So there's this artist. He could probably be compared to Banksy, but he's a lot more...cynical. He shares rooms with a poet who braids his hair with flowers, in a flat near Covent Garden they rent from a short-tempered shop keeper with a penchant for fans and who'd do anything if you mentioned Poland. Sometimes, the three of them will go and deface public buildings in London whilst completely smashed off their heads.

And then there's this, shall we say, 'revolutionary'. He has a band of other revolutionaries, who all meet at this cafe by Borough Market. He shares rooms with his best mate, a philosophy student, spends too much time with a flirty guy who has a thing for poets, goes boxing with a guy in a red vest, wants to punch the wet sop who drools on the blonde waitress and is getting tired of this guy who keep breaking his laptops through sheer dumb luck. Thank god the hypochondriac's there to keep an (slightly too) attentive eye on their stress levels.

The revolutionary thinks the graffiti artist's work is a waste of space. The artist thinks the revolutionary's campaigns are a waste of time.

And all the while, the poet and the flirt drool over each other in the background...

I just really love my barricade boys okay. I got the idea of Grantaire, if he was this artist the fanon seems to have crafted him into (no complaints here), wouldn't always, necessarily, be an entirely legal one. And 'lo, an idea
was developed.
Yeah, and this fic ain't gonna be short.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Someone was throwing paper at his head. Which, of course, could only ever be a good thing.


“WHAT?” Grantaire eventually roared, opening his eyes and tipping his head back over the edge of the – admittedly tiny – couch. His legs were dangling over the other end from knees downwards. Jehan just grinned at him benevolently.

“I was just trying to enquire if we were... y’know... tonight?” the excessively floral creative writing student asked, eyes wide and suggestive.

And Grantaire had been a maximum of two seconds from completely drifting off, as well. He levelled a blank glare at Jehan, before closing his eyes and shuffling back down into comfort, and asking, “Don’t you have an essay you’re meant to be writing?”

But apparently Jehan was going to carry on pestering him regardless. “I mean, Feuilly’s all for it. He said he’s even got extras of that one you were struggling to find. And you said you’d managed to perfect-”

“I’m pretty sure you said you had an essay to write.”

“-and I’m pretty sure you’ve got a project you’re meant to be working on.”

“Mn,” Grantaire agreed, absentmindedly elbowing the backrest until it moulded to his shape. “It’s called sleeping off a hangover.”

Thankfully, Jehan seemed to take a hint, and all Grantaire could hear for a few minutes was him tapping away at his keyboard. It was doubtful he was actually doing the essay he’d been set... what, two weeks ago now? But even if he was just spurting out more poetry, at least he was doing something other than pestering Grantaire.

And then when the silence finally did end, Grantaire decided to take the path of least resistance.

“No but really, can we-”

“Yes we can do it tonight,” Grantaire moaned, before pulling his green beanie down over his eyes and blocking out the world entirely. He determinedly did not grin along with Jehan’s pleased chuckle. He had sleep to catch up on.

*

It was so, so tempting to scrunch up the front page of the tabloids spread out on the desk before him and chuck them, one at a time and with immense force, at Courfeyrac’s head. Perhaps, then, he might actually pay attention to what was written on them.

“Will you please stop flirting with the damned waiter so we can get this done?” Enjolras sighed, strongly resisting the urge to slam his head onto the copy of the Guardian currently taking up space on the table before him.

To Enjolras’ left, Combeferre carefully licked a finger before flicking over a page of the Independent. “In his defence,” he muttered, tracing a line of text with a finger before going over it
with a highlighter, “this new waiter does have a particularly fine ass.”

“Good old Huchloup does have particularly good hiring specifications,” mused Bahorel, who didn’t seem to be bothered to do the work either, which was actually fine by Enjolras, because whenever Bahorel tried reading the Daily Mail or other such broadsheets he usually ended up in a rage that didn’t end until at least one piece of furniture was broken and several bottles of beer had been drunk. Though unparalleled in the field, when it came to having to sift through pages of politically biased shit to find something to act upon, Bahorel was better exactly where he was; reclining across several bar stools and absently paying the tab. “Anyone remember that – what was her name – that blonde chick who worked here for a fair while?”

There were a few appreciative hums from around the room. Even something that was almost a whimper from Marius, but as he was hidden behind a laptop screen nobody could really be entirely sure.

This really was getting away from him, Enjolras lamented silently. Again. “Look, the pertness of the new waiter’s arse is not in questions here,” he stated, probably a bit too loudly considering said waiter was still only just behind the bar, cleaning out mugs. “We’re meant to be finding enough evidence to make sure we’re not just following some bullshit propaganda here, before we actually make the hit tomorrow night. So if you could all tame your libidos and get back to work?”

That simple statement did not deserve the death glares he received for it.

“I think it’s just been so long for poor old Enjolras, that he’s forgotten what he’s missing,” Courfeyrac stated with supreme superiority, flicking his hair before returning his attention to whatever it was he was reading. Spectator, perhaps. “Due to lack of nourishment, his sex drive has shrivelled to the size of a pea. No, smaller – a lentil. His libido is the size of an itty-bitty lentil–”

“I’m not sure that’s biologically possible,” Joly mused, head tilting before pulling out his phone, undoubtedly to Google it. Enjolras levelled a stare at him. Joly quietly slipped his phone back into his bag.

“I don’t think Enjolras needs to sex to reproduce,” Combeferre interjected. Et tu, Brutus. “I think one day he’ll just split. Like an amoeba.”

“Yes, but then that’d mean there were two identical Enjolrases in the world and I don’t think the world could stomach that–”

Suddenly, frantic stabbing at a keyboard drew everyone’s attention away from a slowly steaming Enjolras. On his own little table, Bossuet, wide eyed and mouth ajar, had resorted to slamming his whole hand down on the keyboard. Then lifting up the whole laptop and shaking it once. Then, slowly, he set it back down on the table, watched it mournfully for a moment and raised his gaze to meet the curious, suspicious, and exasperated gazes of his fellows. “I think I broke it,” he admitted sheepishly.

And with that, Enjolras gave up and called it a day.

*  

“So here’s the thing.”

“Grantaire, I swear to god–”

“No no no, the flat’s fine,” Grantaire assured carelessly, mobile pressed between his ear and shoulder as he pushed up from the banister and jumped down about three steps. “Well, I assume so.
I’ve left Jehan there for a good fifteen minutes now, so something’s probably got something written on it. But probably not in permanent marker. No, this is more a logistics issue.”

“Logistics? Why the fuck are you asking me about logistics?”

One of his feet slipped – the soles of his converses has been worn flat years ago, it was a miracle there was any rubber left there at all – and Grantaire mildly refrained from swearing as his landing sent a jolt through his spine. “Fffuuu- well, you know how I tend to use the bike?”

“Bike? What? Yes, but – no, no, Grantaire, no.”

“Well we tried fitting the case on the back of the bike, but I may have been that bit intoxicated.” The confession came quite cheerfully, finally landing on the corridor of the first floor and strolling around to the door of flat 1A. It should probably just have been called ‘1’, really. It’s not as if there were more flats in on that floor, just the one above in which Grantaire cohabited with Jehan. “And I may have kicked the harness in frustration and knocked it off, so using the bike to carry the stencils is out of the question-” He leant on the door frame, and knocked shortly.

“I don’t give a damn what you’ve done to your bike, you’ll just have to fix it if you want to – hold up, there’s someone at the door-”

The door in front of Grantaire swung open, to reveal Feuilly, his large home phone held a centimetre from his ear. When he recognized Grantaire, his face quickly fell into a frown. “No,” he said shortly.

“Feuilly-”

“No, you are not using my bloody car as your damned getaway vehicle, don’t you bloody dare implicate me like this, I have a business to think about, a shop to run-”

Grantaire bat his eyelashes a few times. “Please, Feuilly? C’mon. Do it for the Polish?”

Feuilly met his gaze with narrowed eyes and clenched jaw. “I fucking hate you,” he muttered, slamming his phone down on the nearby table and grabbing his keys from the bowl he kept them in. He all but kicked Grantaire back into the corridor and slammed the door behind himself. “Right, where’s Jehan?”

“Fetching the stencils. He’ll meet us down at the car...”

*

The papers had been carefully collected and placed into two piles beside the steps that led up to the first floor of the cafe. The waiter-slash-bartender had vanished from behind the worn oak bar, probably to help Huchloup pack away the good stuff for the night. He’d stacked most of the chairs upside down on their respective tables before he left, with only the table Courfeyrac, Combeferre and Enjolras were sat around left untouched. And good old Huchloup had even instructed the waiter to leave behind the keys to the drinks cabinet.

These were the quiet hours. The hours late into the night and after the hard work was done with, where the three core members of their group could sit and drink together (in moderation), and talk, maturely, about the more serious things.

“No but really,” Courfeyrac said, after setting his first empty bottle of Stella on the table between them all, “That waiter. What d’you think my chances are?”
Enjolras heard Combeferre, somewhere to his right, snort in an uncharacteristically inelegant manner into his glass of Pinot Grigio. “You cannot be serious,” Enjolras drawled, absently crossing his ankles where his feet were resting on a spare chair. “Are you really getting that desperate?”

Combeferre snorted into his drink again.

“That goes in your mouth, not up your nose,” Enjolras chose to point out in a completely helpful way. Combeferre flipped him the bird.

“Hello! Back to the main topic of conversation here! My wilting love-life!” Courfeyrac called out, waving his hands lazily about in a half-hearted attempt to draw the focus back to himself. “Do you know how long it’s been? Do you?”

“Quite frankly, I’m not sure I want to-”

“It’s been-”

“-and I certainly don’t care-”

“-even the local paperboy is starting to look appealing-”

“-that fact was certainly something I never wanted to hear-”

“-and I’m finding myself wanting to cuddle. Cuddle! I mean...”

Finally, Courfeyrac trailed off, leaving him sat there with a terribly pathetic kicked-puppy expression on his face.

With a horrible feeling that he knew exactly where this was going, Enjolras rolled his head around languidly to look across to Combeferre. Combeferre, helpful as ever, just shrugged, displaying where his allegiance truly lay.

With a weary sigh, Enjolras swung his feet back onto the floor, quite happily letting his boots make horrendously loud thuds he knew Combeferre would roll his eyes to. “Fine,” he said with heavy exasperation as he set his half-empty bottle of Kopparberg on the table, “if we’re going to be talking about... feelings, I’m going to need more cider.”

