'm coming," Levi answered. "I wouldn't miss it. And I'm not missing our trip to the beach the day after, like we promised we'd have."

"Good." Farlan smiled, taking a bite of his food.

"Eren, have you and your sister visited your parents since the finals?" Kutchel asked.

"I haven't, but Mikasa has," Eren answered. "After her fencing team's tournament, she took them out to lunch. Levi and I will be visiting them tomorrow."

Kutchel nodded in acknowledgment. "I'm still amazed that she picked up fencing so quickly. Don't you need a certain amount of years in experience?"

"I think that's just for professional teams, I'm not sure. But yeah, she's always been a fast learner."

"I wanna learn fencing," Isabel complained, swinging her feet under the table.

"I'm still teaching you trumpet," Farlan pointed out. "You are not taking up two things at the same time."

"You're right," Isabel sighed. "Plus, there's that cluster show."

"Izzy!" Farlan hissed. "You're terrible with secrets."

Isabel's eyes widened in horror as she looked to Eren and Levi. The two eyes each other then Isabel in question. "Cluster show?" Levi parroted.

"We wanted to tell you guys later, but it looks like Izzy ruined that," Farlan chuckled.

"It slipped out, I swear!" Isabel defended.

"What's a cluster show?" Eren asked, raising a brow.

Isabel looked to Farlan apologetically and he allowed her to explain. "Well," she began. "It started off as Hanji's idea. Someone they know from drum corps was putting on a charity event, raising money for queer youth centers. And Hanji had the idea that school could do something like that and put on a show with all the artistic groups. So, the groups participating are drama club, the art classes, band, choir, the poetry group, the color guard team and we still need to ask some other people. Hanji suggested we team up with the drama club to put on this really big color guard show with a giant set and we could get theatre kids to help us with a wardrobe change if they have time. And we're getting our own uniforms, Hanji's altering flags for each person and we basically get have the equipment and our uniforms look however we want for the second half, and it'll be so awesome! Because the show is going to be so big, we're starting practice in September and the actual show is next summer. And all the proceeds are going to our local queer youth center and another charity if we raise enough money. Teachers and parents are mostly helping with scheduling and planning. So... would you guys want to join?"


"And it is for a good cause," Eren added.

"So, is that a yes?" Farlan urged them.

"I'll do it," Levi decided.
"I think I'll do it too," Eren said.

"Yes!" Isabel beamed. "This is going to be so much fun, we're still getting in touch with all the other former members, and so far everyone is up for it! We're even asking friends from other schools and people who've never been in guard, just to see if they're interested."

"We're asking around to see if younger guard members want to be a part of it too," Farlan said. "Even the junior guard. It could be cute with them in it."

"What about the routine the color guard already had to learn for competitions, Izzy?" Levi asked. "Will it be hard for you to have two routines?"

"It'll be a piece of cake! I'll work really hard."

"If you're sure."

~

~One year later~

Eren adjusted the straps on his uniform, having only minor difficulties, since he'd never seen or worn a color guard uniform such as this. Him and the others had worked so hard on this show and he couldn't be happier to finally put it on. Rico came back to direct the show for them and had the brilliant idea have a theme of 'a fight for freedom' and worked along side other art departments to make it a unique spectacle. Students who worked on musicals and plays who were skilled in quick changes were ready to assist each member with changing out a the military-like uniform they wore initially and into their new uniforms after the halfway mark of the performance. The art students volunteered to paint an entire background to look like a stone wall that they'd eventually let fall to reveal a mural. Their flags for the beginning portion had crests on each of the silks, their rifles had colored tape applied to resemble muskets, and their sabers had thin black stripes wrapped around them. After they'd go through the second half, no one would be matching, as they'd all picked out their own uniforms and the drama students would aid them with hair and makeup. Their flags would also be entirely unique as Hanji had altered the silks specifically for each person just like they promised. Everyone brought in their own rifles, some had oddly colored rifles and there were even some weirdly shaped rifles. Hanji had brought a yellow rifle that was slightly shaped like a lightning bolt. Farlan had even brought in some flags with pride flag colored silks for those who wanted to use more than one flag, since they'd be doing the entire show all for a queer youth charity. And they'd eventually realized from all the tickets they'd sold that there would be more people attending than they ever expected, so they decided to also donate to a second charity that treated cancer patients, on Rico's request.

Farlan and Isabel were given the job to create a musical composition. So, working along side Oluo, they created two separate medleys. One consisted mostly of foreign music that they'd play at the beginning of the routine and the second was composed of songs that the guard had suggested and would be played for the second half.

The guard itself consisted of members young and old, some previously graduated, most that were still in school and even the youngest members. (Who'd be performing much less difficult and taxing routines and wear severely less dramatic uniforms.) It was astounding how many people had joined. Even people who were incredibly unfamiliar with the sport, like Mikasa and Armin had...
volunteered. Everyone who was a part of it though, believed in their cause and was willing to contribute.

Overall, it was a show they were all incredibly honored to put on and some would even say they felt it was going to be their favorite performance out of all the ones they'd ever do. Every member had a say in the routine at some point their collaborations had blended together flawlessly. Now, all that there was left to do was show the crowd the product of all their hard work.

Eren checked over his uniform one last time in the mirror and deemed himself ready to go on. A hand set itself on his shoulder and he turned to look at its owner.

"Looking good," Levi commented. "All set?"

Eren tucked the good luck necklace his mother had given him years ago into his shirt. "I am now."

Levi smirked at him, pulling out the raven necklace that Eren had given him also and dangled it in front of him. "I am too. Now, let's get our equipment."

Everyone moved out of there host room and began their trek to the gymnasium, passing by the auditorium where a choir performance was already held and walking through hallways that had art pieces set up to be sold. Before they went into the gym, they had business to attend to just outside of it. There, waited a group of people who had funded or helped put together the show. Many teachers that had helped with the setup were within the group, standing aside family members of the guard who had donated money to the charities as well as helping to fund materials for the set and equipment. Kutchel, of course, was happily awaiting the team, wearing a bright grin. Levi's uncle Kenny had even showed up, donating a rather large sum of money (due to Kutchel unknowingly guilting him into doing so.) Carla and even a few of Eren and Mikasa's distant relatives had heard wind of the show and chipped in. And Eren could honestly say for once that he was happy to see Grisha. Their relationship wasn't built back to what it ever used to be, but they didn't mind each other much, and Eren was glad to see his father willingly supporting such a cause.

It was Rico's idea to get several pictures of all the people who pitched in to send to the charities when they gave them their donations. So they could see how many people were making an effort for them. Rico called over the photographer and instructed everyone to get together, having the children stand in front, then arranging everyone by height and keeping those in uniform together.

After the pictures were taken, everyone who wasn't in the show left to take their seats and they waited to be called in. Eren turned to speak with Levi one last time before going on stage, but became puzzled when he was no longer by his side. Eren swiveled around to search for him and found him kneeling to the ground speaking with the youngest members. He smiled to himself and walked over to stand by him.

"You guys have gotten so big," Levi spoke to the children. "It's been awhile, huh?" They didn't have the chance to practice along with the children, so Levi took up the opportunity to talk with them when he could.

Eren recognized the twins, Aleda and Gabryel, and the three inseparable friends Maria, Rose and Sina, who greeted him when he visited Levi when he used to be their instructor. They'd grown up a bit since he'd last seen them. The kids smiled excitedly at Levi, having missed him like crazy.

"Are you all ready to go out when Rico says? Are you following her out?"

The children all nodded. "I'm nervous," Maria mumbled, twiddling her thumbs.
"It's okay to be nervous," Levi told her. "We're all a bit nervous and that's alright. Just remember, nothing bad will happen and this is for fun, okay?"

Maria nodded, cracking a smile.

"Good," Levi said, returning her grin.

"Giving a pep talk?" Eren teased, nudging Levi's shoulder.

"Yeah, a bit," Levi answered. "You guys remember Eren, right?" He stood to his feet, holding Eren's hand.

The five of them nodded.

"Is he your boyfriend?" Aleda asked, making the others giggle.

Levi stepped a little closer to Eren, simpering up at him. "He certainly is."

Eren had to turn away to hide the red that crepted over his cheeks, causing the children to laugh a bit more.

Rico called for them to all line up, and it came time for them to part from the children.
"Remember," Levi said before leaving. "Try not to worry, it'll be a lot of fun. And don't forget to smile, you know what happens when you don't smile, right?"

The five kids gulped and nodded hurriedly.

"Good." Levi led Eren back to collect their equipment and stand in line with the others. "Ready?"

"Not yet," Eren said facing Levi. He planted a quick kiss on his lips and stood back. "Now I am. Just needed a kiss for good luck."

Levi smiled to himself as they walked into the gym with their floor and set pieces already in place.

The guard treated this like any other competition, keeping it professional and resisting to look in the audience as everyone cheered. The entire atmosphere brought back memories of their days back in high school. Of course, they all still attended and performed at individuals, but it wasn't the same.

Kutchel pressed the record button on several video cameras she had set up, wanting to get every second on tape. She took out her phone and started recording in one hand, and used her other hand to take photos with her camera.

"I wish I was as well prepared as you," Carla commented, using her own phone for pictures.

"I am not going to miss a single thing, I'll make sure of that," Kutchel replied. "The only camera that's not mine is the one on the left, Hanji had me set it up for them."

"I'm just glad there's a professional photographer here. I want some good photos of my kids," Carla added. "How did you get so many cameras?"

"Oh, some of these are quite old. My brother Kenny bought them for me years ago. Heh, my kids think I'm a little excessive with all of them." She tilted her head down, realizing they were probably right.

"Don't listen to them, I'd do the same thing if I had that kind of money," Carla comforted her.
The guard took their positions and stood perfectly still, signaling their preparedness. "Oh, they're starting!" Carla chirped.

A voice came over the speakers, booming through the gym. "The audience is ready, is the guard ready?"

The guard took a new stance in a heartbeat.

"You may take the floor in exhibition."

The music faded in through the speakers, the choral singing setting the guard into languid motion. A more upbeat voice came in and they were off, grabbing their flags and diving into the routine.

~

The routine was definitely unlike any other that they all had done. It was significantly longer than most routines and thanks to the drama department and art students, it was far more elaborate as well. While the older guard members went under their wardrobe change, the younger members would come out, guided by Rico and did their own small segment, which the audience absolutely adored. Reemerging from behind the set pieces in their new uniforms, they finished out the show, wowing the crowd. The photographer took several more group photos after their performance and after they'd gotten out of uniform and by then, it was time to call it a day.

All the guests slowly made their way out of the building, except for those that had aided in putting on the event. Rico gathered everyone involved at the end of the day and asked for their attention. "I'm not good with speeches, so I'll make this quick. We raised an incredible amount of money for two wonderful charities and it wouldn't have been possible without all of you. So, as a thank you, I've decided to reserve tables at Scouts, and dinner is on me."

Several whoops and hollers followed her announcement and everyone left to their vehicles, meeting up at Scouts soon after. They all piled into booths, just like they always had, only with a few extra people. Mike, having been in the show, was not their waiter and they were tended to by a different employee.

Nanaba sat beside Eren and Levi. As they flipped through their menus, she decided to chat with them. "So, how's life treating you guys?"

"Good," Eren answered. "Levi and I are trying to find a new apartment. We're looking for one closer to college so we don't have to live on campus."

"Finding an affordable one is tough though," Levi added.

Nanaba nodded in understanding. "Yeah, I get that. Mike and I just found one not too long ago, we're still unpacking."

"How are things going for you two?" Levi asked, his tone laced with suggestive hints.

Nanaba smiled to herself, blushing all the while. "Well, you know. Things are great right now. Living together has really affected our relationship in a good way. I'm sure you two can relate."

Levi and Eren grinned at each other. "We certainly can," Eren responded.
"You guys are too cute together."

"Are you kidding?" Levi asked rhetorically. "Look at you and Mike. It's like watching an old married couple. But you know, more like the ones who sit home and read together and have a million pictures of themselves on the walls, not the ones threatening divorce every time one of them forgets to do the laundry."

Nanaba chortled. "Gee, I'm flattered."

"You both are perfect for each other, honestly," Eren said.

"You think?" Nanaba asked sheepishly.

"Yeah, absolutely. It's obvious how much you two love each other."

Nanaba tossed a look over her shoulder to spot her boyfriend in the booth behind them. He was busy joking around with Erwin and laughing at something his friend had said and she couldn't help but smile fondly at him. "I love him so much," she hummed.

"You're killing us all with the suspense," Levi groaned. "Get married right now or I'm walking out the door."

Eren and Nanaba giggled at Levi's exaggeration. "I'll marry him if you two get married," Nanaba countered.

"Deal," Levi deadpanned.

"I do!" Eren sang, wrapping his arms around Levi, drawing out more laughter amongst the three.

~

~Two years later~

Eren kissed Levi awake in the comfort of their apartment. Levi had slept through their alarm clock and he wasn't about to let them be late for individuals. "Baby, wake up. We need to get ready."

Levi screwed his eyes shut, groaning and tossing. He blindly threw up his arms, seeking out Eren's shoulders and brought him down into a kiss. Eren smiled as their lips met, letting Levi take his time getting up. When they parted, Eren raised a brow at Levi as he opened his eyes. "I thought you hate morning breath."

Levi smirked up at him. "I do, but I like your kisses more."

"You're cheesy," Eren accused.

"And you're hot."

Eren snickered, rolling off his boyfriend. "Come on, let's get ready."

Levi let out a heavy sigh sitting up. He took a few more deep breaths, sitting at the edge of the bed and staring off into space. Eren looked over his shoulder at him while he changed out of his pajamas, studying Levi's attitude. "Everything alright?"
Levi shook himself out of his thoughts. "Yeah," he quipped. "Yeah, everything's just fine." He stood to busy himself with some task.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure," Levi answered a bit too quickly.

Eren chose to let the topic die down. Levi'd been acting so strangely for months and he couldn't bring himself to discuss it with him. Levi always seemed so stressed over something or let his mind wander too much, even during their conversations. This was even the first year since Eren joined color guard that they weren't doing a performance together for individuals and he couldn't help but think there was a reason he didn't know about. Levi wasn't often at their apartment anymore, he said that he was away visiting his mother and needed to go alone. Eren didn't know if it was his own paranoia, but for some reason he couldn't explain, he had suspicions that Levi was somewhere else. Though, he never dared to voice these thoughts. But whenever he did ask why Levi was acting so off when he was around, Levi would dodge the question and say he was fine. To put it simply, Eren felt more insecure than he had in years.

"I'm going to take a shower," Eren said, stepping out of their bedroom.

"Okay," Levi responded, but he wasn't fully listening.

Eren shook his head, heading into the bathroom.

~

Levi walked into the bathroom in search for deodorant and other necessities. He walked past Eren in his towel, brushing his teeth in front of the sink. He opened the cabinets and began grumbling in frustration when he didn't find what he needed. "Babe, have you seen my deodorant?"

Eren paused in brushing his teeth. "No, if you can't find it, just use mine," he said, voice sounding odd around the toothpaste.

"Okay," Levi breathed agitatedly.

Eren looked over to him, observing how off he appeared. "Levi are you sure you're okay?"

"Mhm," Levi hummed. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"I don't know it's just... you seem so tense lately." He kept brushing his teeth to make it look like he wasn't so nervous, but couldn't help that his worries got the best of him. "Did I do something?"

Levi straightened up, fixing Eren with a pained stare. "No... Eren, sweetheart, you didn't do anything." He stood behind Eren, wrapping his arms around his waist and kissing the side of his head. He set his chin on his shoulder and looked at him through the mirror. "I'm just a bit a bit anxious for individuals, that's all."

"You're never this nervous," Eren countered, setting his free hand on Levi's arm. "I feel like something's wrong."