Courfeyrac’s laughter followed him as he headed over to the bar. “What, the great marble leader lowering himself to talk about emotions?”

“Of course,” Enjolras said blandly, pulling out another cider from the fridge and kicking it shut with a steel-capped toe. “I just love talking about roses, bonnets, girl’s chests, boys’ posteriors and Gucci’s new autumn range.”

At that, Courfeyrac gasped dramatically and pressed a hand to his heart. “Combeferre, did you hear that? Our ickle Enjolras knows what Gucci is! Our little girl is growing up!”

Really, the lengths Enjolras was willing to go to keep his friends alongside...

*  

“Is that level?”

“Tilt it a bit... to the left, down a bit on your side, Jehan...”

“Now?”
“You really fucked that up. Up, up, \textit{up} Feuilly – that means you \textit{raise} it-”

“Yes thank you Mr Artist I know what ‘up’ means-”

“Now down a bit – tilt it a bit towards Jehan-”

“How about there?”

“A few degrees clockwise-”

“There?”

“Two degrees anti-clockwise-”

“There?”

“Just a jot to the left-”

“Grantaire-”

“-and then a step to the right-”

“Seriously?”

“-now, put your hands on your hips-”

\textit{Grantaire I swear to all the fucking gods you can think of, if you don’t tape this to the wall right this fucking second.-}”

With a snort, Grantaire conceded and tore off a strip of masking tape with his teeth. With barely a flourish he stuck it over the edge of the cardboard stencil, sticking it to the pristine whitewashed wall.

This particular piece wasn’t all that complex. Block colours of a woman in a stylish long red dress, old-fashioned thick fur scarf, brunette hair piled up Audrey Hepburn style, chunky diamond necklace, and a placard reading, ‘TRUTH! JUSTICE! REASONABLY PRICED LOVE!’

The location? 54 Lombard Street. Putting it on a bank just felt appropriate.

Once the stencil was stuck in place, all that there was left to do was for Grantaire to spray on the colour, for Jehan to pass him the right aerosol cans, and for Feuilly to stand look-out and just generally enjoy the rebellious atmosphere. It was a routine they’d perfected over the last year or so, so much so that Grantaire no longer bothered checking the cans Jehan passed him, and neither Grantaire or Jehan paid attention to anything but what they were doing, trusting Feuilly to warn them if anyone came by.

Though, the issue with having it so perfected, was that they \textit{did} have a tendency to get a bit... lax.

“Feuilly, the fuck do you think you’re doing? Turn off your fucking phone!”

And yet, despite Grantaire’s semi-authoritative tone, Feuilly held up a finger and continued to finish his text. “One... second...”

\textit{Feuilly-}”

With a weary sigh that seemed to manage to mark \textit{Feuilly} out as the good guy here – and how the
fuck did Feuilly always come off as a good guy out of the three of them – Feuilly closed his phone down, and said, “Look, calm down. No one’s going to see us – even Jehan’s wearing nothing brighter than his navy blue-toned damned flowery scarf, which leads to my second point that even if someone did see us, our faces are eighty percent covered so no one would recognise us. Comprende, senor?”

“Yes, but all our careful clothing falls to shit when you’re shining a light on us!” Grantaire hissed back.

“Yes, well, are you going to finish your little painting or stand there moaning at me?” Feuilly replied, head tilted remarkably sassily for someone who professed to be straight.

Behind the black scarf covering the lower half of his face, Grantaire grinned. “You love my ‘little painting’,” he said, shaking the can twice before resuming spraying.

He vaguely heard Jehan ask Feuilly who he’d been texting, the two of them starting up some kind of small-talk, being all casual as they assisted a crime. Just chilling as they graffitied this bank. No biggie. But Grantaire couldn’t care less what they were talking about because he was starting to see it all come together, the colours and the outlines, just as they had in his loft...

There’s always about twenty last sprays of paint, twenty ‘I’ll just touch up over there’’s, but eventually he deemed it done to a satisfactory level. The scrap piece of cardboard he used to protect the other areas was thrown to the ground, the used can dropped back into the bag with the others. It was the clang that caused which drew the attention of the other two, who fell silent and turned to watch as, carefully, and the still slightly wet paint staining his fingers, he pulled the stencil from the wall.

And there, yes. All the shapes and colours suddenly made sense, all slot together to form the same picture that covered a seven foot scrap of paper Grantaire had covering his bedroom wall.

Behind him, Feuilly whistled. Grantaire grinned, turned to face them and curtsied. Jehan mock applauded, but with very real appreciation.

Another sound joined in with Jehan’s applause, a slowly building rhythmic wailing sound, that’s far, far too familiar to say anything good about Grantaire’s life.

And, as one, Grantaire and Jehan turned to glare at Feuilly.

Feuilly’s mouth fell open, and he defensively spluttered, “Wh – what? You seriously – you can’t think-”

“You fucking ever,” Grantaire gritted out, raising a paint-spattered finger and flourishing it at the stuttering art shopkeeper, “fucking answer you stupid fucking phone again-”

Thankfully at least one of them has common sense, and Grantaire found himself grateful for the reminder that such a thing exists as Jehan grabbed both of the bickering men by the back of their coats and started to drag them off down the street. “Forget whose fault it is, just run!”

Grantaire managed to grab the straps of the bag with the spray cans in it before he stumbled around and chased off after where Feuilly and Jehan were already strides ahead of him. He swung the bag onto his back and started to run, following wherever Jehan was leading them, skidding to take the sharp 90 degree angle, clinging to the walls to propel himself forwards, catching up with Feuilly and pushing the man faster forwards and almost crashing into Jehan and rounding another corner and
Almost slammed into Jehan where he was slumped over the boot of Feuilly’s car, half panting and half laughing.

Without even really thinking about it, Grantaire joined him. He stumbled a bit and collapsed forwards, hands on his knees to stop him falling entirely to the floor – which Feuilly promptly did a second later, almost gracefully rolling down onto the ground and lying spread-eagled on his back, on the pavement, and laughing as if it was his last chance.

With one forceful move, Grantaire tugged the scarf down from his mouth and took one huge breath, before declaring, “I fucking hate you.”

And somehow, Feuilly managed to laugh even harder. Reaching up and slapping Grantaire’s thigh twice, he said, “No, no you don’t.”

Grantaire couldn’t help it. He laughed too.

* *

They were meant to be heading home – they should have been heading home, it’s fucking two o’clock in the morning – but of course, Enjolras’ mind won’t let him get anything so much as resembling sleep until the last parts of the plan are straightened out in his brain. So, after locking up the Musain (Huchloup had long gone home, but she trusted them enough to leave them with their own keys to the place), and before heading back to their apartment, Enjolras was striding through the streets of London with Combeferre strolling beside him, heading towards the designated target site to check it out one last time.

“You should be easier on him,” Combeferre said suddenly, his voice muffled by the scarf winding around his neck and tucked into his trench coat.

It wasn’t hard to figure out who Combeferre was talking about. “He’s acting like a teenager,” Enjolras replied, without half an ounce of sympathy. “I can’t have him acting like some kind of horny teenager when-”

“Two things,” Combeferre cut in quite casually, raising a finger. “One, he’s got Marius living with him, even you’d start acting like a horny teenager if you had to spend that many hours with him, if just to counter out the frankly absurd amount of love-dovey crap that seems to seep from his very pores.”

Enjolras sincerely hoped he wouldn’t, but then, Marius did have an excess amount of lovey-dovey seeping pores. Hopefully, they would never have cause to find out what effect such excrement would have on him.

“And two – he’s only two years away from being a teenager, Enjolras! Not everyone grows up as fast as you do.”

“Or you,” Enjolras pointed out.

Combeferre just snorted. “I’ve decided to accept the fact I never grew up at all. I just became even more middle-aged.”

“I was fifteen the first time you told me to turn my music down,” Enjolras mused. “And I can’t think of a time when you wouldn’t tell me off for running in corridors, or leaving my shoelaces untied.”

“Please,” snorted Combeferre, absentely tugging his gloves around and back into place. “You’re
painting an entirely unrealistic picture. You almost managed to make yourself sound like a normal child.”

Enjolras laughed at that, his head falling back. “Ah, too true,” he agreed, still smirking and shaking his head slightly. “I doubt ‘normal’ will ever be a word that can ever be attributed to me.”

“You say that like it’s something to be proud of,” Combeferre said.

“I happen to think it is,” Enjolras replied, lips twisted into the subtlest of sly smiles.

In silence they walked down the last part of the street, the tall building, their destination, slowly rising up in front of them.

They didn’t say anything when they got there, either. Combeferre probably didn’t care enough, at 2am, to say anything when he knew that Enjolras would be too deep in thought anyway. And he was, his eyes narrowing as he studied the front of the buildings, the windows and the doors, in his head putting together layouts, comparing them to what he had already considered, debating, contrasting, fiddling until he could get something loudest, something with impact –

“Ah – it appears we might not be the first.”

Combeferre’s words drew Enjolras’ attention immediately. Fear and fury starting to surge in equal measures, he snapped his head towards where Combeferre was standing, utterly still and making quite an imposing figure in his long coat. His gaze was fixed on the wall, his eyes narrowed, and head tilted sideways as he thought.

“Someone else? But we would have heard, we were working until eleven-” Enjolras cursed, striding towards him to see what it was that might ruin their plans.

“I’d say we hadn’t heard about it, because I don’t think it’s been here much longer than we have – the paint’s still slightly wet, if I’m any judge.”

Paint? Enjolras came to stop next to Combeferre, and reluctantly turned his head to look at the wall. Sure enough, the wall of the back was covered in paint. It was hard to make out in the darkness, but it seemed to be a woman in a red dress, carelessly carrying a placard stating, ‘TRUTH! JUSTICE! REASONABLY PRICED LOVE!’

The style was instantly recognisable. Biting back the curses forming fast and furious on the tip of his tongue, Enjolras ground his teeth.

Combeferre, however, was tilting his head even further, before saying, “Looks like Audrey Hepburn.”

Of all the things to say. Jaw hurting with the pressure he was forcing upon it, Enjolras reached out and quickly brushed his finger down the red of the dress. Combeferre had been right, it was still damp, leaving some of the red paint of Enjolras’ skin. He rubbed it between his fingers until it all but vanished. “Where do you think we can get paint this late at night?”

“There’s that art shop by Covent Garden,” Combeferre suggested absently, before turning and continue down the street, hands shoved deep in his pockets against the cold.

Enjolras stared after him in shock. “Where are you going?” he demanded.

“Home!” Combeferre called back, “it’s too bloody cold for this shit!”
After a few more seconds, during which Enjolras firmly refused to move and Combeferre got further away, Combeferre visibly sighed out and turned back to face Enjolras – whilst still walking, albeit now backwards. “Look, even if that Covent Garden place is open, painting over that piece of artwork will just be disrespectful, no matter how much you violently disapprove of the guy’s work. We can just stick our stuff on the other side – that’s on the far side, well away from the door.”

It took a few moments, but eventually the truth of what Combeferre was saying sunk in. It was true, Enjolras wanted nothing more than to scrub every inch of that self-promoting, tasteless graffiti artist’s work off every wall in the city – all the man (supposing it was a man) did was cover every surface available with basic, supposedly witty designs, but what made it a hundred times worse was that this vandal so clearly had both the means and the talent to make an impact, to do something that mattered, had had ample opportunity to do so, but hadn’t. To a man like Enjolras, to have such a chance and ignore it was the worst trait a man could have. “Fine,” he reluctantly conceded, biting the word out like it physically wounded him to say it, even to the person who was probably the only person he’d ever apologised to, and only then because his GCSE Chemistry teacher had been staring him down until he did. “But if a single newspaper mentions out work in conjunction with that damned piece of graffiti-”

“Let me guess, you’ll stab someone?” Combeferre asked wryly, looking across at Enjolras with a grin as he drew level. “Well then. I guess I’d better start locking away the knives.”

“Please. As if that would be able to stop me.”

“You know, some nights I pray thanks to our lucky stars that you chose the revolutionary route, rather than the serial killer one…”

*  

Seven o’clock in the morning, just as the alarm went off summoning him to college, Grantaire shot bolt upright in bed and stared sightlessly at the easel on the other side of the room. He didn’t move as Jehan kicked his door open, stumbling through wearing nothing but a pair of peach-toned, flowered, loose silk pyjama trousers and cradling a pint sized mug of coffee in his hands.

His flatmate had reached his bedside table – a praise-worthy feat, considering all the shit that littered his floor – and was setting the close-to-overflowing mug down on top of a closed notepad before he said, “Oh dear. You’re not moaning about exhaustion, hangovers, or college. What’s wrong?”

“Tag,” Grantaire said, blinking absently and eyes still fixed on that same spot directly in front of him. “Last night. Didn’t tag it. Before we ran. It’s not tagged.” He blinked a few more times. The bed dipped as Jehan settled onto it, now drinking the coffee he’d brought in. “…Shit.”

A hand stroked his back semi-sympathetically. It counted for shit, though, when Grantaire knew that Jehan was drinking his coffee. That Jehan had been the one to make it was inconsequential. “Trip out tonight as well, then?”

Grantaire groaned, and Jehan only just moved out of the way in time as Grantaire fell backwards, landing on his mattress with a thud.

*  

“Take it off.”

“It’s red.” This really shouldn’t be such a hard concept to understand.

“Red’s a good colour,” Bahorel protested, hands desperately clinging to his waistcoat. “A bold colour. The colour of blood. Revolution. It’s an apt colour to the cause-”

“And a colour that will be seen down the fucking street, I said, take it off,” Enjolras repeated, unmoving, and firmly staring Bahorel down.

Bahorel stared back.

Leaning against the outside of the cafe, Courfeyrac chuckled. “So concerned about your appearance, ‘Orel? You’re losing serious man points for this.”

Impressed, Enjolras turned to look at Courfeyrac. Courfeyrac winked at him, grinning.

Reluctantly, and with each movement threatening a violent revolt of the kind Enjolras didn’t want, Bahorel removed the fitted blood-red waistcoat, leaving himself in a black shirt with rolled up sleeves, fingerless leather gloves, and loose black jeans tucked into his usual biker boots. His ruffled hair was dark enough that it didn’t need to be hidden under a black beanie, like Courfeyrac’s lighter hair did. Enjolras’ blonde curls weren’t hidden by anything, but nobody even mentioned that.

“Oh, really?” Bahorel spit out, balling up the waistcoat and chucking it through the open window of the car behind him. “So how many man points have you lost?”

Courfeyrac was wearing grey skinny jeans, dark coloured Vans, black denim jacket over a black Henley, and one careful curl was loose from the beanie covering his hair. Even the way he was leaning against the wall was clearly carefully designed to be stylish, and at Bahorel’s words he just grinned. “Metrosexual, darling,” he said, with an exaggerated camp voice, nothing like his normal speaking voice. “I am what I am, and what I am is fabulous.”

“What you are is a waste of time, right now, the both of you,” Enjolras almost managed not to yell. “We should have left by now! For god’s sake, pick up your damn rucksacks and let’s go!”

He didn’t miss Courfeyrac pointedly checking out the long, black, double-breasted wool coat Enjolras was wearing over a fitted black shirt and black jeans, his usual boots on. The coat was an admission to Enjolras’ vanity, Enjolras knew it, and Courfeyrac knew it. But, it turned out, Courfeyrac was intelligent enough to not say it aloud.

With his usual perfect timing, Combeferre emerged from the cafe with Bossuet trailing behind him, the two of them carrying three black rucksacks.

“Why is he carrying a rucksack?” Bahorel demanded, pointed a finger at Bossuet and looking between Combeferre and Enjolras for an answer. “Who let him carry one? If he breaks something now, we don’t have time to fix it.”

“Oh, ha ha,” Bossuet drawled, chucking a rucksack at Bahorel hard enough to make him stumble back against his car. “I don’t break everything.”

“And that reminds me,” Combeferre said calmly, turning to Enjolras. “We need to buy another laptop.” Enjolras cocked an eyebrow. Combeferre shoved a thumb over his shoulder at Bossuet. Bossuet blushed.

“I didn’t mean to,” he moaned.
“You are incorrigible,” Courfeyrac lamented, shaking his head. He stretched his hands out to Combeferre, fingers wiggling at the rucksack. “Gimme!”

But Combeferre shook his head. “Apologies, but this one is for our fearless leader.” Be slightly more responsible then Bossuet, he stepped forwards to hand it over to Enjolras, muttering under his breath, “There’s an added present in there from yours truly, klutz over there, our pet hypochondriac, and even our boy Marius. Turns out he’s not a useless romantic waste of space – well, not just.”

When Enjolras raised his eyebrows, inquiring, Combeferre just smiled.

Slightly confused – but mainly very suspicious, Enjolras unzipped the top of his rucksack and started to leaf through the papers inside – none of which were the right size or right thickness to be the posters they’d prepared.

Bahorel, who must have overheard the exchange and got curious himself, pulled two sheets from the wad in his own bag. Frowning, he looked across to Bossuet and Combeferre. “These aren’t the-” he began, before lowering his gaze back to the sheet. The words stopped, his mouth still open as he took in the first line. Then the next. And he started to laugh.

“What?” asked Courfeyrac, eyes wide. “What is it?” And when no one gave him an immediate response he yanked open his own bag, grabbing a sheet and reading it himself. He was a slower reader than Bahorel, but it wasn’t long before he, too, was laughing.

Eyes still fixed on Combeferre’s poker face – which was really wasted, stuck in London and not in some casino in Las Vegas – Enjolras pulled out his own sheet, and raised it to his eyeline.

To: Jeremy Michaels
From: Jason Houghton

Word is, that stupid Hooper bastard is wanting to hire Mirren. MIRREN. For fuck’s sake Jim, I’m not having a stupid bitch of a woman in a position of power in my company. Let him give her a job as a secretary if he wants her cunt so badly. And I hear she’s a fag to boot – is this the level our company’s going to fall to? Disgusting, fucking all of it. If you can’t get Hooper to see fucking sense, he’ll be out of here on his arse...

Eyes wide, Enjolras’ eyes shot back up to Combeferre, who was now grinning with wild abandon. “I think that’s my personal favourite,” he mused, his calm tone totally contrasting his excited expression. “Straight in with the sexism and homophobia, and if you keep reading there’s even a fair bit of racism later on...”

“As all these from the Chairman?” Enjolras demanded, gesturing at where Bahorel and Courfeyrac were giggling at their own emails.

“Dear gods, no,” Combeferre said, looking aghast. “Grief, Enjolras, give us some credit. No, no, not all of them. There’s some from the executives too.”

As Enjolras kept watching, Combeferre’s eyes sparkled with a rarely seen mischief. “If the idea wasn’t so repulsive, I could kiss you right now,” Enjolras declared boldly.

Combeferre shivered. “Eugh, no, thank you. Please don’t.” But all the same, despite the apparent repulsion of Enjolras, he reached over to pat Enjolras on the shoulder in the brotherly way. “How about this – you can pay both halves of the rent this month.”

Grinning now, Enjolras shook his head and turned away. “C’mon, let’s get going,” he called to the
other two in black. “We’ve got some deliveries to make.

* 

“Get in, losers!”

Grantaire’s heart fucking stopped. Fuelled by a fury worthy of Mars himself (and he really needed to stop listening when Jehan went on one his rants about the loss of the Pantheons in literature) he spun around, brandishing a finger at where Feuilly was hanging out of the driver’s seat window. “You fucker!”

Feuilly, fucker that he was, just grinned. “Are you two planning on walking all the way there?”

“Considering that I sent the bike in for repairs-” Grantaire started, fucking pissed because Feuilly had given him a fucking heart attack and he already fucking knew this-

“Yeah, like I said,” Feuilly cut in, still grinning, and waving a hand to gesture at his car, “get in, losers.”

Grantaire didn’t even have a chance to reply. Before Feuilly had even finished speaking, Jehan had let out a whoop of joy and danced off to climb into the back seat. But then, Grantaire hadn’t been going to protest.

“What happened to all that ‘don’t implicate me, nyeh, I’m an honourable shopkeep me’ crap?” he asked innocently, sliding into the passenger seat and absenty chucking the aerosol can between his hands.

“Well I tried sitting at home doing nothing, but Poland wouldn’t let me do it,” Feuilly mused absenty, gently sliding into first gear and entirely focused on the road and driving away.

Grantaire snorted. “Please. You just realised we’d be doing rebellious illegal things without you and couldn’t bear to be the well behaved one for the night.”