Levi sent him a smile through the reflection of the glass. "Don't worry, I promise nothing is wrong."
Do you trust me?"

Eren thought it was a weird thing to ask, but nodded nonetheless. "Of course I do."

"Good." Levi placed a kiss on Eren's shoulder. "I love you, Eren, so much."

"I love you too," Eren said around his toothbrush.

Levi stood back and paused at Eren's side, continuing to watch his boyfriend through the mirror. He couldn't just leave him like that with how he was obviously still feeling insecure, so he decided to lighten up the mood. He turned to leave and lightly slapped Eren's chest, while commenting "Nice tits."

Levi's actions caused Eren to fold over, spitting out his toothpaste into the sink as he was overcome with a fit of laughter. "Levi!" He wheezed. "What the fuck was that?" He watched as Levi smirked amusedly, exiting the bathroom while sending him a wink.

Eren was relieved that they had reached a more calm understanding, but was still slightly apprehensive.

~

"Tell me again why we couldn't do a routine together?" Eren inquired on the drive over to the school.

"Because, I already promised other people I'd do a routine with them and one more would be too much to handle this year," Levi explained.

Eren hated pouting, but he honestly did feel neglected. "But we do one together every year. A short routine couldn't hurt."

Levi tried not to feel guilty, but his boyfriend was making that extremely difficult. He took one hand off the wheel and offered it to Eren. "I wanted to do one with you, but I got so busy. Do you understand?"

Eren took his hand. "I do."

"Today's going to be fun, trust me."

Eren decided to let it all slide and focus on day ahead of him. They arrived at the school and entered into the gym like every year and waited until their other partners showed up to sign in. Eren had a routine planned with Isabel, one by himself and one with his mother. Typically, after his first year, he'd do a routine with his mother and sister, but Mikasa wanted to do a solo performance this year. Levi signed up for his routine with his family, one with Hanji and the last with Petra.

Rico came over to greet them and check on the sign up sheet. "Don't you two have jobs to go to? How do you find time for individuals every year?"

"We wouldn't dare miss it," Levi answered.

"Well, I'm glad you both could make it. I think this might be my last year coaching."
"Really?" Eren said. "Why's that?"

"I can't do it forever," Rico scoffed. "I could go on for another year or two maybe, and I'd always attend the competitions and events, but I need to retire sometime. Don't worry, I'm not going to abandon anybody."

"We're glad you could hang around this long and haven't gotten sick of us yet," Levi joked.

"Trust me, it takes a lot to watch over you kids."

"We weren't that bad! We were good kids back in guard," Eren defended, crossing his arms.

"Mhm, yeah okay." Rico rolled her eyes.

Eren chuckled at her teasing. "Well, we're going to get settled in. Come on, Levi." He tugged at Levi's arm, only to be met with resistance.

"Um, I still need to talk to Rico about something," Levi spoke hesitantly, scratching his arm.


"Uh, in privacy," Levi corrected.

"Oh... okay." Eren looked to Rico, who seemed as clueless as he was and took the hint. "Alright, I'll just... head to the bleachers." He awkwardly stepped away, feeling slightly uncomfortable.

Eren took his seat at the bleachers, soon joined by his mother and Mikasa once they arrived. "Hi, Eren!" Carla chirped, sitting beside him.

He forced a smile as he looked up to her. "Hey, ma."

"What's with that look?" Mikasa asked, sitting at his other side and seeing right through his facade.

"Nothing," Eren lied.

Carla gently tugged on his ears, showing that they'd turned red and she wasn't being fooled. "Is something bothering you sweetie?"

Eren swatted her hand away, sighing. "I don't know. Levi's been acting really weird lately and I'm not sure if somethings wrong or if I'm just being paranoid."

"What's he been doing?" Mikasa inquired.

"Well, he's not home very often and I don't know where he's going. He says he's going to his mother's house, but he won't tell me what for. And he seems so stressed and his mind is always wondering, but whenever I ask him about it, he brushes it all off and says it's fine. Am I overreacting?" He looked to his family for guidance.

Carla bit her lip and avoided eye contact, while Mikasa pulled an over exaggerated, pensive expression. "Guys?"

"Well, that definitely is weird," Mikasa hummed. "But I do think you should worry too much."

Carla nodded quickly in agreement. If anything, Eren was now more skeptical by the way they were acting. "Do you both know something I don't?"
"No! No, we're as confused as you are!" Carla said, shaking her head dismissively.

"Then why did your voice get higher?" Eren deadpanned.

Carla looked away and Mikasa had to answer in her place. "Everything's probably fine, don't worry about it. Levi must have a lot on his plate."

Eren couldn't shake the feeling that the two were hiding something from him and frankly, he hated it. It was as if everyone was in on something, leaving him out of the loop. "Alright," he mumbled. He saw no use in carrying on with the subject. "So, are you two ready to go on today?"

"Oh, I'm so excited!" Carla beamed, clasping her hands together. "I don't think I'll ever get tired of this."

"Me neither," Mikasa agreed. "I've been practicing with the saber you leant me a lot on the days I don't have fencing practice and not to toot my own horn, but think I've gotten really good."

"Great, I can't wait to see what you put together."

"Other than the one with mom, who are you doing routines with?"

"One by myself and one with Izzy," Eren answered.

"What songs are you using?"

"The one I'm using for myself is 'Holiday' and the song for Izzy and me is 'Spitfire.'"

"That title is very fitting for you both," Carla commented.

Eren rolled his eyes. "It was between that song and another called 'Six Shooter.' Izzy decided she'd use that song for her solo routine, though."

"Oo, I'm excited to see her performance too," Carla hummed.

"Sorry to interrupt, but do either of you have an extra hair band?" Mikasa asked, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "My hair keeps getting in my face and I don't want it to mess up my performance."

Eren and Carla shook their heads regretfully. "Maybe you should cut your hair sometime," Eren suggested. "It could get in the way during fencing too."

"It does, on occasion," Mikasa sighed, taking a strand between her fingers to examine it. "Maybe I'll do that."

~

Individuals went by just like every other year, with everyone having a good time, all the varying performances, and the eager people receiving their medals. The only difference was all those who would fail to hide a manic grin upon seeing Eren. All throughout the event, Levi's family members and old friends would try to make idle conversation with Eren, only to leave soon after when he'd question their unexplained excitement. Hanji was practically bouncing in their seat whenever they sat next to Eren, Erwin couldn't suppress his perpetual smirk, and Kutchel would giggle to herself
every few minutes in Eren's presence. As giddy as they all seemed, Eren couldn't help but feel so left out and insecure. Were they actually hiding something from him or was he really imagining it all?

As soon as the medals were passed out, Carla turned to Eren, holding hers up. "Look, I got a bronze medal!"

"No way, me too!" Eren beamed.

"Ha, chumps," Mikasa scoffed. "I won a gold medal."

"You did a really good job," Eren complimented her. "You deserve it. I don't usually see a lot of routines using strictly sabers."

"Thanks," Mikasa said, flaunting her medal.

As everyone started to walk off, Rico spoke into the microphone once more. "Thank you all for coming, but we aren't done just yet. We have a very special performance to show you now, so if you're interested, please stay seated." The crowd and many of the performers looked around, perplexed, but remained in their seats and all the guard members ran to the bleachers, clearing the floor. "For this routine, we're requesting that a Mr. Eren Jaeger be seated in the very front row in the center of the bleachers, please."

Eren paused on his way up the stairs with his family and looked around in confusion. Carla and Mikasa urged him to go, waving downwards and lightly shoving his shoulder. A few people in the crowd pulled out their phones and cameras and sent Eren knowing looks. He felt incredibly self-conscious with all the eyes landing on him while he made his way to where he was instructed to go. He wished he could say that he was connecting the dots as he saw Levi hauling equipment onto the floor, but he stayed just as oblivious as he had been the whole day. He was dressed in a simple black tank top and black pants, but had an odd pouch tied to his waist.

He took a seat between a squirming Isabel and an eager Farlan. He looked to each of them for some sort of explanation, but they didn't provide him with one.

Levi had finished setting things up and awaited for Rico's signal. "The audience is ready, Levi, are you ready?" Rico asked.

Levi took on his pose, showing his preparedness.

"Levi, you may take the floor in exhibition."

The song came through the speakers with mewling sounds and a strong bass, then Levi was off in motion.

~ We move like cagey tigers
~ We couldn't get closer than this

The music came in scatters of sound as Levi moved fluidly across the floor, captivating Eren like he always did. Eren didn't quite understand yet what Levi's motive behind doing this was, but in the moment, he didn't care.

~We bite and scratch and scream all night
~Let's go and throw
~All the songs we know

Levi reached for his flag dressed in a red and black ombre silk. He took the end of the silk and skillfully tossed the flag into the air, catching it in his left hand while keeping it spinning.

~ Into the sea, you and me

~ All the years and no one heard

Whenever Levi wasn't focused on catching or maneuvering his equipment, he'd lock eyes with Eren. He held an expression of pure joy, one that Eren didn't get to see often. It was unlike any other face Levi held in any of his performances. He'd only smile in shows if he had to, or if the routine had a more serious tone, he'd wear a more blank expression. But in this show that was just for his boyfriend, his more genuine emotions shined through. Eren himself couldn't fight back the smile that came as well.

~ We missed you hissed the lovecats

~ We missed you hissed the lovecats

Eren had heard this song many times before. Levi would play it when they were relaxing at home. It had been a song from his favorite band and when it would play, Levi would hold onto Eren and smile into his shoulder. Of course, this image was running through both of their heads while Levi performed.

The flag in Levi's grasp was rarely keeping still while he traversed the floor. The rest of the crowd may have been focused on Levi's routine, but Eren was more curious as to what was going on. What was this all leading up to? Levi always had a purpose for his routines that he did for Eren, like asking him to prom and celebrating Valentine's Day. And every so often, Eren would eye the pouch tied around Levi's hips, wondering what purpose it served or if it had any importance at all.

~ We're so wonderfully wonderfully wonderfully

~ Wonderfully pretty!

~ Oh you know that I'd do anything for you

The song was slightly shortened and Eren knew why. He knew Levi, and he knew there was always another song. Levi traded in his flag for his saber, setting into a round of tosses, each surpassing the previous one's height, impressing the audience.

~ I love you, let's go

~ Oh, solid gone

Levi inched closer as the song faded into the next one. And Eren's grin widened if that was at all possible. He picked the song that Eren grew so fond of and told Levi of how it reminded him of him whenever it played.

~ Oh, all my friends are turning green

~ You're the magician's assistant in their dream

If Eren had dared to take his eyes off Levi, he'd see Isabel and Farlan eyeing him and Levi expectantly. He would've seen his family and friends filming him and his boyfriend, smiling
brightly with anticipation. But his gaze never wavered. He couldn't possibly look away from his boyfriend while he performed for him and him alone.

~Lady, running down to the riptide

~Taken away to the dark side

~I wanna be your left hand man

Levi reverted back to using his flag, the silk's ripples cutting through the air as he move along.

~I love you when you're singing that song and

~I got a lump in my throat 'cause

~You're gonna sing the words wrong

Levi started moving closer to the bleachers as he spun his flag, though his movements slowed in pace the closer he came. His heart beated faster while he approached and he hoped to god that his nerves weren't so obvious to Eren. All his time he spent stressing over making this perfect and practicing back at his mother's house was leading up to this.

~I just wanna, I just wanna know

~If you're gonna, if you're gonna stay

~I just gotta, I just gotta know

~I can't have it, I can't have it any other way

The music winded down, replaying the chorus the last few times and with a trembling hand, Levi carefully set down his flag and stepped over it. Eren cocked his head in curiosity, but still bore his smile, making Levi all the more nervous. Levi's visage mirrored Eren's with his grin and he could feel his breath slipping away.

Levi unzipped the pouch on his waist before kneeling in front of Eren, taking his hand in his and reaching in the pouch. He could see the gears beginning to turn in Eren's head and as the song played its last chords, he revealed the contents of the pouch and opened the little black box that he'd pulled out, fixated on Eren's expression turning into one of shock.

Isabel and Farlan slid away to allow those with cameras to get a better shot and the crowd erupted in gasps and hollers from those who were not aware of the situation, though it never reached the ears of the two men sharing this moment. Some who were previously informed, particularly Hanji and Carla, were however screaming their heads off in glee.

When the corners of Eren's lips quirked up while his mouth continued to gape open, Levi finally asked, "Will you marry me?"

Before he'd even finished the question, Eren was nodding hastily and diving in to kiss Levi. They couldn't be bothered with the noise that came from the crowd, all the clapping and cheers didn't matter. Eren pulled away and looked down at Levi. "Yes," he breathed. "Did you even need to ask?"

Levi laughed breathlessly. "I just wanted to be sure."

They came back together in a tight embrace, finally taking note of all the ruckus and flash of
cameras. Levi pulled away to slip the gold band on Eren's finger, making it official. Eren didn't think his smile would be going anywhere for a long while.

~

~One year later~

"I'm starting to regret this haircut," Isabel mumbled, running her hands through her new pixie cut. "Our brother is getting married and you're concerned about your hair?" Farlan questioned.

"Psh, he got married twenty minutes ago, I can focus on other things now." Isabel rolled her eyes, adjusting in her seat. "Like how uncomfortable this dumb dress is."

Farlan sighed, relenting to join in her conversation. "At least you look good for the pictures. And don't worry about your hair, it suits you. If you don't like it that much, it'll grow back." The main door opened, drawing everyone's attention. "Here they come!"

All the guests applauded as the newly wedded couple entered the venue of their reception. Levi clung to Eren's hand as they walked towards their table, tossing glances to his husband and their guests.

Taking their seats, they watched as everyone turned back in their chairs. Eren looked over to Levi. "We're gonna have our first meal as a married couple," he pointed out.

Levi chuckled. "Are you gonna do that for everything?" He asked, recalling Eren's actions right after they left the ceremony. "'Oh look, our first steps as a married couple,' " he mocked. "'Our first car ride as a married couple.' What's it going to be next? When you go to the bathroom are you going to say 'Oh look, taking my first shit as a married man!'"

Eren cackled, lightly slapping Levi's arm. "I might, just because you're sassing me."

"Fair enough." Levi leaned over to plant a kiss on Eren's cheek. "God... I love you so much."

"Good, because this would be so awkward if you didn't," Eren joked, making Levi burst out into laughter. "And I love you too. I'm so happy we're finally married."

"I don't think I would've been able to go another day without being married to you," Levi confessed. "I would've died of a heart attack."

"I highly doubt that, but I appreciate the sentiment."

Levi smiled, letting his head fall to Eren's shoulder. He took Eren's hand in his again, looking out to their guests.

Carla was comforting Kutchel as happy tears spilled from her eyes while she attempted to get more pictures of Eren and Levi, sitting at their table.

"Kutchel, they have a professional photographer," Carla reminded her. "You'll get plenty of beautiful pictures, enjoy the night."

"I know," Kutchel sniffled. "I-I just want as many pictures as possible."
"For Christ's sake, woman," Kenny groaned beside her. "Get yourself together, and quit crying."

Carla and Grisha glanced at each other nervously at Kenny's exasperation.

"I can't help it," Kutchel whined. "I'm just so happy! My baby is finally married. And to such a nice man."

"Goddamn it, now I'm gonna start crying," Carla complained, fanning her eyes with her hand.

Kutchel was taken aback when she felt arms wrapping around her shoulders. "It's okay, Kutchel," she heard Hanji say. "I'm crying too! My best friend is so happy up there!"

Kutchel turned around to hug Hanji back. "My son is so happy up there!" She wept.

Kenny crossed his arms and rolled his eyes at everyone being over emotional over the marriage. Grisha simply watched as his wife joined the hug with tears running down her cheeks.

~

Eren and Levi swayed together as it came time for their first dance. The familiar tune of an old song played while they danced on the floor, being watched by all their guests.