“Now, let it go on the record that I never said that,” Feuilly said. “All I’m doing is being a good friend and landlord by giving you a lift, and I shall be waiting in the car whilst you two pop over to the back and do what you’ve got to do. And Jehan, if you write a sonnet on the back of my chair so help me God I will not only make you watch as I scrub it off with paint stripper, I shall scrub you down just the same.”

With a glare at the back of Feuilly’s head, Jehan rolled up the sleeve of his left arm, and set the nib of the purple sharpie to one of the few remaining empty spaces on his arm, instead.

* 

The bank was their last stop. Before going there, they’d stopped round the houses of each major player in the bank, posting a selection of the less incriminating emails through their letterboxes.

It would just be cruel to ruin their mornings by posting some of the worse ones. Enjolras did have some semblance of mercy.

By the time they got to the bank, 54 Lombard St., they still had around twenty emails left, including the worst five by the Chairman. Courfeyrac had about twelve sheets still in his rucksack, and, at a nod from Enjolras, started to back up. Then, rubbing his gloved hands together and eyes flicking over the various ledges and chips from the wall, he started to run.
Each member of the ABC had seen Courfeyrac perform his monkey act several times, but it still wasn’t something you could just look away from. His feet pushing off from ledges that didn’t even seem to exist, his hands clinging on to empty air, it was seconds before he was standing on the ledge of the second floor. For a few moments he stood still, looking at the window, the pillar to his left, before calling down, “I could probably make it to the third floor, if you want?”

“If you fall, we’re not going to be the ones making excuses to the paramedics,” Bahorel called back, grinning. Courfeyrac swore back at him cheerfully and swung his rucksack off his back. “We doing anything fancy with these here emails, boss?”

Enjolras chewed the inside of his cheek as he thought. “I think they’re pretty self-explanatory, really. Take... take these emails, and do like we were going to with the posters, one per window. I think I’ll write a little something on this one from Mister Chairman.”

“Aye aye, captain.”

“Fire in the hole!”

Sudden bolt of shock almost giving him a heart attack, Enjolras’ eyes widened as he looked up at Courfeyrac. “Don’t you dare blow anything-” and then stopped mid-sentence as an old-fashioned window bolt clattered onto the pavement next to him. A bit anti-climactic, really. “You know,” he said wearily, “you could just have said ‘watch out below’.”

“Yes, but then I wouldn’t have been able to see you panic,” Courfeyrac called back cheerily, pocketing his Swiss army knife and nudging the window open just enough to slip a few sheaves of paper through.

“Which is clearly high priority right now,” Enjolras muttered, ignoring the monkey and pulling a red pen from his pocket. He rested Combeferre’s favourite email against the wall as he wrote in print letters across the top, ‘why don’t you get to know the men you work for’. At the bottom he wrote, in exaggerated cursive script, ‘yours, les amis de l’ABC’.

“You done with that glue yet, Bahorel?” he called, stepping back and shoving his pen back in his pocket.

“Hang on, hang on, you’ve given me, like, five minutes to glue seven emails here-”

“Well hurry up, I need it-”

Someone, from somewhere behind Enjolras, whistled low. “This is technically vandalism, you know.”

That wasn’t Bahorel – definitely wasn’t Courfeyrac, who was still up high – and neither was it any other member of the Friends. And Enjolras knew the police officers that patrolled this patch (don’t ask), and it wasn’t any of them, either.

Courfeyrac set eyes on the newcomers before Enjolras did, letting out a quiet, “Holy shit.”

Two men; one wearing a leather jacket, ridiculously torn slim-leg jeans, a pair of green vans and matching beanie hat over dark curls, the other wearing flower patterned – were they jeans or leggings? - with a oversized, thick-knit maroon jumper. It also looked like his hair was not only braided, but also threaded with flowers - but most of the details like that, including their facial features, were obscured due the streetlamp behind them.

Looking up over his shoulder, Enjolras tried to meet Courfeyrac’s gaze. However, the imbecile was
Bahorel did look back at Enjolras, however, with eyes wide and asking, ‘what now?’ Enjolras tilted his head sharply at the building. ‘Keep going. I can deal with them.’

“Oh, stop pouting,” said the man wearing the beanie, grinning. “It’s not as if we’re going to report you or some shit. What are they, flyers? CVs?”

“None of your business,” Enjolras replied sharply. “Keep walking.”

The man’s eyes widened comically, but his flowery companion was looking between him and the three Friends with something akin to concern. “Oohhh, I’m terrified!” Beanie man gasped, before laughing. However, he did indeed move, walking down the path and absently tossing between his hands a – was than an aerosol can?

And it all made sense, when he came to a stop in front of the graffiti he and Combeferre had noticed last night. “You’re R,” Enjolras said. And there went his good mood for the day. It was always when you’d been planning and looking forwards to something that the worst things happened, wasn’t it?

Courfeyrac didn’t seem to share the same view. Even from where Courfeyrac was, Enjolras could hear him gasp. “The artist? You’re – you’re both artists?”

The one with the beanie – R, he must be – chuckled and ignored Courfeyrac. The other, however was staring back at Courfeyrac, mouth open for a few seconds before he answered. “Uh – no, I mean, he is. That’s Grantaire, he’s the artist, I’m just a poet really, Jehan – well no, Jean, just most people.”

“Jehan,” Courfeyrac echoed, and Enjolras sincerely hoped that the new two couldn’t hear the new, stupid sappy tone in which Courfeyrac said the man’s name. Jesus, he really needed to get laid...

“Jehan, sometimes Jean. Got it.”

R – Grantaire – whichever, stopped shaking the can to turn and look at Courfeyrac’s beloved poet ‘Jehan’ and ask, sarcasm heavy in his tone, “You done? Want to exchange social security numbers too, or...?” Jehan muttered something back, and even in the dim light of the streetlamp Enjolras could see Grantaire roll his eyes, and almost smile.

“Look, guys, I just need to do this one thing then you can go back to TPing the bank, or whatever it is you’re doing,” Grantaire said, crouching down to spray something small by the base of his piece.

The other, Jehan, had drifted away from him to peer at the windows Bahorel had already superglued emails to. “They look like emails,” he mused, his braid falling off his shoulder as he tilted his head, and, yes, there were flowers in it.

On a whim, Enjolras looked up to Courfeyrac. The idiot was about to fall of the ledge he was stood on, the way he was contorting himself to get a better look of the poet. He looked across to Bahorel, who he hoped would share his agony. Bahorel mimed being sick.

“Aw, aren’t they replying to you?” Grantaire asked absently, now setting his can down on the ground and rubbing at the red R with his finger. Seemingly satisfied, he pushed himself back to his feet, throwing the can up with his right hand and catching it in his left.

“These... are some really discriminating emails,” Jehan was going on to say, wordlessly beckoning Grantaire with his hand. “How did you get access to these?”
“He sent them to us,” Bahorel in an innocent tone that only served to make you more suspicious, if
you knew him.

But neither supposed artist nor self-proclaimed poet paid him much attention, both of them focused
on the email. By the time they reached the end, Jehan was smirking and Grantaire, less subtly,
laughing loudly. “Oh, so you’re revolutionaries!” he crowed, spinning back to face Enjolras and
Bahorel. “Informing the public of what they need to know and all that bullshit, is it? Rooting out
the corrupt and putting them in their place, fighting for Truth and Justice with a capital T and J,
yeah? Well, good luck with that,” he said, still laughing, but there was a mocking tone to it now
that was really, really making Enjolras want to take a leaf from Bahorel’s book and deck the guy.
“Jehan, c’mon,” Grantaire said, making to walk back from wherever it was he’d come from.

“Uhm-”

But before the hesitation of the man’s second could become apparent, Enjolras found himself
talking. “Yes, of course, my thanks,” he said, slipping into a condescending tone without even
planning it, “because of course I need the luck of someone as pointless as you.”

That caused the man to stop – body half turned away, he froze, before turning all the way back to
look at Enjolras. “I’m sorry – did you just call me ‘pointless’?”

The image of Combeferre tutting after Courfeyrac related all of this was almost enough to deter
him from continuing – almost, but not quite. “Of course. It’s the word that suits you best.”

He knew the man wouldn’t speak after that. He’d think. And Enjolras let him think, let him
consider it before continuing.

“Your ‘paintings’, images sprayed gaudily onto walls all over the city – the time that would take,
they must be the point to your life now, yes? It uses time, skill, a penchant for law-breaking, and
effort. And for what? Self promotion? Fifteen minutes in the limelight and all you’re doing is
teaching the next generation that they don’t have to stop scribbling the walls when they’re no
longer toddlers. If you want to show them the importance of art, try painting something decent. At
best, you might be teaching them to mock their superiors but then what are they going to do with
that? Speak back to their professors, their parents? Because students rejecting their education
always improves the conditions of society. So yes, I called you pointless.”

Bahorel was grinning, arms crossed, enjoying the show, Enjolras could see him out of the corner of
his eye. But his attention was taken by the man whose lack of drive in life gave him a feeling of
repulsion. And this man wasn’t grinning, not anymore.

Grantaire was staring straight at Enjolras, eyes narrowing. “So you think,” he said, stepping
forwards slowly, “that this, this organised littering has a point? That it’ll build to something, cause
a grand revolt of the system and fix bureaucracy? At most you’re going to get rid of one man, with
all this, and it’s probably going to be the guy who deals with the press releases when he fails to
twist this to make them look good. And if you do get rid of the guy in charge? Ave duci nova,
similis duci seneca! They’re all the same. This? This thing you’ve got going on here? Changes
nothing. You calling me pointless is the best example of hypocrisy I’ve seen all week!”

This wasn’t exactly a new argument. “So you’re saying doing nothing is better than doing
something? If every-”

“No, I’m not saying that, I’m saying that you’re doing nothing-”

“If everyone does the amount I’m doing, then it will build up to more than something!” Enjolras
yelled back, now, too, stepping forwards. “One person starts it, and the people shall follow!”

“You know, I almost could hear the capital P there-”

“You mock my methods,” Enjolras hissed, voice barely more than a whisper but Grantaire was by now close enough to hear it either way. “And yet, I don’t see you trying to do any better.”

Grantaire stopped moving, his face, his ignorant, stubborn grin now well within punching reach. “Than this little farce with superglue and pieces of paper? You bet your Armani clad arse I could do better, posh boy.”