~ But I'll be there for you

~ As the world falls down

"Do you remember the first time we danced to this song?" Eren asked.

"Of course I do," Levi answered. "That was the night of our first kiss too. I think that was also the night that I realized that I loved you."

Eren giggled, resting his forehead on Levi's. "It was not, you're lying."

"It's true," Levi argued, pecking Eren's lips. "When you started getting upset that you couldn't dance in public with me, I thought of how I'd do anything to make you smile in that moment, but I couldn't understand why. Then after you kissed me, I knew it was because I love you. And I've loved you more everyday since."

"Shut up or you're going to make me cry," Eren threatened through a laugh, already feeling his eyes water.


Eren leaned back in a full fit of laughter. "Stop it!"

Levi relented, admiring his handsome husband chortling before him. "You're so beautiful." He could believe that this radiant, magnificent man in his arms was his forever.

"Not as beautiful as you," Eren countered.

"You shush," Levi silenced him.
Smiling, Eren rested his head beside Levi's head as they danced. "I love you so much."

"I love you too, mon grand," Levi murmured. "More than anything in the world." They went through the rest of their dance with only the music filling the silence.

Amongst the tables, Mikasa and Armin sat together, watching their best friend dance with his husband. "Six years ago, I thought Levi would be just a stranger that Eren had a bad run-in with. Now they're married... how crazy is that?" Armin pondered aloud.

"Pretty crazy," Mikasa mumbled. "But seeing how much they love each other, I can't see them any other way."

"I'm so happy for them."

"So am I."


~

It came time for everyone to start dancing and Levi and Eren took a brief break from each other to catch up with their guests. Hanji started haphazardly dancing with Levi, causing him to feign irritation.

"And you promise you'll still have time for me, right?" Hanji asked. "You two will visit me in my office and not just lock yourselves away, right Levi?"

Levi rolled his eyes while he was being swung around. "Yes, I promise."

Hanji held him closer. "And you both will still come to my drum corps performances? And you'll still celebrate Yule with me? And you promise to—"

"Hanji, I promise nothing will change. Eren and I are going on our honeymoon, we'll come home and be busy looking for a house, but after that, it'll be just like always. We're not abandoning anybody."

"Oh thank goodness!" Hanji wrapped him in a bone-crushing hug.

Levi frowned, but refused to pry himself away. He heard chuckling and glared over at Rico, Mike and Nanaba as they all watched his misfortune. He looked over Hanji's shoulder at his husband and wondered how he was doing during all this.

Eren was dancing with Mikasa at a much more acceptable pace than Levi was with Hanji. "When I suggested that you cut your hair, I didn't think you'd actually do it," he commented.

Mikasa only shrugged. "Eh, you were right, it kept getting in the way. Plus, I thought it was time for a change."

"And what? Your brother getting married wasn't a big enough change for you?" Eren teased.

"You guys were practically married before!" Mikasa laughed. "Besides, it's not like I'm the one getting married, it's not that much of a change for me."

"Which reminds me—"
"Eren, for the last time, I am perfectly happy alone."

Eren shrugged it off. "Fair enough."

Mikasa's shoulder was tapped, putting a halt to their dance. She looked over her shoulder to find Sasha waiting there. "My turn!" She beamed. Mikasa gladly stepped out of the way to let Sasha dance with Eren. "So, Eren, how's finding a house coming along?"

"It's been tough," Eren replied. "We decided to wait until after our honeymoon to get serious about looking. We wanted to focus on the wedding, you know?"

Sasha nodded understandingly. "Good call, everything turned out amazing! Did Petra do all the floral arrangements?"

"Who else would we trust to do it?" Eren said.

Sasha chuckled in agreement. "The food is spectacular too! When are you gonna cut the cake?"

"Patience, Sasha, we'll cut the cake soon enough," Eren assured her with a grin.

~

On the third morning of their honeymoon, Levi waited on the bed in their hotel for Eren to finish his shower. They'd agreed to spend this day relaxing rather than going out. Levi heard the water turning off in the shower and wondered what was taking so long after silence came for another five minutes. "Babe, what are you doing in there?" He hollered.

"Drying my hair!" Eren answered through the door.

"Can't you skip that? I'm lonely," Levi whined exaggeratedly.

Not ten seconds later, Eren emerged from the bathroom dressed in a towel, staring down at Levi. "You're that impatient?"

"It's not me, your spot was getting cold and I couldn't keep it warm for much longer," Levi lied, patting the bed. "I didn't want you coming back to freezing sheets."

Eren chuckled lightly, letting his towel drop and got under the sheets next to Levi. "How noble of you," he teased. He scooted up to his now husband, tucking his head under his chin and wrapping his arms around him. "Wow, so warm. I never should've doubted you."

"Right? It'll be like this everyday from now on. I'll always keep the bed warm for you until you get back."

"And what if you leave the bed and I stay behind?" Eren countered with a raised brow.

"Then I'd hope you'd do the same for me," Levi scoffed as if it was obvious.

"You're out of luck then, I'm not so good at retaining heat. Guess you'll just have to freeze." Eren snuggled closer to him, breathing in his scent.

"That's not very nice," Levi mumbled. "You would let me freeze?"
"Of course not, I was only kidding. I'd put on the heater, make you something to eat, bring you tea and make the bed. I'd make sure everything was perfect before you came back."

Levi hummed happily, placing several kisses at the top of Eren's head. "Mm, that sounds perfect." His thoughts settled over their current state and how at one point he would've laughed if someone had told him that they'd end up like this some day. "Did you ever think we'd get this far? When we first met?"

"Definitely not at first," Eren chuckled. "When I first had a crush on you, I thought you'd never like me back. When we started going out I thought you'd get sick of having to hide our relationship and leave. Somewhere along the way, though... I had a feeling."

"I did too," Levi breathed. "What about before all that?" He asked jokingly.

Eren laughed, the vibrations from his chest reaching Levi. "Before all that? Back when I called you a faggot? No, not then either. Why, did you think we'd make it this far when we met like that?"

"Oh, of course," Levi drawled out sarcastically. "Mhm, when you called me that, my first thoughts were 'I may be a faggot, but one day, I'll be his faggot.'"

Eren was struck with a fit of laughter, clinging onto Levi. Levi smiled into his hair, tugging him closer and savoring that sweet sound. As Eren calmed down a bit, Levi began pondering over the circumstances of their first meeting along with how they were now. "We've changed a lot since then."

Eren wiped away a stray tear. "Yeah, but I think it's all been for the better." It was true, Eren had become more open minded and accepting, whereas Levi became more confident, taking more chances. "I loved you the way you were then, but I love you even more now."

"Same goes to you. You're such a wonderful person," Levi hummed. He lower one hand, stroking Eren's arm as he went, squeezing in certain spots. "That's another thing that's changed," he mentioned pointedly.

"Oh yeah," Eren snickered. "Mike wasn't kidding when he said color guard would build up my muscles."

"You still couldn't beat me in an arm wrestle."

"I could!" Eren argued.

"Yeah, I don't think so babe."

Eren turned to face away from Levi, but remained in his grasp, pretending to be bitter over the subject. "Well, you can kiss my ass," he muttered jokingly.

Levi leaned up to murmur in Eren's ear. "Be careful what you wish for," he warned.

Eren shuddered as Levi's breath ghosted over his skin and soon, he felt Levi's lips planting gentle kisses just beneath his ear. They grew in roughness as Levi slowly worked his way down his neck, nibbling and sucking at the skin every so often. "You have the loveliest skin, Eren... I want it to be absolutely covered in marks by the time we get back home." He punctuated his statement by harshly biting down on the crook of his neck, hard enough to leave a rather large bruise and causing Eren to gasp, clutching the sheets. He could feel the cold metal of Levi's lip ring occasionally, along with his tongue ring whenever he'd lick a stripe up his neck.
"Why can't we settle things like normal people and actually have an arm wrestle?" Eren suggested as Levi made his way down his shoulder.

"I mean, we could," Levi mumbled against Eren's dark skin. "But where's the fun in that?"

Eren figured he was right and relaxed under his touch, letting him do as he pleased. Levi gently angled Eren so that he was laying on his stomach and started biting at his nape, causing him to squirm. "All these years and you're still so sensitive here?"

"Shut up," Eren mumbled into the pillows.

Levi smirked to himself and began leaving his trail of kisses down Eren's spine, caressing his sides. He stopped just short of the small of his back. "Did you thoroughly clean yourself?"

Eren was glad he was face down so Levi couldn't see his flushed cheeks. "... Yes."

"Really thoroughly?" Levi asked while he massaged the mounds of flesh in his hands.

"Yes," Eren admitted. "That's why I took so long."

"Perfect," Levi mused, tugging at Eren's hips to angle him so that he was on his knees with his ass up. He used his hands to spread his cheeks for better access and licked a stripe from his balls to the orifice, eliciting a surprised moan from the man beneath him.

Eren writhed in the sheets as Levi prodded around with his tongue. The warm muscle made its way inside and Eren found it hard to suppress his moans. He gripped the pillow beneath him so tightly that his knuckles turned white. Levi took in all the sweet noises his lover was making while he kneaded his flesh and slid his tongue in and out, occasionally sucking on the surrounding areas. When he decided Eren was ready, he added a finger with his tongue, feeling around and trying to stretch him.

At this point, Eren lost all care and spilled out his praises in incomprehensible moans. Levi leaned back to observe the way Eren's back arched under his touch and added another finger. Tearing his gaze away from the lovely curve of his spine, he reached over the the bedside table, grabbing the lubricants.

Eren tossed a look over his shoulder, panting and smirking back at Levi. "You know..." he rasped. "When I said you can kiss my ass, I didn't mean French kiss it." He gave a short, breathless laugh as Levi quirked a brow at him.

"I didn't hear you complaining," Levi countered, popping open the bottle of lube.

Eren frowned, mostly due to the loss of Levi's fingers while he prepped them. "You don't need to do that, I'm probably still stretched from this morning."

Levi sent him a look and helped him lay on his back. "I'm not taking chances, I don't want to hurt you."

Eren pouted indignantly, readjusting on the bed. "You won't," he mumbled.

Levi chuckled and leaned down to kiss him softly. "I'm still going to prep you. I don't want my angel getting sore only a few days into our honeymoon." His fingers slowly entered Eren again, being cautious to not overdo anything.

"If I'm not sore, you're not doing it right," Eren teased, wiggling his hips.
Levi glowered down at him, though his eyes lacked any venom. "I want to go gently this time."

"Fine," Eren relented, melting into the mattress. "But when I top later, I'll get you back for this."

Levi snickered. "Deal."

Once Eren was stretched to Levi's satisfaction, he lubed himself up and settled between Eren's legs. He carefully eased in, loving how it felt to be engulfed in his husband's tight warmth. Eren threw his head back and shut his eyes at the sensation of being filled, laboring his breathing.

Levi lowered himself to be closer with Eren while they made love. Eren wrapped his arms around Levi's shoulders and clung to his back, letting his nails dig into his skin while Levi started rocking. Levi kept his hold on Eren's hips, steadying him while he angled himself to find his prostate. He made a slow rhythm, keeping his word about being gentle and started leaving another trail of kisses in the crook of Eren's neck.

Eren angled his head to give him better access and moaned. "Mm... fuck Levi," he sighed. He lifted his hips to help Levi find that bundle of nerves and cried out when he finally hit it. "Right there!"

Levi latched onto Eren's shoulder with his teeth and started hitting his sweet spot head on. He reached one hand down to stroke Eren as he thrusted into him. Between the hand driving him wild, the pressure on his shoulder, his prostate being hit and Levi's piercing adding onto all the stimulation, Eren came close to reaching his peak.

Within minutes, Eren was coming along with Levi, making a mess over both of their stomachs and chests. Levi filled Eren to the brim, knitting his brows together as he groaned into Eren's skin.

The two were left panting, embracing each other after coming down from their high. "Fuck... I love you so much," Levi breathed.

"I love you too," Eren replied, leaning up to kiss his husband.

~

~ One year later ~

Levi dug through their cabinets in the bathroom in search of towels. Luckily, they had two clean towels left and he took them in his arms, heading back down the hall. "Babe, I found them!" He hollered. "We need to do laundry soon, there's only two left."

"Great, get on the stool," Eren said as Levi came around the corner and into the kitchen.

Levi set one towel underneath the stool and wrapped the other around his shoulders. As he sat down, he ran his hand through Eren's bangs, causing the taller to giggle and back away. "Looks like you could use a haircut too."

Eren made Levi turn in the other direction, grabbing the razor and clipping up Levi's hair to reveal his undercut. It was just barely long enough for him to run his fingers through. "I think I'm gonna grow out my hair."

"Hm, I think you'd look pretty sexy with long hair," Levi commented, practically purring as Eren
played with his locks.

Eren chuckled. "Same to you. You hair looks good at this length, you're sure you want to cut it?"

"Yeah, it's time," Levi answered. He heard the buzzing of the electric clippers and sat perfectly still. "Maybe once the undercut is cleaned up, we can shave things into it."

Eren snorted, starting at the base of Levi's neck. "What? Like a lightning bolt?"

Levi huffed out an amused breath. "I don't know, what do you feel confident with shaving?"

"Hm... I can shave in a really badass smiley face—"

"Maybe we can wait to get a professional to do that," Levi decided.

Eren laughed and continued to shave up his undercut. "Even if I could add shapes, do you think we'd have enough time before the party?"

"The party isn't until tonight, we've got plenty of time," Levi scoffed.

"Can I shave in a really really tiny heart?"

"No."

"Come on!" Eren whined. "You could hide it with the rest of your hair if you don't like it! I'll put it high up."

Levi sighed agitatedly. "... Okay."

"Yay! I'll make it really neat and small, only you and I will know it's there."

Levi smirked to himself, watching bits of his hair fall out of his peripheral vision. "You're a spoiled brat, you know?"

"I know." Eren paused to give Levi a kiss on the cheek and went back to cleaning up his undercut. "I can't wait to see everyone tonight, it's been so long since all of us were together. Especially with Farlan running off to the city."

"Can you blame him? How often do you get the chance to be a professional pianist for headlining musicals?"

"I know. And I'm happy for him it's just... I miss everybody," Eren sighed.

"I miss them all too," Levi said. "But we'll get to see them all tonight. The whole group will be back together."

Eren set down the clippers and took the scissors in their place to cut the harder to reach places. He snipped around Levi's ears delicately, careful not to cut Levi. "I'm gonna shave the little heart now," he announced.

"Go ahead," Levi muttered, rolling his eyes.

Eren used the very tips of his scissors to carve out a small heart right below where Levi's longer hair was so that he could easily cover it up. "There, all done." He took the mirror off of the table and offered it to Levi as he took the clips out of his hair.
Levi inspected his husband's work and decided that it was satisfactory. "Thank you." He stood, setting the towel off his shoulders and leaving it on the stool. "I'm going to check out the heart in the bathroom."

Eren laughed to himself. "Okay, I'll take care of the towels."

After Eren had cleaned everything up, Levi came out from the bathroom and wrapped him in a hug. "I love it," he said, giving him a kiss.

Eren gladly returned this kiss. "Good, I'm glad. Now, we should start get ready. You know how long it takes for you to do your makeup." He weaseled out of Levi's arms with a wink.

"It does not take me that long!"

~

Levi did keep Eren waiting after all. Over the years, he experimented with his makeup more and layered on more black on a day to day basis, and occasionally would add a touch of color. He wanted to look his best for the party, so he skillfully placed a patch of red on his eyelids amongst the black. Before moving from the mirror, he pushed his hair to one side and angled it forward to show more of his undercut, then hair-sprayed it in place.

He went to their bedroom and dig out his warmest spiked jacket and slid on a pair of his platforms, deeming himself ready to go. He walked out to the living room, finding Eren throwing on an old scarf his mother made for him years ago. Eren smiled at him. "Nice hair," he said.

Levi shrugged. "I want people to see my new haircut."

"It's just a touch up," Eren chuckled, walking up to him and looking him up and down. "Nice height."

Levi snorted at his comment. "Thanks, you always seem to forget I have these shoes."

Eren took Levi's hand and stuffed it in his coat pocket. "Let's just go, we're already late."

They got in their car and left to the party, which was being held at Armin's home. His job as a marine biologist payed well enough for him to afford a decently sized house, which could easily host those who were invited. It was a long drive to Armin's house unfortunately, considering his career had forced him to move out of town, but that wasn't going to stop everyone from visiting.

Reaching their destination at last, they hopped out of their car and into the cold as they walked up to Armin's front door. They went right in without having to knock, aware that no one really minded anyways. They had only barely made it inside before friends from all directions were attacking them in hugs and greetings.

"Levi, you little jerk!" Hanji hollered in his ear. "You never call me back and you don't reply to me when I email you those cat videos you used to like so much—"

Isabel was the one to be shouting at Eren while pulling him into a death grip. "Where the hell have you been?! You haven't stopped at the shelter to see me once this month, I thought something happened to you—"
Thankfully, Farlan and Moblit came to their rescue, prying off the noisy guests. "Good to see you both," Moblit said.

"Same to you," Levi huffed out, finally gaining some air.

They walked further into the house and were swarmed by everyone else, as it was expected and started catching up immediately. Levi sat down with Hanji and started asking them how their job as a forensic scientist was treating them and they inquired how Levi liked working as an interpreter as he'd always planned. Hanji was absolutely loving their job, while Levi couldn't complain, seeing as he had the opportunity to work alongside his mother. Eren sat aside Farlan and Isabel, discussing Farlan's career as a professional pianist and Isabel's job working at the local animal shelter. Eren tended to stop by and see Isabel on his way home from his job working at a gym, so they didn't have much to catch up on. Farlan however was happy to share all his stories about working in theatre and how he couldn't be happier.

Hearing all the commotion in the living room, Connie and Sasha came out from the kitchen to see Levi and Eren. They were more than happy to pass out hugs, telling the two how much they missed them. "Levi, I love your new haircut!" Sasha gasped.

"Thanks. Eren did it." Levi tossed a smirk to his husband.

"Very nice work, Eren," Sasha praised him.

"You didn't see my favorite part," Levi said, turning around. "Can you find it?"

Sasha and several others crowded around, searching for what Levi was referring to. Even Eren had forgotten what he put and leaned in to see. "Do you see it?" Levi asked no one in particular. He helped them out by feeling around on the back of his head to find the bare spot. "Right there," he announced, placing his finger on the heart Eren shaved in.

Sasha started giggling to herself. "Aw, that's the cutest thing!"

"Levi's just a big softy for his hubby," Hanji said in a mocking tone.

"Dammit," Isabel sighed, running her fingers through her short locks. "I want a husband to shave hearts in my hair."

"And you'll get one some day," Farlan promised her.

"Eren Jaeger, where have you been?" Armin shouted, storming out of the kitchen. The group turned to face their host as he tore off his oven mitts. "You said you'd make it here early to help with dinner!"

Eren side-eyed Levi and chose not to throw him under the bus for diving into his cosmetics for a little too long. "The roads were icy, but I'm here now. Can you forgive me?" He tried a tad harder when all he received was a glare. "Buddy?"

Armin eased up, letting himself forget about Eren's tardiness and focus on the fact that he was able to make it at all. "Yeah, yeah, now come and help me with the rolls."
"How's being a fencing instructor going?" Eren asked Mikasa, knowing she wouldn't get too enthusiastic about it. "Is it as exiting as ever?"

"Oh, you know," she began, taking a sip of her drink. "We got a bunch of new kids joining which is always nice. With all the younger ones trying to beat each other with their foils and talking like Darth Vader when they put their masks in for the first time. It's... just dandy."

Eren snorted. "I can imagine."

"Eren, if you and Levi ever have children and if they're interested in fencing, do not bring them to my classes until they're mature."

"No problem," Eren chuckled, falling silent and looking around to find where his husband had gone. He started smiling to himself when he found him on the other side of the room, showing off the heart at the back of his head to Erwin and Mike. He didn't think he'd be so open about such a silly thing and it made him happy to see him laughing over it with his friends.

"Checking out your man, I see," Mikasa interrupted his train of thought.

Eren huffed out an amused breath. "I can't help it."

"God, you guys are so mushy. It's sickening," she joked, taking another sip of her drink.

Eren barked out his laughter. "You're just jealous because you don't have someone to be mushy with!"

"I don't need to be married, I've got cable," Mikasa countered. "Oh, speaking of being married, Petra asked me to be one of her bridesmaids. And I said yes."

"Really? I can't picture you as a bridesmaid," Eren hummed, imagining his sister in a gown in line with other women matching her.

"Well, start picturing it, because it's happening." Mikasa scanned their surroundings in search of Petra. "Hey, Petra! Get your butt over here!"

Petra looked over to Mikasa and excused herself from speaking with Annie, Bertolt and Reiner. She scurried over to sit beside Mikasa, wearing her typical cheerful grin. "Yes, my future bridesmaid?" She sang.

"Where's your fiancé tonight? I thought he'd be coming," Mikasa said.

"Oh, he had holiday concert to attend. It was mandatory," she explained. "But, he will be coming to our winter party! He made sure he didn't have any conflicting events beforehand."

"That's good."

"Holy shit, is that your engagement ring?" Eren gawked, observing the large stone on her finger.

Petra gushed and nodded bashfully. "Yes," she said, offering her hand so Eren could inspect it closer.

"Oh my god, lucky you," Eren breathed.

"I'm just happy I'm marrying the man of my dreams."

"God, I can't escape all the mushiness tonight," Mikasa groaned, eliciting laughs from the other
two. "So, what were you chatting about with those three?" She motioned to Reiner, Annie and Bertolt.

"Oh you know, work. They were asking about the flower shop and how it's going. Annie likes her new job as a jeweler just fine and Reiner and Bertolt are getting more work lately. There's this man who was looking for contractors to add this huge installation for his home, and it's a lot of work but he's willing to pay extra. Bertolt and Reiner were the only ones to accept, so they're going to be busy for awhile, but they're making a ton of money doing it. They're going to put all the money towards their house."

"That's great," Eren beamed. "I didn't know they were getting a house."

"They are now," Petra giggled.

"I'm really happy for them. Especially after all this time," Mikasa mused, gazing at the three.

It wasn't long ago that the three had announced to their friends that they were in a polyamorous relationship and had been for years. Reiner didn't know how his family would understand him being in a relationship with another man, let alone two people at the same time. So, throughout their senior year of high school, they kept it a secret, but Reiner allowed Bertolt and Annie to be open about themselves. It was only a little over a year before this get-together that they all came out. Eren could somewhat empathize with them, considering he had a similar situation in his family and he needed to hide his boyfriend for months on end. But he couldn't imagine what it was like to hide a relationship for years. Pondering over the subject, it occurred to Eren that all of their friends had made it so far in life. He scanned room, trying to see if he could've predicted where his friends are now.

Eren knew Ymir always had a love for history, but he never would've guessed that she'd land a job working in a museum. Christa on the other hand, worked at home, selling homemade jewelry online. He supposed he could've seen that coming. But everyone could've foreseen how they'd end up happily married, that was a given.

After finding her new love of archery, Sasha started teaching the basics to young adults for a living. The job was especially rewarding for her, because every so often, she'd get a student who came to her, telling her how much the sport was helping her with their struggles in life. Every time, she'd tell them how she could relate and they'd both be motivated to improve.

Connie was the owner of a local bar that was notorious for their nights of amateur stand-up comedy and strangely named drinks. Some of their get togethers would be held there, most of them would take a crack at being first-time comedians, and Connie would provide them with free drinks and free nonalcoholic beverages to those who didn't drink or were driving home. Erwin, Moblit, Erd and Gunther were offered jobs working with him as the bar grew in popularity, and who were they to refuse?

Nanaba and Mike were still together, and it was only a matter of time before one of them proposed. Secretly, a few of them took bets on when it would be and who would pop the question. Nanaba didn't have a set job, but would often help Petra with the flower shop, while Mike had recently settled into his job working at the fragrance counter at a popular department store in their area.

Marco, the saint that he was, ended up being a school counselor, wanting to help as many students as possible, be it academically or in their personal lives. Throughout the years, he kept in contact with Jean. After graduating, Jean started taking his actions more seriously and drifted away from a few of his pressuring, influential friends and spent more time with the guard. Marco helped him make adjustments to his life, trying to figure out his strengths and interests before going off to
college. Jean found an interest in law, and pursued education and later on a career in the justice system as an employment lawyer, specialized in discrimination within the workforce. Marco was so proud of him, supporting him and encouraging him every step of the way.

Everyone had grown so much and they'd all kept their promise to stay close to each other while living their own lives. Admittedly, some had their doubts that they'd be able to stay in touch, but none of them would drift from the others without a fight. The solidarity of the group was something damn near impossible to break.

~

"I didn't think Eren would be able to make it so even," Armin commented on the heart on the back of Levi's head. "Especially since it's so small."

Levi turned back around to face Armin. "Have you no faith in your best friend's abilities?"

Armin huffed out an amused breath. "No, it's not that. He's just never been the artistic type."

Levi shrugged. "That's why he put it so high up. In case he didn't do well and I could cover it up." He took a sip of his drink and decided to veer onto a different subject. He'd been showing off his undercut all night after all. "Who's house do you think we should have our next party at? You probably don't want to host another one so soon."

"Well, I wouldn't decline if I had to host another, but won't be the first to volunteer," Armin chuckled. "Petra's too busy planning her wedding, so she most likely wouldn't want to have it at her home. Mikasa's house isn't big enough to hold everyone. Annie, Bertolt and Reiner are still in their apartment, so that's out of the question. I haven't talked about it with Christa and Ymir, though."

"Their place is big enough, we should ask them," Levi suggested.

"We could," Armin agreed. "If all else fails, we could always ask Connie to close up the bar for one night, he's done it before."

Their conversation was cut short when Ymir called for everyone's attention. "Quiet everyone! We have an announcement to make!" The room silenced as she stood by her wife with her arm around her shoulders. "Do you want to say it?" She whispered to her.

Christa nodded excitedly. "So, we haven't really brought this up with anyone yet, but that's because we wanted to be absolutely sure before we said anything." She started biting her lip, unable to hold back her bright smile. "We've been discussing it for quite some time and we've made up our minds... we're going to have a baby!"

There was only a second of utter silence before gasps and hollers sounded. Hanji was practically shrieking in joy, Marco was already making his way over to the couple to give them hugs and Isabel started jumping in her spot, overcome with excitement.

"Guess, they're too occupied to host a party too," Levi mumbled to Armin, causing him to stifle a laugh.

A round of applause followed everyone's initial reactions and they all couldn't be happier for the two of them. "Are you adopting?" Nanaba inquired after the room had somewhat quieted.
"That was our first plan," Ymir explained. "But we thought about it more and Christa really wants to go through the process of being pregnant and giving birth, so we found a sperm donor."

Farlan came to their sides and gave each one of them a tight hug. "I'm so happy for you both!" Soon, everybody was taking turns embracing the couple and congratulating them.

~

Levi drove on the way home and he'd been mostly silent after they'd left the get-together. Eren was exceedingly exhausted and nearly dozed off as soon as he buckled in. "I can't believe they're having a baby," he yawned. "They better have a baby shower, I wanna get something for them."

"Me too," Levi agreed curtly, his thoughts elsewhere.

Eren let his head fall back on his head rest and shut his eyes. "I'm gonna get some sleep."

"Okay."

Levi focused on the road as best as he could, but he couldn't help but let his subconscious intrude on his forefront thoughts. Of course, he was incredibly happy for his friends and their future addition to their family, but he also had a strange feeling sitting at the back of his mind. He wasn't certain, but he had a suspicion that it was... envy, perhaps? He didn't know.

He snuck glances at his husbands sleeping visage when it was safe to do so and wondered if he had any similar emotions, or if he merely felt glad for his friends like everyone else. Levi supposed it was best to ignore these thoughts and focus on the drive home, but still. The idea of a child coming into his friends' lives weighed heavily. And not in an entirely bad way.

~

~ One year later ~

Levi and Eren walked into the tattoo shop that they'd been in so many times before. Levi only trusted a select few people to do his tattoos and piercings, so he became a loyal customer to this particular shop. Levi had scheduled an appointment to get a piece done on his lower back and his preferred artist finally had the time to get him in.

They walked up to the front desk and informed the shop manager of their appointment and were soon invited back by Nifa, Levi's artist. "Levi, long time, no see!" She greeted him, pulling him into a hug.

"Hey, how've you been?" He asked, returning the hug.

Nifa pulled back to answer him. "Oh, you know. Same old, same old. How are your hip piercings looking?"

"Really good."
Great, and how about your, uh... other piercings? How are they holding up?


Eren turned bright red upon hearing what Levi was insinuating. "Levi!" He hissed, slapping his shoulder. Levi was unfazed, giggling at how embarrassed his husband was getting.

Nifa giggled at the couple. "Gosh, it's been so long since I've seen you two. Your tattoos are healed up, you both have new haircuts. You need to book more appointments, mister," she chastised Levi, wagging her finger at him.

Levi had collected many tattoos from Nifa over the years, but it had been awhile since he had work done. And the two did look quite different now. Eren grew his hair out to the point where it was ridiculously unruly, but he liked it like that, and Levi loved it even more. And Levi grew fond of the way his hair looked pushed forward and to the side, and he'd gotten a hair stylist to shave in circular designs rather than having Eren wing it.

"Yeah, I know, but I got a job and a husband that keeps me busy."

"Well, you're here now. Let's go get you set up." Nifa guided the couple over to her station and pulled out the stencils she had drawn up. Levi wanted the phases of the moon in a circular display rather than a linear one. Nifa had taken artistic liberties and added a detailed background. "How do ya like it?"

"It's exactly what I wanted," Levi replied, examining the sheet.

Nifa had Levi sit on a chair facing backwards and requested that he take off his shirt for the tattoo. Upon doing so, Nifa stared in shock at his upper back once it was bare. "Shit, it has been awhile since I've seen you. I didn't know you got scarification." She marveled at the expansive work, an image of two wings overlapping in raised skin.

"Oh yeah, I got that done like... ten months ago? It's pretty much healed now." Levi's started chuckling when he noticed Eren's face contorting. "Nifa, you should've seen Eren when I told him I wanted scarification. I explained to him what it was and he almost had a heart attack." Nifa barked out a laugh, picturing the scene. "He got really scared when I told him how big it would be and when he went with me as I got it done, he almost passed out."

"Can you blame me?!" Eren took a fold out chair and placed it in front of Levi for him to sit. "Something could've gone really wrong."

"Do you not like it?" Nifa asked, prepping Levi for the tattoo.

"No, no. I love it, it's just that... carving out the skin was... terrifying." He scratched his neck uncomfortably, remembering the traumatizing experience. He remembered how Levi didn't seem the least bit fazed, but Eren simply couldn't look.

"Well, there won't be any skin carving today, rest assured," Nifa promised.

"Well—"

"Levi!" Eren snapped. "No more!"

Levi snickered. "Alright, alright. I won't get anymore... yet."
Eren groaned into his hands.

Levi never put up much of a fuss while getting tattooed. Eren didn't understand it, he almost looked relaxed while Nifa worked away, practically stabbing his skin a few thousand times per minute. Levi had one arm resting on the back of the chair that he set his chin on while Eren held his free hand.