“I highly doubt that,” Enjolras laughed at him.

Something twitched in Grantaire’s jaw. “I could prove it to you,” he boasted. “If I felt so inclined.”

This conversation had run its course. Enjolras didn’t care to listen to this man’s empty words as he showcased his ego. “I still highly doubt it,” he said, turning away and heading to where his rucksack had been abandoned, putting well-needed space between him at the cynic before he did something stupid. “But if you ever do ‘feel so inclined’, come to Cafe Musain, near Borough Market,” he said. “Ask for Enjolras.”

“And Courfeyrac!” Courfeyrac suddenly, randomly chipped in. “Courfeyrac. Um. That’s... that’s me...” That idiot wasn’t even bothering to pretend to be addressing Grantaire, his eyes fixed on the poet Jehan. Or Jean. Whatever. And he was close to falling over the edge in pursuit of getting a better look at the guy. Again.

“You’re going to fall off,” Enjolras muttered up at him. He rolled his eyes as Courfeyrac started, and almost jumped backwards, against the window.

“Perhaps I might show,” Grantaire called to his back. “I think it’d be fun to see you embarrassed!”

Enjolras couldn’t help but snort at the ludicrous idea, and he smiled wider when he heard Bahorel do the same.

“But for now, I am afraid I must deprive you of my presence,” Grantaire was continuing. “Jehan?”

Enjolras raised his eyes long enough to see the flowery poet dither a little, still making eyes at damned Courfeyrac, before walking towards where Grantaire probably was. Then he waited a few seconds, before turned back around, seeing Grantaire and Jehan vanishing into the darkness of an alleyway.

“What an ass,” Bahorel said suddenly, startling a laugh from Enjolras.

“Well, I can at least tell Combeferre he lived up to my expectations,” he admitted, making Bahorel laugh in return. “Stuck up, pretentious fools, the both of them.”

“Not the poet!” Courfeyrac called down, stunned. “Surely you can’t say that about the poet! That poet... Jehan... he was... he was...”

“Sounds like you need the ‘poet’ to come back and describe himself for you,” Bahorel chuckled.

“I do!” Courfeyrac declared, swinging as he clung to a post for balance, standing on one foot as the other swung out over the edge. Enjolras winced. “By the heavens I do! Oh that the poet would return to me! Oh that... that... damn I really should have listened when Combeferre was trying to teach me literature...”
“For my sanity I’m glad you didn’t,” Enjolras muttered. “And for god’s sake, get down from there before you get love sick and fall!”

And dear lords, Courfeyrac made a ‘squee’ing noise as he slid down a column.

“You realise this is only going to get worse when he meets the guy again,” Bahorel muttered, handing Enjolras the superglue. “Why the fuck possessed you to go and tell him where to find us? Just because you can’t bear to do anything but win an argument doesn’t mean you need to make space for more arguments, for fuck’s sake! What’re you trying to do, give the rest of us migraines?”

“Don’t worry yourself about it,” Enjolras muttered, emptying the superglue on the back of the final, signed email. For a moment he entertained the idea that it was Grantaire’s face he was pouring superglue on, before questioning his sanity. Jesus, he’d never felt so furious at a person before! At an injustice, he’d often get angry, even violent, but to want to see someone with a black eye so badly... this was new. But what did it matter? “It’s not as if they’re actually going to show up.”

*  
Feuilly was pacing back and forth in front of his car by the time Grantaire and Jehan finally returned, hot, bothered, and out of breath.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Feuilly yelled when he saw them coming, “How fucking long does it take to make your damned sign – Jesus Christ what the fuck’s wrong?”

“In the time we have been gone we climbed Mount Olympus,” Jehan sighed, leaning against the bonnet of the car and slithering down it so he was sat on the floor. “We have climbed to the heights of Olympus and met the gods...”

Completely stunned, and more than a bit scared Feuilly spun to Grantaire. “Say what now?”

But, it turned out, Grantaire wasn’t in much of a better state. Face covered with an expression of complete bemusement, he collapsed on the floor beside Jehan. “So much... passion, and, and fury and determination and jesus, that hair!”

“Gods of Justice and Truth...”

“He looked like Apollo, A-fucking-pollo, with, with his jaw, and his blonde hair, and his fucking passion-”

“I’truth, if he was Apollo then the other must have been Hermes, residing in the sky, perched upon a pedestal...”

“No seriously, Feuilly, that guy was literally high up, like, standing on the ledge of the second storey or some shit-”

“Courfeyrac...”

“But how could you look at him when fucking Apollo walks the fucking earth?”

And, to Feuilly’s horror, the two of them only went and sighed in unison.

Barely withstanding the barrage of Romantic imagery that was being (unfairly) thrown upon him, Feuilly just looked between his two tenants, and shook his head. “Dear gods,” he lamented. “I’m
surrounded by homos.”

Grantaire and Jehan glared up at him, and he managed to glare back for all of five seconds before laughing. “Come on, you raging homosexuals you,” he said, proffering his hand and giving them both a tug to their feet. “Get in the damned car so I can get us all home, will you? You two can wax poetic when you’re safely locked away in your flat, and I’m home alone and can watch porn and feel like a real man.”

“Hey, I resent that!” Grantaire protested, stumbling around to the passenger door. “I’m a real man too! Bet I wank off to porn more than you do.”

“And that is a debate I really don’t think I want to take part in.”

Driving them back, Feuilly tried, desperately, to block out the muted whisperings of Grantaire and Jehan, neither of which seemed quite ready to stop dreaming about their Greek Gods just yet.

“We are going to this cafe he told you about, right?”

“What? What! No! No, no of course we’re not, I mean, that was all bluster, I’m not really going to... to... it’d just be... I mean... I... okay, yes, fine, fine, of course we’re going to the fucking cafe.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Yeaaaaah sorry this took so long, but as you can see, it's a KINDA big chapter... scenes just kept appearing, it got really annoying.
Again, endless love for Priya, without whom this fic wouldn't be anywhere near as good as it is.
Starts with a snippet following the previous night's events - they ran into each other whilst trying to vandalise a bank, for various purposes, if you don't remember - and then moves on to the following day...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Enjolras returned back to the flat only to see Combeferre waiting for him on the sofa, mobile phone in his hand.

With an exasperated sigh, Enjolras shrugged off his coat and turned to hang it on the back of the door. Damn Courfeyrac and his lightning-speed texting. “For god’s sake, the artist wasn’t funny, it’s not like they’ll even come, and the poet wasn’t actually all that hot.”

“Well, now,” Combeferre replied, amused, eyebrows rising, “I was just going to text you to ask you to pick up more semi-skimmed from Tesco, but please, tell me more!”

For crying out loud, Courfeyrac, get your act together. Enjolras shouldn’t be the one to have to gossip to Combeferre about all this. But, with a reluctant sigh, he went to fetch a coffee, and started planning how to relate the evening he’d had.

*

Feuilly’s art shop had a back room that, upon occasion, was host to the works of small local artists, a make-shift gallery only known to the art aficionados of Covent Garden. He’d set up signs promoting it weeks prior, and in the week the display was set up he might get a few people wandering around per day, and, with the help of both his amazing assistants and loitering tenants, he might be able to have a few of the pieces sold.

However, such displays would only be in place for a week every few months, at the most, leaving an empty, spacious room with no purpose for the rest of the time.

Needless to say, Jehan and Grantaire had kind of stolen the room for their own purposes, as much as you can steal something without actually moving it. In one corner Grantaire had set up an easel and a table covered in various paints, watercolours, pencils, paintbrushes, sponges, etc, etc. On the other side of the room Jehan had accumulated a mound of beanbags and cushions, notepads and pens and poetry books all shoved and lost between the folds of material. And halfway between the two was a mini-fridge stacked with frappes, fruits, beers, and some drinks that were slightly stronger. For the displays, the socket that currently kept the fridge cold (the one socket in the entire room) was usually being used by either a heater or an air-con unit, but Jehan and Grantaire had long got used to wearing either very much, or very little, after deciding that having a functioning fridge was far more important.
And it was here they were both loitering in that afternoon, still both ridiculously sleep deprived after two consecutive nights of vandalising a bank, Jehan buried deep in his books and Grantaire off his head.

“I can’t find the *words* – he was mine for – fuck, not even for five fucking minutes, how am I meant to be able to pin down the essence of someone from five minutes-”

“Then write about that, that thing you said, five minutes not enough-”

“Yes, thank you, of course I need help from someone who’s – I don’t even know what that’s meant to be, what the hell are you drawing?”

“Something – something complex, an’ extragvant – no, ex – ex-”

“Extravagant, is the word you’re looking for, and it’s not, it’s just an awful lot of red-”

“Yes, well, red means a lot of things, and besides, this is looking fucking *awesome-*”

Jehan was spared more of Grantaire’s boasting when the door flung open, thanks to the boot of Feuilly’s precious, elegant, lady-like assistant slamming against it. “’Sup, losers, I need to get drunk.”

Ah, Grantaire’s moment to shine. He spun around, the whiskey sloshing around in the bottle as he shoved it out towards Eponine. She raised an eyebrow. He grinned.

“You’re drunk already, aren’t you?” Eponine sighed, deciding to ignore the bottle and instead flop down onto the beanbag beside Jehan. Jehan didn’t respond, didn’t move at all, save for the starting a careful brush of his pen nib across the paper of his notebook.

“’Course I am!” Grantaire exclaimed cheerfully. “I’m painting, aren’t I?” He downed another swig of the whiskey, before dipping his fingers into the small puddle of gold paint on the nearby table and starting to brush a circle onto the red-drenched canvas.

“What, exactly, are you painting?”

Jehan’s head shot up from his notebook for a second, eyes wide, and braid flopping off his shoulder again. “Exactly!” he exclaimed, “What the *fuck* are you painting?”

“Something, I dunno,” Grantaire shrugged, the shape of the gold changing from a halo to soft gold waves, golden curls. Black, black would be next, he knew. “It’ll become something. Eventually. Possibly.”

From their little blanket and pillow den in the half of the room behind the easel, Jehan and Eponine just stared at him, equal parts amused and concerned, before nodding. “Right,” Jehan sighed, “Sure. Eventually.” His pen started to quietly scratch away again.