Eren gazed at Levi's arm for awhile, admiring his collection of tattoos, all in red, black and grey. On the back of Levi's hand was his most recent piece, a simple letter 'E' for Eren. Working up his wrist, Levi had a few plain, black rings varying in width. Above those, laid pieces dedicated to his siblings. Since, they both had a love for music, he had birds that were known for their noises to represent them. For Isabel, he had a red songbird perched on a magnolia branch, since her favorite flowers bloomed on that kind of tree. For Farlan, he had a woodpecker tapping on a church door. Even though Farlan wasn't religious, he had a love for classical songs that typically had a spiritual meaning. On the other side of his forearm was a tattoo that he'd gotten with Hanji, as they wanted matching ones. He and his best friend now had a tattoo of a color guard flag and rifle crossing each other with a saber down the center and a banner beneath with the words 'blood, sweat and tears' in script. On his elbow was a cob web splaying outward, simply because he liked the aesthetic of it. Above that on his bicep, was a red heart with a banner across it that read 'Mère,' that he'd gotten for his mother. Kutchel would always tell him how that one was her favorite every time he'd visit after he had it done. It was cliché and an overused image, but it was simple and sweet, just like his mother, so that made it perfect.

Levi sat perfectly still all throughout his session, happily gazing into Eren's eyes and stroking his thumb across Eren's. It had gotten to the point where Eren thought there was a reason that Levi was staring for so long. "Is there something on my face?"

"No," Levi hummed, smiling slightly.

"Why are you staring so hard?" Eren asked, chuckling.

"Cuz you're beautiful," came Levi's breathy reply.

"Guys, I'm working," Nifa said over the buzzing of the tattoo machine. "Stop being cute."

The couple laughed shortly, unbothered and enjoying the silence.

"And... you're all done!" Nifa announced, wiping off the excess ink. "Take a look." She allowed Levi to stand awesome asked over to a mirror on the wall, offering him a smaller one to see his back.

Levi gazed in the two reflections, allowing a grin to settled into his features. "I love it." He wasn't often the type to give a million praises, so that much would suffice.

"I knew you would," Nifa said, proud of her work.

"You do such a beautiful job every time," Eren commented, observing the tattoo in awe.

"Aw, thanks!" She took the mirror from Levi and set it off to the side. "Now let's get this sucker
wrapped up and safe."

Levi gave her the required payment after he had his tattoo wrapped and wished her well as they left. Eren was the one to drive home, seeing as Levi was in discomfort as it was. Once back at their home, they decided to take the rest of the day easy, relaxing on the couch with Levi laying on his stomach across Eren's lap while they watched television. They stayed like that for hours, simply enjoying each other's company.

But like every other day for the last year, Levi's mind wandered.

Something was missing. He had a gorgeous husband who he was absolutely madly in love with. He had a job that paid extremely well and allowed him to stay right by his mother everyday. His siblings were happy and living their lives to the fullest. His friends lived nearby and saw him quite often. Finances weren't a concern of him, he did what he loved, he had plenty of wonderful people in his life and he couldn't be happier. And yet, something was missing.

Whenever his thoughts would go down this path, a few images would creep into his head. When he couldn't place a name to this longing, memories of the little guard came flooding back to him. He got to know each of their personalities. He taught them color guard, something they all loved. He basically took care of them, making sure they were hydrated, helping them open their snacks, forcing them to apologize and make up when they'd hurt each other's feelings on rare occasions, tying their shoes, helping them with their homework. He'd complain and roll his eyes when people asked him about it, but under the surface, he knew that he truly loved doing it. Something about it was so rewarding. Whenever he tried to think about what was missing and what it could be, he'd think about the children he'd see at work in the hospital. He'd translate to some of them what the doctors were saying, typically reassuring them that they'd be just fine and their delighted reactions never failed to warm his heart. He'd spend some time with some of the children who needed more comfort, considering it was no fun being in the hospital especially when you couldn't understand what anyone was saying. At first they'd inch away, due to his alternative appearance, but after he started talking in their language, they warmed up to him and they'd end up asking him why he looked the way he did, which made him smile. The smaller children would even poke at his tattoos, testing to see if they were flat and dammit, he couldn't bring himself to tell them no. He was constantly watching his mother when she would explain to children what their parents were in the hospital for and intently studying the way she'd simplify her words for them as well as break more serious conditions to them gently. Even when he wasn't working to assist the children directly, they'd pass him in the halls, looking at him with such interest or giggle, hiding behind their parents like it was a game. But when he'd have to deliver bad news to children or their guardians, their reactions or just the knowledge itself of what was wrong with them tore him in two. And he'd get admittedly a little too attached to those he translated for after they gave birth, needing to understand the doctors specific instructions or news. He didn't mind working with people no matter what their age, but he felt an instinctive duty to be there for the younger ones.

Levi craned his neck to look up at his lover, watching him watch the television. Could it be that Eren would feel the same? What if he didn't? "Baby?"

Eren gazed down at him. "Hm?"

Levi's words got stuck in his throat. Such a serious topic being brought up out of the blue might not be the best idea. But Levi couldn't wait. "... Have you ever thought about having a family?"

"You are my family, Levi," Eren replied.

"No... like kids." Levi hoped this wasn't one-sided. If it was, he'd do what he could to forget all about it, but he wished that Eren would feel the same.
Eren studied Levi features, wondering where all this was coming from. "Are you asking because of Ymir and Christa's baby?"

Levi shook his head. "No. Have you ever thought about having children? I have."

Eren mulled over his answer, running a hand through his long locks. "Well... yeah, just not thoroughly. The idea has crossed my mind a couple times, but I've never sat down and considered the possibility. Do you want to have children?"

"... I think I do."

Eren nodded, deep in thought. "I'm not opposed to it," he admitted. "But I think we shouldn't make any rash decisions until we both know for sure it's what we want, and not just something we think we want."

"Right," Levi agreed. He let his eyes drift away, but his chest ached as he forced himself to drop the subject.

Eren could see that Levi wasn't finished. They couldn't leave it at that. He adjusted himself so that he was laying beside Levi, wrapping his arms around Levi's center. "Do you want to talk about it?" He murmured, caressing the side of his husband's face. Levi nodded once. "Then let's talk about it." He placed an encouraging kiss on his lips, waiting for him to speak.

Levi took a steadying breath and filled the distance between them. "... Well, ever since I was young, I knew I wanted a family, but I never thought about it seriously. I never thought about names, how I'd dress them or maybe even what they'd like. I just pictured myself doing things with them like teaching them how to read, cooking with them, taking care of them. And for the last year... I felt sort of like I was missing out."

Eren stopped Levi in his tracks, staring into his eyes. "You've been keeping this bottled up for a year? You wouldn't tell me how much you want kids for a whole year?"

"I didn't know if you'd want them too," Levi mumbled.

Eren clicked his tongue and held his husband close to his chest, tucking his chin above his head. "Levi, you still should've mentioned it, even if I didn't want kids. If there's something you want, tell me, regardless of what I'll think. I care about your wants. Especially the ones as important as this."

Levi clutched at Eren's shirt. He took a minute to collect his thoughts, trying to come up with any reason why he wouldn't want children, or at least why it would be a bad idea. Other than diapers and less sleep, he came up short. "... Baby, I really want this. If you decide that you don't, I can always move on, but I want kids. There's no doubt in my mind."

"Then we'll keep talking about this. We'll talk about it for a long while and figure it out. Okay, honey?" Eren placed a gentle kiss on the top of Levi's head.

"Okay."
"Oh... I see." Eren croaked in his weak, worn voice into the receiver of their phone. "No, no, I understand... okay. Okay, thank you... bye." He hung up the phone and blew harsh breaths out of his nose, shutting his watering eyes. Levi wouldn't be happy when he got home. Hell, if this phone call had brought Eren to his knees, he couldn't imagine how Levi would feel. He supposed he should get started on dinner so that Levi would have one pleasant thing to come home to.

Halfway through cooking their meal, Levi came home, exceedingly tired. "Hey sweetheart," he said, walking up behind Eren to give him a kiss on the cheek.

"Hi, how was work?" He tossed him a second long look, faking a grin to keep him oblivious for just a little bit longer.


"That's great! How long is he staying for?"

"A week, I think?" Levi hummed. "The musical he's working for is having major complications, so they gave him time off."

Eren nodded to show that he'd heard him, but had trouble speaking while still pretending everything was fine. So, he kept cooking without turning around, doing all that he could to keep himself together. Levi raised a brow at his prolonged silence, but didn't think much of it. "I'll be in the living room if you need me."

"Dinner will be ready soon," Eren muttered.

"Alright, I'll set the table."

Their meal went by with little conversation. Eren simply couldn't bring himself to say much, knowing the conversation they'd be having later. Afterwards, Eren asked Levi to go, sit down and relax while he washed the dishes. He finished up rather quickly and joined Levi in the living room, watching television.

"Did the adoption agency call back today?"

Levi'd beat him to it. And he wasn't ready.

"... They did," Eren mumbled.

"... They did," Eren mumbled.

Levi could already tell by his husband's tone that they didn't bring them the news they wanted. But he still turned to face him, throwing an arm around his shoulders and bringing him close. "... What did they say?"

Eren bowed his head, feeling his bottom lip tremble. He merely shook his head, hoping Levi would understand without him having to speak. Luckily he did, and responded by pulling him into a comforting embrace, which Eren gladly returned. Eren let out a choked sob and Levi reacted by patting his back and shushing him.

"We'll start looking for another one tomorrow," Levi promised quietly. "Okay? We're not going to take no for an answer."

Eren only wept harder. Levi's words were of no comfort. For over a year, they were being turned
down by every agency they'd contact and it was over the silliest reason. "Why can't we have a baby?" He cried. "W-we'd be good parents."

"You know why." Levi could feel his eyes beginning to water as he tried keeping himself together. "We'll find an agency that doesn't discriminate against gay couples, don't worry."

"And what if we don't? What if the ones who don't discriminate turn us down too?"

"We'll find a way. I promise."

Eren wasn't sure if Levi could really follow through on that promise, it was out of his hands. But for some reason, he still believed him. Despite having faith in him, he couldn't prevent the endless flow of tears streaming down his face. He was overwhelmed with the sadness of being unable to have a family, the frustration of being turned down time and time again, and the anger that it was for a ridiculous reason.

"You know..." Levi began. "Jean specializes in cases like these. Maybe he could help us—"

"No," Eren interrupted. "I don't want to bring this to court, I just want our baby."

Levi was torn between tending to his husband and trying to think up a solution to their problems. It wasn't fair that they were denied a child who needed a home that they'd love and care for. It wasn't fair that they weren't allowed to have a family when they were prepared and responsible enough. Other people who were less qualified could adopt a child without being given a second glance, why couldn't they?

Later that evening, they got ready for bed separately. They made a habit of getting to sleep earlier, mainly because their days had grown to be so stressful that they were left exhausted, mentally and physically.

After brushing his teeth, Levi walked down the hallway and into their bedroom, halting at the doorframe. His heart broke in half when he saw Eren on his knees, mumbling a prayer, and it was obvious to him what it was for. Levi knew Eren prayed on rare occasions, but he'd never seen him do it, and he almost wished he hadn't. Levi wasn't particularly religious, he only vaguely considered the concept of a deity, but they could've used all the help they could get.

He approached silently, kneeling beside Eren, resting his elbows on the bed and folding his hands. Eren paused briefly to take notice of Levi, and Levi said nothing, letting him continue. Eren returned to his prayer, finishing just as quietly as he spoke before. Finally he crossed himself and Levi tried to mimic his actions. They stood together, climbing into bed after turning out the lights.

Levi left a couple kisses on Eren's forehead as he cuddled closer to him. "Goodnight."


"I love you too, baby."

Eren's exhaustion may have been enough to put him asleep almost instantly, but Levi wasn't as fortunate. He laid there, incredibly tired, but his mind was stuck, cluttered with all his worries and half thought through solutions. They wanted children more than anyone it seemed, and somehow agencies thought they deserved them the least. His eyes stung with how badly they needed to be shut for rest, but regardless, his mind wouldn't allow him such luxuries.

He peered down at Eren's sleeping face, picturing how devastated he looked earlier. He hated seeing him so upset. He knew he'd keep his promise of them getting a child, he just didn't know
when he'd pull through.

Levi held Eren close, thinking of a way to guarantee themselves a baby. No matter how he looked at it, there was no way of knowing who would look past their gender and focus on how reliable and responsible they were. Some agencies would turn them down immediately, while others tried to hide the fact that they were being discriminatory and interviewed them and came in for a homestudy. Levi thought perhaps, if the agency had gotten to know them before they showed interest in adopting, then maybe they'd have a chance. How could they make that happen? Then, like a ton of bricks, the idea hit Levi.

"Eren, wake up," he said, shaking his husband's shoulders. "I thought of something."

Eren peeled his eyes open, groaning. "What?" He whined, not appreciating being torn from his slumber. "What is it?"

"Did we ever go to the agency that Mikasa was adopted from?" Levi asked.

"No," Eren mumbled, wiping at his eyes. "That's a different one."

"Eren," Levi almost shouted, stuck in his moment of realization. "Would they remember you?"

Eren raise a confused eyebrow at him. "Yeah, it's been ages since they did a homestudy for us, but even as we grew up, we'd see the people who worked there in the grocery store or in town or something and we'd recognize each other and say hello."

"Eren, they know you," Levi pointed out. "They've done a homestudy for your family before. Mikasa turned out fine, even though you weren't her parent. They've already gone in your history, your medical files, they've approved you and your family before. Granted, you were just a kid, and they'd need to do it all again, but they know you. They know you'd be good with a new child. They might look past the fact that we're a gay couple, they'll take us seriously."

Eren and Levi were both sitting up at this point, and Eren's eyes were blown wide once he realized what Levi was saying. "I can't believe we didn't think of this before!"

"I know!"

Eren searched around in his rush. "We- I have to call my mom and get their contact information!" He nearly hopped off the bed, but Levi's hand latched onto his arm in time to stop him.

"Listen, babe, your mom is probably asleep," he said amusedly. "And I don't think they'd appreciate us calling them so late." He guided Eren back down under the sheets. "We'll figure it all out tomorrow," he promised, giving Eren a kiss.

"But... but I want to figure it out now," Eren complained.

"I know, and so do I," Levi hushed, holding onto Eren's hand. "But we can wait one more day. We've waited this long. Let's get to sleep for now."

They laid down on the bed and resumed their earlier position. "But I don't want to wait," Eren sighed. "I can't get to sleep now."

"I know, it won't be long until we can call though," Levi assured him.
Kutchel sat in the break room, stirring sugar into her cup of tea while chatting with her coworker, Darius. "They're adopting from this lovely lady named Ilse. She's a journalist and her and her husband weren't ready for children, and Ilse is too invested in her job to have a child, so that's why they're putting the baby up for adoption."

Darius nodded along, always interested in what Kutchel had to say. "When is she due?"

Kutchel giggled. "She was actually due two days ago, so the baby will come any day now."

"Oh, do they know the sex of the baby yet?"

Kutchel shook her head. "They want to be surprised. They don't really mind what it'll be," she explained. "I don't mind either, I just want to meet my grandchild already."

Darius chuckled. "Yeah, I get that, we were really anxious when my son was due. Isn't the waiting just torture?"

Kutchel nodded with a kind smile. "It is. You'd think after having three children I'd be more patient, but it never gets less stressful. I just want the baby to be here and healthy. I want to be a grandma already! I've got all my cameras and presents in my car so I'm prepared for whenever the time comes."

"Well, I'm very happy for you and Levi. Let me know when the baby comes so I can get him a card," Darius said.

"That's so sweet of you—" Kutchel was cut off by the break room door opening harshly, revealing Grisha searching in a haste.

"Kutchel, there you are," he wheezed. "I'm incredibly busy right now, so I can't wait with you, but Eren and Levi are here. Ilse's water broke."

Kutchel snapped her head to face Darius again. "You'll have to excuse me," she stammered before rushing out of her seat and towards the door.

"Congratulations!" Darius hollered after her.

Kutchel kicked her feet in the waiting room, holding onto the plush, toy rabbit she'd bought and checking all her cameras to make sure they were charged and had enough room for photos and videos. She kept texting members of the family and friends, informing them of the news and texting Eren and Levi, asking for details. Even though she knew they were too busy to answer their phones, she still hoped for a couple updates. Her attention was torn from her phone as she heard Carla yelling to her.

"We came as soon as we heard!" Carla shouted, rushing to Kutchel with Mikasa right on her tail.
Carla held about five balloons in one hand and an umpteen amount of stuffed animals in the other arm. Mikasa on the other hand, was carrying a bouquet and a light yellow baby blanket.

"Carla! Have they told you anything?"

Carla and Mikasa sat beside Kutchel. "No, Grisha called to let me know. I picked up Mikasa on my way here."

"I saw them just as they entered the delivery room, but I didn't get to talk to them," Kutchel said.

"Does Armin know?" Mikasa asked.

"Oh! I'll text him right now." Kutchel went back to telling people, Armin being the next person to receive the news.

"Where's my godchild?!" The three women looked up to find Hanji racing towards them.

"They said you could be the godparent?!" Mikasa gawked. "What about me?"

"Well, they didn't exactly say it, but they didn't need to," Hanji explained, taking their seat beside Kutchel. They rummaged through their bag and yanked out a teddy bear made of all different, mismatching fabrics and two different colored button eyes. "I made it myself, I hope the baby will like it."

"It's so unique, I'm sure the baby will love it," Kutchel gushed.

"Thank you, Kutchel!"

"What did I miss?" Isabel was the next to arrive, nearly tripping over the stuffed animals she brought.

"Not much," Mikasa answered. "All we know is Ilse's in labor."

Isabel plopped down by Mikasa. "Oh gosh, I'm so excited! I'm gonna be an auntie! I made sure I got the baby all it'll need," she said, gesturing to the stuffed animals. "I bought an elephant, a penguin, a panda bear, a family of lions, a blue kitty cat, several different birds, because you can never have enough birds. And I got a wolf, a fishy, a tortoise and a turtle, so the baby can grow up knowing the difference. And a rainbow lizard."

"... Wow," Mikasa mumbled. "Guess I have some competition for being the favorite aunt."

"May the best auntie win," Isabel deadpanned.

"Agreed."

~

Eren held Ilse's hand as she laid in the hospital bed, panting after having given birth moments ago. Levi sat beside Eren, with an arm around his shoulders.

"Nothing to that," Ilse huffed out, drawing out laughter from the couple beside her.
"Your husband texted us," Levi said. "He's stuck in traffic, but he's coming."

Ilse nodded tiredly. "That's okay." She took a few minutes to regain some of her breath before speaking again. "Here's how this is gonna go... once the baby's back, I wanna hold her for a bit. After that... I'll hand her off to you two... and then I'm going to sleep... got it?"

Levi and Eren nodded, smiling at her.

Soon, a nurse came in, holding the newborn in a white blanket. Ilse sat up, suddenly more attentive than she was moments ago. Eren and Levi held their breaths as the nurse came closer, handing their new daughter over to Ilse. "She's perfectly healthy," he said. "Congratulations."

"Thank you," Ilse breathed, taking the baby into her arms. The nurse left the three alone and they were silent, too awestruck to find words.

Eren and Levi leaned in close to see their baby's face. She had the same tan skin as her mother and the tiniest bit of brown hair atop her head. Eren instantly fell in love with her, feeling his eyes prickle with tears. Upon seeing her clearly for the first time, he knew he'd protect her and give her anything she'd ever want. He had no doubts of that before, but now, taking care of her was all he could think about. Levi smiled at his beautiful new daughter. After all the children and infants he aided at work that he had to watch as they left, he'd finally get to keep this one, take her home, watch her grow up and love her forever. Neither of them dared to take their eyes off her.

~

When family members were being allowed in, Kutchel and Carla were the first ones to enter. They tiptoed in, just in case the baby was sleeping and walked in while Eren was taking the baby from Ilse. Levi leaned into Eren's side to see their baby just as easily and motioned for their mother's to come in. Ilse fell asleep almost instantly after handing off the baby.

The two came in bearing their gifts. Carla set down the balloons beside Ilse's bed and setting the stuffed animals aside, starting a pile. Kutchel set the rabbit she'd bought on top of Carla's and they both rounded the bed to see their new grandchild. Kutchel immediately took out her video camera and gave another camera to Carla for her to take pictures and they both immediately started capturing as much as they could. Both women were overcome with emotions as they laid eyes on their granddaughter.

Eren didn't even look up as their mothers approached. His daughter was so beautiful, and since her eyes had opened, revealing pretty, brown irises, he couldn't will himself to look anywhere else. Levi reached to touch the side of her face, finding it to be one of the softest things he'd ever felt. They couldn't be bothered by anyone else's presence.

"Do we have a name?" Kutchel whispered, mindful of Ilse sleeping.

The couple nodded, still watching their daughter. "We wanted to pick one that meant something to us," Eren murmured.

"After all that time we spent being turned down, again and again," Levi started. "So much was taken out of us and we just felt so weak. But when the adoption agency accepted us and Ilse came into the picture, we found our strength again. So, we agreed on choosing a name that means strength."
"We did our research and found a name that has both French and German roots," Eren added, knowing it would excite their mothers. "... This is Mattie."

"It suits her," Carla said. "That's a wonderful name."

"Thank you," Eren replied. "Do you know if anyone else is coming?"

"Is anyone else coming?" Carla scoffed. "My god, Eren. There's an entire herd in the waiting room. We all decided to come in two at a time. Your father obviously has a job to do, but he said as soon as he's let off, he's coming to see you."

"And Levi, you understand that Farlan can't make it, right? He lives hours away, but he'll be visiting as soon as his show ends its season," Kutchel said.

"I understand." Levi nodded to her. "We can still video chat with him and send him pictures."

"Right." Kutchel nodded.

"Could we hold her for a bit?" Carla asked hesitantly.

Levi instinctively snapped his head up to give her a look and luckily, Eren answered for him. "Not just yet, Levi hasn't gotten to."

"Speaking of which..." Levi mumbled, looking to Eren hopefully.

Eren nodded and shifted gently to let Levi hold their baby. Carla watched the couple and how carefully they held their child. She looked at all the love they had for Mattie while she hadn't even been a few hours old. Her train of thought was brought back to all the toys she bought, all the gifts the others had and every person in the waiting room. She sighed and said, "That child is going to be spoiled."

Eren faced her, smiling uncontrollably. "Yeah."

~

Settling in at home and adjusting to the new member of the family was tough at first, as any major life change would be. But a little over a month into parenthood, Levi and Eren could say that they had a decent grip on things and had gotten used to losing sleep and refocusing their responsibilities.

Waking up one morning, before opening his eyes, Eren grew suspicious as to why he was so well rested. His curiosity grew more as he felt around on the bed and didn't find the warm mass that was his husband. He opened his eyes to find the rest of the bed empty and relaxed, realizing Levi was most likely tending to Mattie or using the restroom. He sat up, stretching, before getting out of bed to throw on a shirt and put his hair in a ponytail, leaving his bangs where they were.

He groggily walked across the hall, and peaked into the baby's room, seeing that it was empty. He checked the bathroom next, which was also empty. He walked down the hall and into the living room, luckily finding Levi sitting in a chair and holding their baby. Levi hadn't noticed his presence, so he didn't stop playing with Mattie.

Eren snuck up behind him and saw that he hadn't bothered to comb his hair or put on something
other than his pajama pants, so he guessed that Mattie had started crying and he just never came back to bed. He couldn't hold back a grin as Levi held the teddy bear that Hanji had made, moving it into front of Mattie like it was dancing, causing her to smile. She'd only recently started smiling and they both would try to get her to do it as often as they could.

"Est-ce ton jouet favori?" Levi said in a light, playful voice. "Est-ce ton favori, mon ange?"

"Please god, no," Eren groaned, giving away his position.

Startled, Levi craned his neck to see Eren. "No what?"

"Please do not teach her French," Eren begged.

Levi glared at him. "Why not? I can't censor my French, it just slips out sometimes."

"Levi, if you teach her French, one day she's gonna come to me and tell me something, and I'm not gonna understand a thing she says. And that'll just be my life," Eren complained. "I've known you since high school and I still don't know what 'je deteste ce merde' means," he said, failing to pronounce the phrase right.

"Don't say that in front of her!" Levi hissed.

"She doesn't know what it means and neither do I!" Eren argued.

Levi rolled his eyes and turned back to the baby, smiling as he did before and raising the teddy bear back up. "My mother did just fine raising me on French and English."

"That's because she speaks French, Levi."

"Then there's your solution. Square up and learn French."

Eren let the conversation slide and sat on the arm of the chair to see his daughter better. He reached for her to tap her cheek. "Look who's all smiley today!" He cooed. "You have the prettiest smile in the whole world."

"What about me?" Levi joked.

"You're a close second," Eren said, giving Levi a kiss, then giving Mattie more attention.

"So, I've been thinking lately," Levi spoke up. "What's she gonna call you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, when I come home, you point to me and say 'there's dad.' When I'm looking for you when I'm with her, I say 'let's go find dad.' Obviously, we can't both be dad, that's confusing."

"More confusing than having your kid speak to you in a language you don't know?" Eren challenged, raising a brow.

Levi ignored his remark. "As I was saying, you'll have to pick a different title, since I call dibs on being dad."

"You can't call dibs on being dad!"

"I just did."
Eren huffed out an annoyed breath. "Well, I don't wanna be 'pops' or anything like that. That's what we called my grandpa."

Levi snickered. "You can pick whatever you want, I just get to be dad."

Eren thought it over for a bit. Not many alternatives were coming to mind other than papa or father, and he couldn't picture an infant pronouncing 'father' anytime soon. Not to mention it sounded far too formal for his liking. Then suddenly, the idea came to mind. "Baba."

Levi looked up at him amusedly. "What?" He chuckled.

"Baba," Eren repeated. "We call my other grandfather 'grandpa,' but when my mom speaks to him directly, she calls him baba."

"Is that German?"

"No, Turkish. What do you think of it?"

Levi mulled over the word. He wasn't quite familiar with it. "I'm not sure..."

"For god's sake, Levi. If you get dibs on dad, and you get to teach her French, then I get to be baba."

Levi squinted up at his husband, seeing that he had a fair point. "You play dirty."

"I know."

~

~ Five years later ~

Levi drove to the gym, ready to pick up Eren so they could retrieve their daughter from preschool. Levi was welcomed in the gym and allowed to stroll right in to get Eren on the days Levi didn't have work and they needed to be somewhere after Mattie's preschool.

Levi spotted Eren from across the gym, recognizing his long hair pulled up into a loose bun with his bangs clipped back for convenience having only a few strands coming loose from working out, fiddling with a machine in his red sweatshirt and shorts and decided to sneak up on him. Weaving through the treadmills and ellipticals, Levi tiptoed directly behind his husband, quiet as a mouse and promptly slapped his ass.

Eren jolted forward in surprise, instinctively shouting as he slowly faced the culprit. "I AM A MARRIED MAN— oh, it's you. Hi, sweetie." Eren bent down to greet Levi with a kiss, smiling at his presence.

"Did I catch you off guard?" Levi laughed, wiggling his brows.

Eren blushed and lightly shoved Levi's shoulder in embarrassment. "... Little bit."

"Come on, go get changed and we'll pick up Mattie."

Eren had gotten cleaned up and changed into his winter clothes rather quickly. He was used to
working long days and rushing to get out of his gym clothes so he could get home to see his family.

"You should wear your hair like that all the time," Levi commented as Eren came out with his hair in a ponytail, leaving his bangs loose. "It's hot."

Eren rolled his eyes, smirking. "Let's just go, you perv."

They drove through the snow, hoping the icy roads wouldn't delay them on their way to the preschool. They only ended up being a few minutes late, which wasn't a problem, but it annoyed Levi to no end.

Once inside and free from the cold, Mattie's preschool teacher noticed their arrival and left to retrieve their daughter. It wasn't long before they heard tiny footsteps running towards them from the other room. Mattie rushed over to them and stopped over at Levi's legs. "Dad, look!" She pointed to the flower crown sitting atop her brown hair that reached just past her shoulders. "Our teacher let us make them."

Levi kneeled down to be at eye level with her. He examined the fake flowers of all colors. "It's beautiful, did you do that all by yourself?"

Mattie nodded excitedly. "Mhm. And we made bulbs for the tree," she said, holding up a small glass ornament that she painted haphazardly. "And our teacher had too many flowers, so she let me make another. So, I made you one in your favorite color." She held up another flower crown with black flowers and reached up to place it on Levi's head.

Levi couldn't help but smile at her. "Thank you so much! I bet I look almost as pretty as you," he said, picking her up into his arms.

Mattie laughed, nodding at her father.

"You both are so gorgeous," Eren chuckled, opening the door for them to leave.

Levi set Mattie in her car seat, buckling her in and getting back to the drivers seat. After they headed off in a different direction than usual, Mattie watched out the window with curiosity. "Where are we going?"

"We're going to see Grandpa, Oma and Aunt Mikasa," Eren answered. "Grandpa and Oma are going to be away on Christmas, so they want to give you your presents tonight."

Mattie gasped and started squirming in her seat, too excited to sit still. "Is Oma gonna make hot chocolate and cinnamon rolls like last year?"

Eren chuckled to himself. "We'll have to see." Ever since Mattie was born, they'd spend their Christmas mornings at home, have lunch at Levi's mother's home, then go to Eren parents' house for dinner. And the year prior, Carla insisted that she'd make cinnamon rolls and hot chocolate for dessert every year as a beginning of a new tradition.

They reached their destination and Eren was the one to unbuckle Mattie. "Hold on to your tree ornament," he reminded her. "So you can show everybody what a good job you did."

Levi took a bag of Mattie's toys out of the trunk in case she became bored amongst adults and the family hurried inside.

"Mattie!" Carla exclaimed as they came through the door. She took her out of Eren's arms before he could get a word in. "How's my favorite little girl?"
"Nice to see you too, ma," Eren deadpanned.

"Oh, you stop it! I'm happy to see all of you!" She soon turned her attention back to Mattie. "What a pretty headband, where did you get it?"

"I made it all by myself, Oma," Mattie answered proudly.

Carla gasped exaggeratedly. "You did?"

Mattie nodded. "Mhm. I made one for dad too."

Carla looked over at Levi, who was still wearing the flower crown. "Wow, he's so pretty!"

Eren and Mattie giggled, leaving Levi to just smile and nod. "Thank you, Carla."

The four turned their attention to the door once it opened, revealing Grisha and Mikasa shuffling in and patting the snow off their shoulders. "Sorry we're late," Grisha excused him and his daughter. "Mikasa needed to be picked up."

"Grandpa!" Mattie exclaimed, reaching out for him.

"Hello, Mattie!" He greeted her back, taking her from Carla. "Nice hat, Levi."

"Thank you, sir," Levi replied. "Mattie made it for me."

"Dinner's not going to be ready for awhile," Carla said, handing her off. "Everyone, make yourselves at home."

"Mattie, do you want to show everybody what else you made?" Levi prompted.

Mattie simply held up the ornament that she decorated and smiled delightedly as everyone else gasped. "That's so pretty! You did a great job," Mikasa congratulated her.

"Thanks," Mattie said, grinning. She tugged at Eren's sleeve to gain his attention. "Baba, can I go play with Aunt Mikasa?"

"Ask her yourself," Eren suggested.

Mattie faced her aunt with wide eyes. "Aunt Mikasa, do you want to play with my action figures with me?"

Mikasa nodded as Grisha set Mattie down. "Of course I do! Let's go in the living room to play."