“Who cares, anyway,” Eponine moaned, yawning, and falling back. “This is mean to be about *me!* I need to get drunk. D’you hear me? *Drunk.*”

“I will throw this bottle at your *head-*”

Eponine narrowed her eyes at him. Grantaire tried to narrow his eyes back, but, getting the sense he wasn’t quite being as dramatic as she was, decided to take another drink instead. Because, hey! That fixed everything.
“No, I mean, I need to get *drunk,*” Eponine clarified helpfully, closing the comment with a weary sigh.

Understanding hitting him, Grantaire nodded wisely, stepping back from the easel and running his hand through his hair, flecking his black curls with gold. “Oh, you mean you want to go to pubs and clubs and down enough Jaeger bombs and dubiously named cocktails to make your body have the stability of jelly and flirt and go home with some random guy and wake up with your sexy lingerie hanging off his toaster?”

“Exactly!”

Jehan rolled his eyes. “Why didn’t you say so in the first place?” he asked, words muffled by his absent chewing of his pen.

“I *did,* dumbass,” Eponine chastised, giving him a friendly slap to the shoulder. “You two just had your heads too far stuck in the ‘brightest heaven of invention’ to understand us down-to-earth folk. So, you in?”

“Can’t,” Grantaire said, entirely unapologetically, fingers swiping up a fair dollop of black paint. “We’ve got plans.” He started to lather the paint onto the canvas, downward swipes creating the appearance of heavy drapery.

For a few seconds, Eponine just blinked between the two of them in silence. “You – what’re you – what’s more important than getting pissed off our *heads*?”

“Why d’you want to get drunk?” Jehan muttered, in his usual poor attempt at changing the topic. “Celebratory outing for finally dumping your poor excuse of a boyfriend?”

Eponine winced. When Grantaire raised an eyebrow at her, she sighed, and confessed, “More of a... trying to summon up the courage to, outing. So you see why I need my wingmen? I need you guys to get me drunk enough to call him and break up and then land a really, really hot rebound guy!”

“I told you, we are unable to assist with your morally-dubious plans,” Grantaire said, adding a touch of grey to the swirls of the coat. “We are busy.”

“Busy doing *what*?”

“Y’know,” Jehan said, conclusively, “stuff.”

“What ‘*stuff*’?”

“Busy stuff that we have planned to do tonight,” Grantaire explained with a shrug.

“Oh come *on,* just *tell* me-”

“We’re just-”

Suddenly, another voice joined the cacophony. “They’re going to go and stalk the two acclaimed ‘gods’ they ran into whilst desecrating a bank last night,” Feuilly yelled from the shop.

Eponine snorted, as Grantaire and Jehan froze. “Um,” Grantaire asked, his wide eyes fixed on Jehan’s, which, if anything, were even wider. “I – that’s – can you *hear* us from out there?”

“Easily!”

“So... you’ve heard...”
“Enough blackmail material to get me through the next five years, at least,” Feuilly said, as the door opened and he stepped into the room. “What? There’s no one out there,” he explained, shoving a thumb over his finger. “Am I not allowed to leave my own shop once in a while?”

“Not if the other option is coming in here and, and making... libellous statements!” Jehan tried. He did. He really tried.

Grantaire rolled his eyes and tried to bury his face in his hands. He only succeeded in getting a black handprint across his right cheek and eye, which did nothing to stop Feuilly continuing, “They had gone back to the Bank last night cos this genius had forgotten to tag his work, and they ran into some guys from this ‘power to the people’ squad who Grantaire squabbled with, Jehan gawked at, and after making complete twats of themselves somehow still managed to get invited back to the super-secret hideout. Probably to give these guys more to laugh at, if you ask me,” Feuilly said, grinning, “but hey! These guys are gods, right, so of course they’re going to go there.” He leant back against the wall, arms crossed and still grinning, impervious to the death threats both Grantaire and Jehan were shooting him.

Grantaire blinked, then brandished a black finger at him. “You’re a dick,” he stated, quite simply. “I hope you know this.”

“I did not, but thanks for the update; I shall try my hardest to live up to your expectations.”

But there was a terrible glee in Eponine’s eyes that couldn’t be distracted. “Oh, I am so coming with you,” Eponine said, eyes wide and grin determined. “I am so fucking coming with you.”

Grantaire really should have had a plan B prepared for this shit. And he really needed something stronger to pour down his throat. “‘Ponine-”

“Grantaire-” Eponine echoed, smirking her little smug face off. “Previous experience has shown that things always turn out better when I stalk your boyfriends before they become your boyfriends. It is known.”

Like the little backstabber he is, Jehan turned to Grantaire with an apologetic tilt to his smile. “It is known,” he agreed.

And lo, Grantaire knew he had lost. “Fine!” he said, “but behave yourself. Don’t do anything that...” there was a long pause whilst Grantaire tried to think of someone they knew who had boundaries. He gave up. “Just don’t do anything but sit there and nod or shake your head occasionally, okay? Don’t say anything, don’t touch anything, don’t touch anyone, just... just...”

“Let you do all the talking and touching of peoples, got it,” Eponine said, humbly raising a hand as she committed to her duties solemnly. Grantaire didn’t believe a word of it.

Jehan summed up Grantaire’s feelings by moaning loudly, collapsing backwards, and pulling up a blanket to cover his face. “We are so screwed.”

“Or not!” Feuilly chimed in, cheerfully.

“Are you gonna come?” Eponine asked.

Feuilly shook his head. “Nah. I’ve seen these idiot make a fool of themselves enough times. ‘Sides, shop’s open until twelve on weeknights, isn’t it?” he pointed out. “Only got the last two nights off cos you wanted the cash- HOLD THE FUCK UP!” he yelled suddenly, making everyone else jump. Some whiskey spilt onto Grantaire’s jeans, such a waste. “You,” Feuilly declared, copying Grantaire from earlier by brandishing a finger at Eponine, but with only a few specks of paint on it.
rather than Grantaire’s complete glove of the stuff. “Your shift doesn’t end for another half a bloody hour! What’re you doing lazing it up back here!”

Grantaire took great pleasure in tutting loudly, only adding a nice large roll of the eyes when Eponine glared at him. “You said yourself, not five minutes ago, there’s no one out there!” Eponine argued, on full defensive mode. “You can’t tell me off for doing something you’re doing!”

“Yes I damn well can!”

“Why?”

“Because...” Feuilly flailed around a bit for an answer. “Because I’m the boss and I write your paycheques!”

In full teenager tantrum mode, Eponine stuck her tongue out, clambered to her feet and stomped from the room, and slamming the door behind her.

Well accustomed to this, and just about getting able to see the humour behind it, Feuilly just chuckled, and turned to follow her. But before he left in his own, less dramatic way, he pointed at Grantaire’s easel and said, “I know what you’re painting.”

Confused, Grantaire frowned at him, then turned and frowned at the painting instead. And now, with the alcohol starting to wear off, it was all becoming a lot clearer. The passionate red background, blonde halo of hair and silhouette of a long black coat. He groaned, and tried to bury his face in his hands, only succeeding in smudging the black already covering the right side of his face. “It’s the fucking revolutionary from last night, isn’t it?”

“Yes!” Feuilly confirmed cheerfully. “Tootles!” was his parting call before he pulled the door shut behind him.

From where he was still buried under his blanket, Jehan chuckled. “You’re so fucked.”

“Bet you a tenner the last ten poems you’ve written were about your precious monkey-man.”

Jehan moaned in response.

“Exactly. So you can shut the fuck up.”

* 

As far as London days went, this was a pretty decent one. Still only about five degrees, but without the slightest hint of a breeze or any clouds, so you could still get away without wearing a jumper, Enjolras, also enjoying the warm of success, had even gone so far to take off his coat, leaving it draped over his leather satchel and held in place where it pressed against his hip. The sun was still just about high enough to be providing slight warmth as he walked down Southbank, beside the Thames.

In fact, he was in such a good mood that he was even letting himself walk in time to the music playing through his ear buds, almost bobbing to the rhythm. And when someone jogged up behind him and pulled one out of his earbuds, he even smiled a bit as he shook his head with mock despair.

“Yo dude, what’s the tune?” Courfeyrac asked, nudging his hair behind his ear with a knuckle as he slotted into place beside Enjolras and slipped the earpiece into his own ear.
Wordlessly, and without slowing his pace, Enjolras pulled the classic black iPod from his pocket and touched the wheel, letting Courfeyrac read the title: Howl, Gaslight Anthem. Courfeyrac pulled a face – but didn’t take the earbud from his ear. “Eugh, I don’t get how you can go from liking Bastille to this stuff.”


“You’d listen to Nicki Minaj if she slipped in a lyric about overthrowing Big Brother,” Courfeyrac lamented. Enjolras smirked, but again, said nothing. “But anyway, how’s your day been, fearless leader? No, no – actually, don’t tell me-” Courfeyrac spun sideways, eyes narrowed and scanning Enjolras up and down as he awkwardly sidestepped so not to lose pace. “Formal-ish attire – oh shut your mouth, it’s formal for us normal people and you know it – but with sleeves rolled up, coat off, tie loose and top button undone-” Courfeyrac cut himself off with a gleeful clap. “You’ve just handed in a paper, haven’t you?”

“And got one back,” Enjolras added, unashamedly smugly. If there was anyone who’d never be able to judge someone for boasting, it’d be Courfeyrac.

True enough, Courfeyrac just chuckled. “Of course you did. No wonder you look like you just go a booty call from James McAvoy.”

Enjolras didn’t even know how to start protesting to that comment. You’d think he’d have learnt how to, really, by now. And it was made even worse by the traitorous smile edging its way into place.

“So, what did you get? What grade did our lovely teddy-bear of a teacher-”

“-please, stop calling him a teddy-bear-”

“-he is a teddy-bear, a lovely, ridiculously enthused teddy bear of a man, you’ve seen him when he starts off on something he’s passionate about, he’s adorable, almost as adorable as you become – but what did he give you, anyway?”

The question had to just be for politeness’ sake. Surely the answer was obvious. This was Enjolras and politics, after all. “An A.”

Courfeyrac laughed, and Enjolras’ grin spread that bit wider. It wasn’t his fault; Courfeyrac’s happiness had always been infectious. “Of course! I mean, I’m not sure what happens more, you licking Lamarque’s boots or Lamarque licking yours-”

“How’s your day been?” Enjolras cut in swiftly, and hoping that Courfeyrac would prefer to talk about his own life than mock Enjolras’.