She took Mattie's hand while they walked into the other room, followed by Levi as he brought her toys with him.

Mattie sat on the floor across from Mikasa and waited for Levi to set down the bag of toys. Mattie started digging through the bag once Levi had opened it for her. She handed Mikasa several of her toys first.

"Wow, you have a lot of dolls," Mikasa noted.

"They're action figures," Mattie corrected, making Levi chuckle.

"Right, I'm sorry," Mikasa giggled.

"She loves super heroes, she refuses to call them dolls," Levi said. "I bet you she can name any
super hero you put in front of her, she's obsessed."

Mikasa nodded to him. "Mattie, who's your favorite super hero?"

"Wonder Woman," she answered, picking out the toys she wanted for herself and for Mikasa. "You can be Tygra and Sailor Mars and I'll be Wonder Woman and Cyborg."

Mikasa whispered to Levi, "Who's Tygra?"

Levi shrugged. "A character from a show Izzy let us borrow on VHS for her. It's called Thundercats."

Mikasa nodded, trying to figure out how to keep her niece occupied. "So, Wonder Woman is your favorite, huh? I think I know what you'll be getting for Christmas then."

Mattie perked up at the mention of Christmas. "What is it?!"

"You'll have to wait and see," Mikasa said. "What did you ask Santa for?"

"I saw him at the mall and I asked him for more markers and pencils." Mattie almost forgot about her toys because she was far too excited talking about Christmas.

~

After dinner and dessert, Carla and Grisha let Mattie open her presents by their tree while her parents and her aunt sat on the couch watching. Levi, taking after his mother, took an umpteen amount of pictures on his phone while they watched.

Mikasa leaned to whisper to her brother. "I think I'm gonna get her a Wonder Woman coloring book and a few other things for Christmas."

"I think she'd really love that," Eren murmured back. "Are you coming early on Christmas?"

"If you don't mind, I'll be coming around noon."

"We won't mind." Eren smiled, seeing his daughter running to hug her grandparents after opening her gifts. He and Levi always reminded her to be grateful and say 'thank you,' and he was always happy to see her doing so without being told to. He was even happier to see his family functioning the way it always should have.

He still couldn't be close with his father, he'd never be able to remove memories of what he did to him in the past from his mind. But at least they could carry on like civil people and didn't mind each other so much. His mother was as supportive and loving as ever, never failing to keep in touch and visit constantly to stay a part of their lives. His sister stayed close to him, and being an adopted child herself, could bond with their daughter in her own way. She was a terrific aunt and loving sister. The love of his life stood by his side everyday, just as he'd hoped. Levi was there to stay forever, which filled him with joy like nothing else. Except of course the fact that they had the most wonderful daughter. She was growing too fast for his liking, but he looked past that fact and was instead grateful that she was growing to be healthy, smart and kind. She was constantly emanating joy and sharing her things, trying to make her dads smile and helping them clean around the house. She'd often make a worse mess, but she was trying. His family was secure and held little
conflicts, so he couldn't find much to complain about.

And outside of his immediate family, there were his amazing in-laws. And aside from them, he had all his friends who might as well have been family too. There wasn't much more he could ask for. He used to be so miserable back in high school, hiding his sexuality, fearing his friends wouldn't accept him, being casted out from his home, hating himself to some degree, it was too much at the time. But he was glad he went through it all, because it led to his current state.

Eren was snapped out of his reverie when he felt Levi nudge his elbow. "You're spacing out again," he murmured, setting down his phone.

"Sorry... I was just thinking.

"What about?"

Eren shrugged. "Our family. I'm just real happy things are going this well for us. After all that time."

Levi smirked at him, leaning over to kiss his cheek. "Worth it, huh?"

"Definitely." Eren turned to give Levi a proper kiss.

~

"Dad, why doesn't Hanji celebrate Christmas?" Mattie asked from the back seat of the car and watching the snow fall outside the window as they drove to Hanji's house the day after they visited Eren's parents.

"Well, it's because of their religion. They celebrate Yule instead. It's kind of the same thing with Petra's husband and your friend Jeremy at preschool. They celebrate Hanukkah instead of Christmas, and Hanji celebrates Yule instead of Christmas. Lots of people celebrate different holidays around Christmas time and some don't celebrate anything," Levi explained from the passenger seat.

Mattie nodded along. "Will they be mad that I made them a Christmas card and not a Yule card?"

Levi chuckled to himself. "No, I don't think they will, sweetheart. I think they'll appreciate it." He heard his daughter breathe out a sigh of relief and smiled to himself at how concerned she was. Though, he started frowning once he felt small, repetitive thuds on the back of his seat. "Mattie, please don't kick the seat."

"Sorry," she mumbled.

"I swear, she learned that from you," Levi told Eren.

Eren scoffed, flipping on his turn signal. "When have I ever kicked the seat?"


"Oh please, if anything, she learned it from you constantly swinging your legs because your feet can never reach the ground when you sit."
"Watch it," Levi hissed.

"Your feet don't even reach the floor in here!" Eren laughed.

Levi slumped down in his seat a bit so his feet made contact with the floor of the car. "Lies."

Mattie giggled at her fathers, finding it funny whenever they'd tease each other. It especially amused her when Levi would end up losing and get grumpy over it.

"We're here," Eren announced, pulling into Hanji's driveway.

The family made their way inside, bringing in their gifts for the exchange that would take place later on. They stomped off the snow from their boots before entering and all sighed contentedly after coming into the warm house.

"Oh my gosh, you're here!" The three looked up to find Nanaba coming towards them with outstretched arms. "Everyone's here now!" She exclaimed, pulling Eren into a hug, then switching over to Levi. She bent down to face Mattie. "May I give you a hug?"

Mattie nodded excitedly, reaching up for Nanaba.

"Are we late?" Eren asked.

"No," Nanaba answered, releasing Mattie. "Everybody else is just early. Now come on! The party can officially start."

The three followed Nanaba into the living room, finding all their old friends talking amongst themselves like nothing had changed after all this time. "They're here!" Nanaba yelled, drawing everyone's attention.

One by one, everybody greeted Eren, Levi and Mattie, letting them enter properly so they weren't crowded. Isabel and Farlan were the ones running to see their niece, pushing through the rest.

"There she is!" Farlan said, picking Mattie up into his arms.

"Our favorite niece!" Isabel beamed.

"She's your only niece," Levi pointed out, raising a confused brow.

"Which means she's our favorite!" Farlan countered. "Are you excited for the party, Mattie?"

"Yeah! I made everyone a card."

"Aw, how sweet!" Isabel chirped. "Eren, Levi, you guys raised a little saint!"

Before they realized what was even happening, Isabel and Farlan walked off with their daughter without so much as a hello to either of them. "She's in good hands," Eren mumbled.

"God, I hope so," Levi sighed, rubbing his temple. "I know those two, and by the time we get her back, she'll be singing along to Les Mis and Rent."

"Probably."

They reached the Yule tree to set down their presents, including Mattie's box of Christmas cards, then split up to join their friends. Levi migrated over to Erd and Gunther, while Eren joined Armin and Mikasa on the couch.
"Long time, no see," Armin said, as Eren took his seat.

"Armin it's been a week, I wouldn't exactly call that a long time," Eren laughed.

"Well, it's been ages since we've seen each other," Mikasa joked.

"Dammit, Mikasa, it's been a day."

The other two laughed at their friend as they picked fun at him.

Levi stuck with his two friends, catching up on what they'd all missed firstly, then discussing home life.

"So, what are you getting for Mattie?" Gunther inquired.

"We've already gotten her a lot," Levi said. "She really loves drawing, so we bought her a ton of art supplies. Then we got her some pajamas with a cape on them, because she's obsessed with superheroes. Eren found a few new action figures for her, which she'll love. And we're actually asking Hanji to sew together a flag silk for this flag we ordered for her."

"Oh, really?" Erd raised his brows at that. "She's taken an interest in color guard?"

Levi nodded. "Yeah, while Eren and I were messing around with our flags during the summer, she said she wanted to do it too, but you know, those flags are like three times her size. So, we let her try to hold the flag, but that didn't go over well. And she won't stop bugging us about it, so we decided to get her a flag and Hanji will be making the silk because Mattie said she wanted one just like Eren's and we can't find a small silk like his online."

"Does she want to join color guard once she gets into school?" Gunther asked.

Levi shrugged, scratching his neck. "I don't know, we never asked her about it. If she wants to, then that would be a great, but we really don't want to force her into it. It's just something we can do together as a family for now, and if she grows out of it, then that's that. If not, that's alright too."

His friends nodded in understanding and the silence that came between them was soon broken.

"Levi!" Hanji practically screeched, clinging onto him. "I'm so happy you're here! Where's my precious little Mattie?"

Levi attempted to worm out of their grasp. "Dunno, Farlan and Isabel ran off with her."

"No!" Hanji whined. "I need to find my little muffin! I made cookies just for her and my Patrick!"

"Well, have you at least found Patrick?"

Hanji finally let go, scanning the living room. "I saw him when Christa and Ymir first came, but I lost him."

"Go find them then, I'm sure they'll know where their own son is."

"Says the guy who can't find his daughter," Erd commented, causing Gunther to snort out a laugh and making Levi glare venomously at them both.

Hanji ignored his comment, taking Levi's hand and leading him into the kitchen. "We have to find them."
Levi groaned, but didn't put up any resistance.


The gift exchange began, and Eren watched Mattie hand out her cards all on her own and smiled at all the reactions she received. Eventually, she came around to the couch and handed one over to Mikasa. "This is for you."

Mikasa gasped happily. "Thank you so much!"

"You're welcome. I drew all the pictures on it," Mattie said.

"They're all beautiful, you're very talented!"

Mattie smiled sheepishly, always excited to hear praises for her art. "Thanks." She moved on to Armin, handing him his card. "This is for you, Uncle Armin."

"Thank you- Uncle?" Armin cocked his head as he accepted his card.

Mattie nodded once. "Yep. Baba says you're like family, so you're Uncle Armin now." She walked off without another word to give her next card to Marco.

Eren snickered at his best friend. "Welcome to the family."

Armin placed a hand over his heart. "I feel so special."

Mikasa set her hand on his shoulder. "I didn't expect to get another brother this late in life, but here we are."

"And I didn't expect to get two new siblings and a niece. This day just keeps getting better and better!"

Eren laughed along with them, but was soon being tugged to his feet by his husband and was led away into the kitchen. "Levi? What are you doing?"

"I have to show you something," Levi said simply, taking Eren to the other side of the house. He walked through the hallways, eventually pointing up at a doorway that led out to a back exit and gestured to a plant hanging from the frame. "What do you think that is?"

"What?" Eren asked, utterly perplexed.

"I said what do you think that is?" Levi repeated, pushing him under the door frame.

"I don't know, maybe—" Eren was interrupted by Levi's lips pressing into his own. At that moment, he couldn't care less about Levi's motives and melted into the kiss, wrapping his arms around his husband's waist.

Levi pulled back, smugly smirking up at Eren. "Oh, it seems to be mistletoe. My bad."

Eren chuckled, shaking his head and looking up. "Levi, that's not mistletoe. Don't you remember? Hanji said they keep that here to—"
"Same thing," Levi cut him off, pulling him back down for another kiss. "Besides, you looked like you could use a little time away from the crowd back there."

"I was enjoying time with my friends."

"Let me rephrase that, I looked like I could use a little time away from the crowd," Levi corrected.

"You're ridiculous," Eren chortled, leaning his forehead against Levi's. "But I love you."

"I love you too, mon grand."

"Let's get back," Eren suggested. "Mattie probably wants to open her presents."

~

~ Three years later ~

"I'm getting too old for this," Levi grouched, straightening out his back after lifting his flag bag.

"You're thirty-six," Eren scoffed.


Eren snorted, rolling his eyes. "You certainly had plenty of youthful energy last night."

"You did most of the work, you were the one to carry me upstairs, and I'm still in pain."

Eren only shrugged in response. "Didn't hear a single complaint though." He picked up his own flag bag and slung it over his shoulder. "Come on, mister bag-of-bones. We've got places to go and people to see."

They moved out of their house and to their car, packing their equipment away. They were heading to this year's individuals, meeting their daughter there, since she had spent the night with her friend she was doing a routine with. It would be her first year performing in individuals since they recently started allowing younger members to participate. And seeing as both her fathers were well experienced in the sport, she advanced past her team members due to all the practice and help she received at home.

Eren had two routines set up; one with Levi and one with his sister. Levi also had two, sharing one with Eren and the other with Hanji. They both agreed to wait until Mattie was older before they asked to do a routine with her since she reached the age where she was embarrassed whenever Eren and Levi tried to be more involved in her social life. They knew it would eventually pass, since they had been at that age once too, so waiting through the phase wasn't the end of the world.

Entering the school, they both were immediately hit with such a sense of nostalgia that it was nearly painful. Walking down the hallways with such a warped sense of time and mere hints of vivid memories that they could never recapture the exact feeling of. The two slowed their pace, taking in the smell of the building they knew so well from their youth. It felt like being transported back to their years in school, but times were now much too different for the sensation to be genuine. And it seemed that no matter how much time passed, no matter what was going on in their lives that altered their personalities or their outlooks, this event that happened every year
brought them all back together, like moths to an annual flame. Then, they entered the gym. They were met with the sight of people practicing in the floor, every one of them being a young member of the school's team. Their faces may have been foreign to Eren and Levi, but their movements and tools were like coming home. And they took a moment to breathe in the ever changing yet familiar air of this sport they'd come to love so much.

Nothing could ever compare to it, every aspect, every risk, it was such an obtainable beauty. The ripple of the flag silks called like a siren, sounding like the freedom of being able to dangle your hand out the window of a car going at an incredible speed on an endless road. As much as it made them cringe every so often, the aluminum that hit the ground rang like bells and would leave nothing but the urge to improve in their wake. Consecutives and the act of catching the rifle, in gloved hands or otherwise bare skin, was by far the most alluring noise of all. The slap of the worn, fake leather as it was caught between the solid, painted wood and their palm was so inviting, one would want to hear it over and over until their arm grew stiff. At a show, when one caught their rifle, they only hoped that the song in the background was not loud enough to mute the catch. These were the sounds they all longed to hear, not the music that they performed to. Not the roars from the audience. These perfect little sounds that they were never deprived of at a single practice.

The exhilaration was even better. The feeling of being completely in control of a continuously spinning object, moving its weight along with their own, it was a fluidity not unlike a dance between two lovers. The knowledge that at any moment, the object that they worked so carefully could come crashing down; it was exciting to say the least. The self-trust one built up was unbreakable. Being able to spin a heavy, momentous tool mere inches from your body and appear to be unfazed was a skill that they each prided themselves in. They trusted their bodies, their muscles, every fiber of their beings to keep everything spinning and keep themselves unharmed. And when they were harmed, their training showed more than ever. They knew how much their bodies could take and that no matter how much it hurt, they would heal stronger and work through the pain, adding to their resilience. Every bruise was a medal, every broken bone was a trophy. No one dared cry out if they were hit. They could only endure.

The sights in the guard were as rewarding as everything else. Rifles and sabers blurred as they spun in the air, mesmerizing whoever would watch. The need to see the print of a flags silk as it sat still was compelling, but it didn't compare to the swirl of flying colors that never failed to attract the eye. The gleam of all the metal caught the light and took hold of one's gaze as it rotated around in someone's hands or above their heads. The juxtaposition of flowing, trained limbs against rapid weapons might've played a role in the appeal.

And all the experiences that came with the sport had the members dying to relive them, no matter if it was from winter guard or drum corps. The red emergency lights on the buses being the only thing to illuminate their faces on the way back home from a competition. The passing of opposing teams that had nothing to say but encouragements. The brisk air that bit at their skin before they would exert themselves on the field. The instinctive drawback when their teammates would horse around and shove their old, dank gloves up to each other's noses. The wonder when they stumbled into their host classroom when at another school. The dust that stuck to their hands when rolling out their overused floors. The bonds they made along the way. It was all a part of an unmatched experience that they considered themselves lucky to have been through.

And this was as close as they could get to reliving it all.

Eren grasped onto Levi's hand, leading him over to the sign up sheet, so they could write in when they'd perform. Though, even as they walked, neither of them could tear their eyes away from the art they viewed. That was until they reached the sheet. Even if they couldn't go back in time or get
any younger, an unsung hero for their nostalgic needs stood by the audio equipment.

"Hey, you two," Rico greeted them with a fond smile. After retiring, she'd moved on to become an announcer and judge for competitions, unable to truly leave the sport. "All these years and you're still not giving up, huh?"

"We could say the same to you," Levi countered.

"Once a guardie, always a guardie," was all Rico replied with, handing Levi the pen to sign in.

Eren and Levi both wrote in their places and handed in their music. After quickly catching up with Rico, they made their way to the bleachers, and migrated towards Kutchel once they spotted her. "You're here!" Kutchel gasped delightedly as they came to sit by her side. "Where's Mattie? I thought she was doing a routine with her friend."

"She is," Levi said. "She stayed the night and her friend's parents are bringing her."

Kutchel nodded. "I can't wait to see what she came up with."

"Us too," Eren agreed. "Her and her friend say they've been working really hard on their performance."

"I made sure I charged all my cameras so I can catch it all," Kutchel squealed, pulling out her video camera and her tripod to set it up. "Oh gosh, how could I forget? Levi, has it finished healing yet?"

Levi remembered that he hadn't shown his mother and removed his jacket to show her. "Yeah, it's all healed now." He held out his arm, showing his mother the new tattoo on the underside of his bicep. He wanted to get one in dedication to his immediate family, so he chose the image of two adult bats hanging from a branch with a bat pup between them, all sleeping. He'd asked his artist to make it so that it looked like Mattie's name was carved into the bark of the branch, and somehow Eren convinced him to have 'E +L' inside a heart carved into the trunk. As cheesy as it was, Levi decided it was his new favorite.

Kutchel covered her mouth with her hand as she broke out into an ecstatic grin. "Levi, it's so beautiful!"

"Now I've got one for all the people who matter most to me."

Kutchel was about to comment further, but she became distracted by a familiar voice calling, "Grand-lady!"

Eren and Levi both turned to see their daughter running up to see Kutchel. They smiled at the name. When she was younger, they'd try to teach her to say grandma, but she never would call Kutchel anything. Then one day she said 'grand-lady' out of nowhere and they thought it was too funny and too cute to correct her.

"You came!" Mattie exclaimed, hugging her grandmother.

"Of course I did, I wouldn't dare miss it!" Kutchel hugged her back.

Mattie turned for face Eren. "Baba, as tu nos caméras vidéo?"

Eren stared at her blankly before looking to Levi, whining, "Levi!"

Mattie turned back, laughing as Kutchel tutted her lightheartedly. "Mattie, tu sais que Baba ne peut pas parler français." Mattie knew her error, but laughed in response, enjoying how frustrated Eren would be when she spoke French.

"I really need to start learning your language," Eren sighed, figuring it was time.

Levi only nodded in reply, continuing to watch his daughter speak with Kutchel.

Eren and Levi watched as they interacted and shared a vague memory, of when they were younger and in high school, talking and having fun with their family and friends before shows. Now, they were the ones to cheer on a child of their own.

~

Eren took photos in the front row while Mattie performed with Levi by his side, filming it on his video camera. Levi whispered to Eren, trying not to get his voice on the recording, "I'm going to see if I can get this from a better angle over there."

Eren nodded as Levi shuffled away, and continued taking pictures, feeling so proud of his little girl. He'd lost count of all the images he'd already gotten.

"Is one of them yours?"

Eren was almost startled by the voice next to him. He glanced over to find a woman gesturing to Mattie and her friend, then it clicked to him. "Yes, the one with brown hair," he answered excitedly. "It's her first individual routine."

"You must be very proud," the woman commented. "I remember when my oldest daughter did an individual performance for the first time."

Eren wasn't familiar with this woman, so he assumed she was the mother of someone who was a bit older and in a higher grade than his daughter. He was well acquainted with most of the parents on Mattie's team, so he tried to be just as friendly with this stranger as he was with them. "I am very proud. How old is your daughter?"

"Oh, she's a junior in high school right now, so it's been quite awhile since her first individuals. Of course, her routine was more advanced than this one, but they all start somewhere," the woman chuckled.

Eren raised his brows at her, taken aback from her words. He felt personally offended that she spoke of his daughter in such a manner. He grinned at her uncomfortably. "Heh, um... excuse me?"

"Well, it's obvious that your daughter is very new with a performance like this. But not everyone can be naturally gifted, there's no shame in that."

Just what was she implying? Eren felt his blood boiling. Instead of screaming right off the bat, Eren inhaled slowly to take on a calm composure. "True, but I doubt your daughter did much better." He wasn't going to take this so easily, he had to defend his daughter's honor.

The stranger scoffed at him. "Excuse me? But my daughter was never as sloppy as yours, even as a young girl."
"Sloppy?" Eren parroted. He'd almost taken all his attention away from Mattie's routine by now. "If you call hard work and impeccable timing sloppy, then maybe I see what your getting at."

"Oh please." The woman rolled her eyes. "They're so off, they could almost pass at making a ripple affect if they had more members."

Eren couldn't understand why she was being so critical of such young girls, especially when their performance wasn't even that bad. "Bet your daughter couldn't do a full split at this age like Mattie can."

"Didn't need to, she could already do tosses."

Eren's competitive side heated up. Mattie couldn't do tosses yet, she was only eight. He was beginning to think this woman was lying, but he wouldn't let her win. "My daughter can do consecutives."

The woman glanced bitterly at him, needing to find a comeback as the performance came to an end and the crowd started cheering. Eren started screaming and clapping for Mattie as she and her friend trotted out of the gym to change. "So did mine. She was and still is the top of her class as well."

Eren gave up being calm and fully faced this stranger, furrowing his brows and straightening his back to emphasize his height compared to her, attempting to intimidate her. "Mattie has straight A's."

The woman faced him as well, puffing up her shoulders and putting her hands on her hips. "My daughter started learning Spanish at that age."

Eren crossed his arms triumphantly. "My daughter is bilingual. She's already fluent in English and in French," he countered, raising his voice.

"Yeah? Well... my daughter was a chess prodigy," the woman said, also increasing her volume.

"My daughter's an artist."

"Oh, sure. I'm certain she's very talented in making finger paintings of blobs all day."

Eren wasn't going to let her get away with putting Mattie down like that. He started yelling at the top of his lungs. "Listen, lady! If you wanna know who the next Picasso is——"

"Eren, sweetheart," Levi interjected, forcefully pulling his husband away by the arm. "We talked about this and you said you wouldn't get into any more fights with guard moms."

"She started it!"

Levi looked past him and to the woman who was still fuming. "I'm terribly sorry about him." Eren sent her his middle finger, which Levi immediately started swatting at. "Put that down!" He ushered Eren to the other side of the bleachers, noticing the eyes that started staring at them both warily. Half of them seemed to be staring at him, but he had to admit that amongst a bunch of middle aged parents with desk jobs, he did stick out with his alternative image that he stuck to all these years. But the other half appeared to be staring at Eren, which was understandable since he's just been shouting and flipping off another parent. Even so, he wouldn't allow them to stare at his husband with such judgment, so he glared each one of them down as they passed.

They reached the other side and Levi sat Eren down. "Babe, think of how embarrassed Mattie
would be if she saw that. You can't keep doing that."

Eren pointed back at his new foe. "But she—"

"Shush. It's not important now. Think about Mattie and- wait, please tell me you didn't spend all that time arguing without focusing on our daughter's show."

Eren huffed out an agitated breath, pouting like a child. "No, I watched it all and I still took a lot of pictures."

Levi sighed in relief. "Thank god, I don't know what we'd do if she saw you fighting instead of watching during her first—"

"Dad! Baba! How did we do?" Mattie came running to them both excitedly, jumping in front of them.

"You both did great," Levi told her, smiling and holding her hand. "You did so good, and we got the whole thing on video."

"And I took a lot of pictures," Eren added, pulling her into a hug. "Your routine was amazing! I loved every minute of it! You're so talented and beautiful and don't let anyone tell you different."

Mattie felt confused at his last sentence, but smiled anyways, hugging him back. "Thanks baba, you think I did that good?"

"Absolutely," Eren assured her, pulling back. "I'm so proud of you."

"I am too," Levi said. Mattie moved to give him a hug as well. "Baba and I have to get ready for our own performance now, attends avec Grand-lady ou Oma."

"D'accord." Mattie ran off to join her grandmothers while Levi and Eren left to change into their performance attire.

"Fuck, I really need to learn French," Eren groaned.

"I'm surprised you don't even know the cognates by now."

~

After the event was over, the old guard team naturally herded together outside, chatting like nothing had changed. "So!" Hanji hollered, clearing their throat to take the floor. "I don't know if the rest of you have plans, but recently I received a rather large pay check and I know what I'd like to spend it on. What do you guys think? Would you all be in to going to Scouts for lunch? It'd be on me."

It was unanimous of course, everyone agreed to going with them and piled into their cars, heading off to the restaurant they all knew so well. There, at Scouts, they huddled into the biggest booths to fit everybody in. As if they hadn't already experienced enough deja vu, Eren and Levi were revisited by the familiar scent of the food and the sight of all their friends flowing over the barriers between the booths so they could be included in every conversation. The only thing missing was Mike taking their orders.
Levi watched as his daughter inspected her silver medal with so much pride in her eyes. He felt so happy for her and tried to recall the first medal he won and how good it felt in that moment.

"Dad, can I put this in my room?" Mattie asked, looking up at him.

"Of course, it's yours," Levi said. "You can do whatever you want with it."

Mattie smiled down at the medal in her hands. "I'm gonna wear it everyday," she decided.

Levi heard Eren giggle and assumed it was at their daughter's eagerness, so he turned to look at him, but instead found him smiling down at the interior of his watch. The very same watch that he'd given him ages ago that opened up to reveal a picture of the both of them. "I can't believe you still have that," Levi scoffed. "It doesn't even keep good time anymore."

"I don't care," Eren admitted, shrugging. "It's my favorite. And don't judge me for keeping this after all this time when you wear that necklace I gave you every single day."

Levi clutched onto said necklace in defense, avoiding eye contact. "... It's my favorite," he muttered.

Chuckling, Eren gave him a kiss on the cheek. "My point exactly."

They fell into light conversation, spiraling into different subjects as they went on. It was like time hadn't touched them whenever they ate at Scouts. Levi hoped that when Mattie got older, she could feel the same.

Once their meals were delivered, the conversation died down a bit, but Mattie seized the opportunity in the silence. "Dad, can we have a dog?"

"Yeah, Levi, can we have a dog?" Eren joined in.

Levi felt cornered and stared confusedly at the two of them. "Where the hell is this coming from? Did you two plan this behind my back?"

"No," Eren said. "It just sounded like a good idea when she said it."

Levi pinched the bridge of his nose, unsure of how to weasel his way out of this. "I don't know, dogs are messy and they're a lot of work to take care of. Let's talk about this another ti—"

"Please!" Eren and Mattie simultaneously begged, each tugging on one of Levi's arms. Levi bitterly thought to himself, he chose this life.

"Alright, I'll think about it," he grumbled.

Before he knew it, Isabel was moving from her table and over to theirs. "I heard you guys mentioning getting a dog."


"Yeah, dad said he'll think about it!" Mattie beamed.

"Awesome! If he decides that you can get one, you should adopt one from the shelter I work at! We've got a ton that could use good homes and I can be there to help you find your new best friend. Wouldn't that be great?"

"Don't get her hopes up, I haven't made up my mind yet!" Levi interjected.
"Please!" Isabel and Mattie pouted in unison.

"What's this about getting a dog?" Farlan asked, listening in and coming to sit with them.

Eren watched as it all went downhill from there. Between Levi's little sister and his precious daughter, Eren knew he wouldn't be able to say no in the end.

Mikasa and Armin turned around in their seats to speak with Eren, resting at either side of him. "What's all this talk about getting a dog?" Armin asked.

"Yeah, is it gonna happen?" Mikasa questioned.

Eren shrugged. "Probably. He can't really say no to those two."

"You know he can't say no to you either, right?" Mikasa teased him, poking his shoulder.

"Then I guess we're getting a dog."

Eren genuinely couldn't be happier. He was surrounded by all of his friends, his family, his lover, and his daughter. Granted, he had the daily stresses of taxes, a job, taking care of his family and whatnot, but he didn't care. It could never get better than this for him. He'd made peace with parts of himself that burdened him long ago. He'd experienced so many things that had him feeling privileged. For many people, it was difficult or near impossible to pinpoint the one decision that caused everything to go right or wrong in their lives. But he could gladly say that his life was set on the right track the second he joined color guard. And such a simple fact made him so grateful for all the little choices he'd made. He went from being so full of self hatred, judgment and fear, to having nothing but love to give. And after experiencing so much prejudice and having it be replaced with that very same love and endless amounts of support, it was enough to bring him to tears. But he wouldn't shed any now. No, he was far too overjoyed.

Levi turned to him, rolling his eyes, but smiling nonetheless. "What do you think of all this?"

Eren mirrored his smile, holding his hand under the table so that their fingers intertwined. "I think it's perfect." Levi raised his pierced brow at him, but continued to smile. Eren didn't address his confusion, he only set his head on Levi's shoulder. "I love you, Levi."

Levi rested his head on Eren's. "I love you too, Eren."

Chapter End Notes

I'M NOT O-FUCKING-KAY! MY FAVORITE FIC IVE WRITTEN IS OVER NOOO.

Thanks to everyone who has supported this (especially you, tol bean, you know who you are) whether you just read it, left comments, kudos or bookmarked it, I appreciate every bit of it so much.

I'm writing this new fic that I'd be so grateful if you checked out. It's called Restrictions and its for ereri, and it's spreading awareness for a disorder called ARFID which is something I suffer through. It would mean the absolute world to me if you gave it a chance! I'm also still continuing my fic Counterclockwise if you're interested!
I feel like I had so much more to say, but I'm an emotional wreck and can't remember. This fic is my baby and now it's over. Please leave comments or kudos if you liked this, it would make my year! Thank you all again, I love you guys!!! <3

TRANSLATIONS: Mon fils! Tu m'as manqué! - My son! I missed you!
Tu m'as manqué, aussi. - I missed you too
Pardonne-moi, Je suis désolé pour le désordre. - excuse me, I'm sorry for the mess.
Ferme ta bouche, la maison est parfait comme toujours, Maman. -Shut your mouth, the house is perfect like always, mom.
Tu es toujours trop sympa. - You're always too nice.
Est-ce ton jouet favori? Est-ce ton favori, mon ange? - Is this your favorite toy? Is this you favorite, my angel? (This is the only one in the entire fic that I'm not confident that I translated correctly.)
je deteste ce merde - I hate this shit
Baba, as tu nos caméras vidéo? - Baba, do you have our video cameras?
Oui - Yes
Mattie, tu sais que baba ne peut pas parler français. - Mattie, you know that baba can't speak French.
attends avec Grand-lady ou Oma - wait with Grand-lady or Oma
D'accord - Okay

Thanks for reading!!! <3

End Notes

What did you think? Let me know in a comment or with a kudos, they're very much appreciated! If you'd like to check out my tumblr that has all my fics as well as my art, it's dr-s--art. I didn't edit this, so I'm sorry if there are any errors. I never edit my fics.
Anyways, thanks for reading, I really hope you liked it!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!