“Eh, so-so,” Courfeyrac said. Good to know he still had the attention span of a squirrel. “Had a two-hour seminar this morning, the afternoon off to work on a paper-”

“Plenty of time to day-dream about poets, then?” Enjolras suggested, innocently.

Seeing Courfeyrac open and close his mouth like a fish a few times was a remarkably satisfying sight. “...I am, I am offended that you see me as such a shallow creature! No, actually, I got a decent amount of work done. And if I ever see that... that delectable poet again, I’ll be my usual suave mofo self, get his number, rock his world, and that shall be all. No romantic exploits for me. Smooth criminal, all the way. Smooth, classy, and untouchable.”

“Is that so?” Enjolras muttered, pulling his phone from his pocket and clicking onto the new
“Do you doubt my ability to charm away pants?”

‘Guess who’s just turned up.’ Enjolras smiled. “Suave smooth criminal, was it?”

“Of course!"

“Of course. How could I doubt you.”

Cafe Musain loomed up ahead. “Also, I have nothing tomorrow until a lecture at three, so Bahorel had damn well better have opened a tab-”

Laughter flowed over them, as per usual, as they swung open the door to the bar. Enjolras had just enough time to see Bahorel already lying across three bar stools, Bossuet and Joly slumped over each other and half hidden behind a mound of textbooks and laptops (one of which seemed to have been separated in half), and cramped around one table, Marius, Combeferre, a girl he didn’t know and, oh look, the artist and his pet poet.

And then there was a rather loud squeal, and the earbud was ripped from Enjolras’ ear as Courfeyrac spun and all but fell back out into the street.

That, of course, got everyone’s attention.

Enjolras met only Combeferre’s eye with a matching raised eyebrow, ignoring the artist and the gawping poet entirely as, first, he pulled his coat off from where it was hanging over his satchel, hung it on the overflowing coat rack, before following his distraught companion outside.

Courfeyrac was leaning against the wall with eyes wide and staring straight ahead. “I can’t face him, Enjo,” he gasped, “I can’t. I mean, look at him!”

This statement clearly desired a response, so Enjolras dutifully leant back and peered through the small window in the door. The poet under question once again had hair braided with flowers, but the maroon jumper had been replaced with a big knitted grey cardigan over a tight purple top, a red-toned floral scarf around his neck, but the floral leggings – no, perhaps they were jeans – and Doc Martins were still in place. He was also looking remarkably flustered, with the new girl smirking and poking him in the ribs. The artist was oblivious, using grand hand gestures and chatting amiably with Combeferre. The traitorous bastard.

“Well?”

“I’m looking,” Enjolras replied calmly, taking his eyes from the artist and Combeferre and returning it back to the friend in dire need. “And?”

Courfeyrac gaped at him. “I can’t – I can’t, y’know – that! I’m, I’m, I’m...” he trailed off, hands flapping at his own outfit. Grey skinnies, brogues, and a second-hand cotton navy-blue blazer with the sleeves rolled up over a light blue shirt.

“You’re too prep school?”

“Not as prep as you, Eton boy!” Courfeyrac fired back, defensive mode kicking in for a second before he started blabbering again. “No – I’m – cool, I’m nowhere near cool enough, he’s just so unique and-”

“Very floral, and blushing into what seems to be either, well, vodka, martini, or gin and tonic,”
Enjolras mused, leaning back to look inside again. Combeferre, on the far side of the table, caught him looking and furrowed his eyebrows inquisitively. Enjolras shrugged back and rolled his eyes, before dodging out of sight before the artist could turn to see what Combeferre was pulling faces at. “Or it could be water, I suppose.”

“It’ll be a G&T,” Courfeyrac muttered, eyes falling even wider. “Or a martini. Classical and classy, and, fuck, I drink fucking Peronis and WKDs and, shit, how am I meant to even talk to him-”

Right, enough of this. “Look, I don’t give a fuck how you’re going to talk to him. Do, don’t, make a fool of yourself, whatever. But what I do care about is that you are a prominent member of revolutionary society that’s had its second success in as many weeks, and we’re going to spend the night celebrating and coming up with our next target. You’re owed that much, we all are. So that’s what you’re going to do, ridiculously floral yet good-looking poet or not. Okay?”

Finally, Courfeyrac met Enjolras’ gaze, the deer-in-headlights eyes settling into something slightly calmer. “Yeah?” Courfeyrac asked.

“Yes,” Enjolras confirmed. “Now for god’s sake, man up.”

That got Courfeyrac grinning, like Enjolras knew it would. “I’m going to tell Bahorel you said ‘man up’. You’re not going to hear the end of it.”

“Tell him that and I’ll tell him how you chickened out because some guy had flowers in his hair.”

“Pfft,” Courfeyrac shrugged with a bit too much bravado. “Guy, what guy. No guy in there. Well, no, technically there’s-”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve got the message, just go,” Enjolras sighed, grabbing Courfeyrac by the sleeve of his jacket and shoving him in through the door.

Enjolras followed him through, keeping a firm hand on the middle of his back and steering him straight past the occupied table and towards the bar. He shoved the sop onto one barstool and shoved Bahorel’s legs off another.

“Fuck you, you fucking fucker,” Bahorel moaned, pulling himself upright. “What was that for?”

“Make sure Courfeyrac only drinks manly drinks,” Enjolras muttered, “none of his fluorescent blue shit-”

“-or his girly-ass Peroni?” Bahorel muttered back. “Gotcha.”

Bahorel could be trusted. He knew what was going down. Enjolras slapped his shoulder, and got a friendly punch back.

He didn’t go to Combeferre, and the other problem, straight away. There was a small matter about two disconnected halves of a laptop to deal with first.

Bossuet was stuttering excuses before Enjolras had even finished pulling out the one other empty chair at that table. “Look, I swear to god, this one wasn’t even my – okay, it might’ve been slightly-”

“At this rate,” Enjolras sighed, sliding onto the chair, “We’re going to have to come up with an entirely separate fund for your laptops.”

“I don’t think he does it on purpose,” Joly supplied, looking a bit hopeful. Whether the hope was
for Enjolras to ‘play nice’, as Combeferre put it, or that his room-mate really didn’t do it on purpose, wasn’t quite clear.

Enjolras shrugged at Joly, and turned back to Bossuet. What did he even do anymore? He’d been kicked out of... at least three colleges, and three jobs, since Enjolras had met him a few years ago. Oh, and more than a few flats, until his long-suffering best friend had given in, and risked the many panic-attacks living with Lesgle would cause.

“I mean... surely, as a conspiracy plan, that’s a bit too clever for our little Lesgle?” Joly added, grinning, and neatly dodging Bossuet’s half-hearted swipe at his arm.

It was depressing, how consistently cheerful these two were. Well, until someone developed a cough and then all hell broke loose in the Joly/Bossuet household. But to be this constantly happy, and to not have even drunk anything yet...

“If you’re working for the government and working from within to drain our resources,” Enjolras threatened, eyes narrowed at Bossuet and fingers tapping on one of the halves of the desecrated laptop, “I will find out. Don’t think I won’t.”

Bossuet just raised his eyebrows. “You think I’d be stupid enough to cross you?”

Now there was the kind of response Enjolras liked to hear. Shuffling the chair back and rising to his feet, Enjolras swung a finger on Joly and ordered, “Watch him. Don’t let him break another laptop.” Joly gave him an only-just mock salute and a grin Enjolras knew to trust, as he turned away from the bar, leaving Courfeyrac in Bahorel’s reasonably safe hands and the safety of his team’s laptops in Joly’s.

Good mood. In a good mood. Don’t ruin it now by punching someone.

It looked like sheer luck was on his side, anyway; there was barely enough room for the five people already around the table, let alone any more space for Enjolras to fit in to. Instead, he just made his way around to Combeferre, eyes sliding over each person in turn, firmly not responding to the artist – Grantaire, wasn’t it? – and the insolent expression stuck on his features. He looked away from the challenging glare down to Combeferre, lightly touching his friend’s shoulder to get his attention. When he leaned back, Enjolras leant down and muttered, “When you’ve finished socialising, we’ve got work to do-

“No fear, Blondie,” the girl cut in, a smirk also matching the artist’s. “Mr Byron here was just heading up to the bar to fetch us some more drinks, weren’t you? You can take his seat!”

By the looks of it, no one had forewarned the poet of this. And by the amount of bottles and glasses on the table, no one needed any more drinks, either. Yet, after sufficient eyebrow wagging from the girl, and eventually Grantaire kicking his chair, the poet stumbled to his feet and over to the bar.

Enjolras watched him take the seat the other side of Bahorel to Courfeyrac. Stuck between those two – well, that was going to make Bahorel’s evening.

Either way, that left the seat next to Combeferre free. Not entirely sure if he was grateful or not, Enjolras slid into it. Wordlessly, Combeferre pushed his beer across the tabletop to him. Now that, Enjolras was grateful for. He took a swig, and said, “You saw the papers I left on the work surface this morning?”

Combeferre didn’t reply straight away, but smiled in a way that seemed polite to anyone who
didn’t know him well. Enjolras, however, saw it and started drawing up battle plans. “Would you look at that,” Combeferre said, turning to direct the smile at the other three left on the table. “Not even a ‘how was your day, honey’. No, straight down to work.” The girl chuckled, Marius snorted. The artist just raised an eyebrow. Rolling his head back to Enjolras, and taking back his beer, Combeferre continued, “I did see them, yes. And yes, a roaring success all round. What do you say, think the chairman will resign by the end of the week?”

“Less time than that,” Enjolras said, stealing back the beer and downing it before Combeferre could protest. Watch it, the action warned. “Did you see those headlines? I thought The Guardian’s was particularly cutting.”

“Have you heard who they’re rumouring as his replacement?”

It was the artist. He’d cut Enjolras short.

It half sounded like Combeferre was trying to stifle a laugh behind his fist, but it could – had better – just as easily be a cough.

Enjolras met Grantaire’s apparently innocent gaze with hard eyes. He turned to face him, resting his elbows on the table, hands clasped before him. “No, I hadn’t, do tell,” Enjolras said, letting the sarcasm drip from each syllable. “Please do tell, I’d love to hear what the artist has to say.”

The way Grantaire’s eyes widened, he tilted his head, the way he grinned – he was pushing Enjolras, he was enjoying this, the bastard, of course he was, but there was an annoyance starting to show in his eyes that Enjolras couldn’t quite make sense of. “It’s just, I heard it was ex-MP Giles Michaels. Wait – isn’t he – help me out here, politics expert – wasn’t he one of the ones who had to leave the government because of expenses scandals?”

Yes, yes, he was. And it did look like he was first in line for the old chairman’s soon-to-be-vacated seat. “And your point is?”

Grantaire shrugged, smiled benevolently, and sunk back into his chair with a glass of whiskey in his hand. “You heard my point last night. It’s just that now, I have the evidence. Ave duci nova, friend.”

Combeferre was tapping his thumb on the side of the rescued, empty beer bottle in an unspoken If you knock him out, I’m not going to apologise on your behalf. Again.

That was something Enjolras should care about, right? “We got rid of the bigot,” he said through gritted teeth, “if we have to, we’ll get rid of the thief, too.” After all, we got him out of government, Enjolras didn’t add. “You’re a fool if you think we were of the mind we’d solve this one case, and that’d be it. Of course not; one pebble does nothing. But eventually, they will get the message the people are watching, and won’t sit back and wait for them to die, of a heart-attack when their high cholesterol finally puts a stopper in their hearts. We will be here, pulling them apart, until they realise they need to stop giving us cause to.”

That grin didn’t slip so much as an inch. “So you’re immortal, is that it, Apollo?”

“Enjolras.” He’d never said his own name with such fury. “My name is Enjolras.”

Grantaire raised an eyebrow. “But you must realise that’s how long it’ll take, right? Forever? And you won’t get that, this society will collapse to another one, and that’ll fall corrupt – you can try and fix this one, but that’d be pointless, when all that’s going to happen is a worse one will rise.”

“I won’t need to live forever.” It was getting harder to stay calm. It was getting ridiculously
tempting to suggest taking this outside, which was beyond idiotic. Nothing ever needed to be ‘taken outside’, no matter what Bahorel said. Everything could be – should be able to settled with debate, but this, this artist was making it so hard. No one had challenged Enjolras so much, since – well, since he’d first joined Lamarque’s classes. “It’s really not hard to understand. An avalanche doesn’t start all at once – one pebble, one group, and the rest will—”

“fall’ with it, if you follow your little metaphor through to the end,” Grantaire cut in, now also leaning on the table, just as Enjolras was. Noticing this, Enjolras pulled his arms back and leant back in his chair, arms crossed over his chest. “And spare me the whole ‘the People will rise’ speech. I don’t care how many times you’ve practised it in front of your mirror, I’ve heard it a thousand times before.”

“Perhaps you’ve heard it so many times because it’s a valid argument?”

“You realise that people are inherently bad, right?” Grantaire continued, and wasn’t that comment just the icing on the cake.

Why was he here?

Combeferre stirred suddenly, a smile playing at his lips. “That can be debated,” he said, clearly, and inexplicably amused.

The amusement must have come from some part of the conversation Enjolras had missed, because now the artist was laughing, too. “Hey, David Hume—”

Why was he HERE?

“Mm, I’d rather be compared to Kant, but at least you picked a decent philosopher—”

“Hey, Kant, I’m well aware that any point could be argued,” Grantaire said cheerfully. “Give me a day and I could probably come up with an argument pro-sobriety—” the girl snorted “-but just because a point can be argued doesn’t mean that its essence is correct. Romney made a good enough argument to come close to presidency, but by hell I’d deck the guy if I had so much as half the chance.”

That this artist disapproved of Romney made no difference on Enjolras’ view of him. You’d have to be stupid to think of supporting the Republican, and whatever this artist was, it clearly wasn’t stupid.

“To understand the truth of the world, you have to go by experience,” Grantaire was concluding, raising his glass to Combeferre. They must have discussed Combeferre’s epistemological leanings, earlier. “All you’ll get from a well-structured debate is lots of angry people.”

“Then why are you here?” He wanted to yell it, to grab the fucking drunk cynic’s collar and shake him until he understood. “To make people angry? You don’t support what we’re doing. You don’t seem to believe in anything but your whiskey! So why waste your time here?”

And of all the things Enjolras had said so far that night, of all the arguments he’d put forwards, this was the thing to stop the artist’s tongue. His mouth hung open, smile fading to a frown as he, finally, stopped. “I guess,” he said eventually, his tone lacking the careless enthusiasm from before. “I guess it’s because you never told me what the odds were, on the bet.”

What bet? “I would never make a bet with someone like you,” Enjolras said.

“No, I think Courfeyrac mentioned something about this,” Combeferre cut in, lips curling. Turning
to Grantaire, he asked, “Are you referring to when my friend here dared you to do better than us?”


“Wait, wasn’t Joly saying something the other day?” Why had Marius even opened his mouth. Why. “He suggested we recruit one of the art students, the nearest we have to an artist is Courf, and he’s not even – or was it Lesgle who said.”

“We don’t need an artist,” Enjolras cut in, at exactly the same time Combeferre said, “No, you were right the first time, it was Joly.”

“We don’t *need* an artist,” Enjolras reiterated firmly, levelling his eyes first at Marius, then at Combeferre. But Combeferre, of course, just returned the gaze blandly.

For a few sweet moments, silence settled on the table. “Doesn’t mean you couldn’t use one,” Grantaire said. He wasn’t arguing, he was *asking.* “Just... give me a chance. Let me show you what I can do.”

*What does he WANT?* “I will say this one last time,” Enjolras said, sliding back his chair, palms flat on the table as he pushed himself to his feet. “We do not need an artist. Besides, I’ve seen what you can do – what you can do is barely more than vandalism, and is *certainly* not ‘art’.”

He could hear the forthcoming lecture in the way Combeferre sighed out. He half expected for the artist to follow him, to hit him, kick him, yell at him – many other men would have, after that. But nothing. Everyone at the table let him leave for the bar in silence.

*

“You’ve been writing since you were seven?”

Jehan blushed. He didn’t think he’d stopped blushing, in truth, for the full twenty minutes since this man, this astonishing man had entered the cafe for the first time – well, second, technically, after diving out swiftly in a way Jehan was refusing to over-analyse. “Well, um, that makes me sound like some kind of child prodigy,” he muttered, the words fading into a laughter which Courfeyrac, inexplicably, joined in with, his laughter ringing so much clearer than Jehan’s. “I, I don’t think I’d call it *writing* – I just spent a lot of time in libraries, I’d read a book of poetry – Browning, or Shelley, or Coleridge, and I’d just, try to reproduce it, y’know? Just take a phrase, and try and get it to be as lyrical. Nothing *special.* It was just... what I did.”

“Yeah, whilst the rest of us were making mud pies, and climbing trees!” Courfeyrac laughed, his smile so wide, so stunning. Gods, Jehan had read that eyes could shine but he’d never *truly* believed that happened outside of poems, until now.

“I don’t know, it looks like your climbing practise is serving you better than my poetry is,” Jehan admitted, smiling and tugging self-consciously on the holey grey cardigan he’d bought from an Oxfam shop. Whereas Courfeyrac, in his fitted blazer... looked more pristine, more perfect than anything Jehan could deserve. Homer couldn’t have written a hero to fit the role of Courfeyrac’s love.

Courfeyrac seemed oblivious, instead smirking and saying, “Actually, the practise in falling came in the most handy...”

Jehan smiled back, and it took him a few seconds before he realised he was meant to say something. “Uh, still, being able to just... *jump* up onto a second storey, isn’t exactly an *uncool* thing to do,” he tried, just wanting to hear Courfeyrac talk some more.
“Hey, now, I never said it wasn’t cool,” Courfeyrac protested, raising his eyebrows, pursing his lips and throwing back his hands, and just like that Jehan was laughing unstoppably again. “I am the king of cool, okay? Super cool. Über cool. Remember that.”

“I’ll remember!”

“You’d better!”

“I promise.”

“Good.” Courfeyrac paused, and grinned right at Jehan. Jehan couldn’t have stopped smiling, couldn’t have taken his eye from him if he’d tried. “But yeah,” Courfeyrac continued, eventually, and by Olympus that minute had felt like forever. “I mean, ugh. At least I’m not some kind of 21st century Byron, god, imagine how bad that would be. All that ‘go a roving nevermore’, how horrid!”

Jehan opened his mouth, amused and confused, at the same time Courfeyrac started to frown. “No, wait, I just mixed up Byron and Poe, didn’t I?”

“Um, yeah, I think you did,” Jehan agreed, grinning flat out now. “Bit of an-”

“Odd combination? Yeah, just a bit,” Courfeyrac finished, grinning.

“No, no don’t worry, I’m just, I’m kinda impressed you got both references-”

“Only ‘kinda’? Damn, what am I doing wrong?” Courfeyrac asked, eyes sparkling in a way that was doing really, really bad things for Jehan’s heart. “And uh, I’m ‘kinda’ annoyed at myself for messing that up.”

He was tapping his fingers on the bar in a nervous rhythm. Jehan wanted to reach out and hold them still, but Courfeyrac was too far away for the stretch to look natural. All Jehan could do was try to smile comfortingly, and say, “It’s fine, you’re not an English student, you’re excused.”

Courfeyrac winced.

“Unless... are you an English student?”

Shrugging apologetically, Courfeyrac confessed, “English and Education, joint Honours.”

Oh... oh. “You’re-”

“No, I get it, everyone here’s all politics and law and philosophy – all three if you’re bloody Enjolras – it’s a logical assumption to make-”

Jehan held up his hands, shaking his head, “No, no no, I mean – you want to be a teacher?” He couldn’t keep the awe out his voice. Just thank the gods Grantaire wasn’t near enough to hear it.

There was a sudden and almighty thud as Bahorel slammed his beer bottle onto bar surface.

Jehan almost fell off his stool, blinking desperately. He had completely forgotten the guy sat between him and Courfeyrac – probably at least partly due to how his head had been face-down on the bar for the last ten minutes, at least, not saying a word. For all Jehan could have known – if he’d remembered the guy was there – he could have been asleep.

Apparently not.
“F**k this f**king shit,” Bahorel groaned, using his beer to push himself upright. “I give up. Drink whatever fluorescent shit you want, I do not any more give a flying f**k.” And with that declared, he staggered off, tie lopsided, top three shirt buttons undone, wine-red waistcoat entirely undone, one sleeve rolled up and hair sticking in random places. Jehan watched him, half-smile on his face as the man slumped on a stool a few down from Courfeyrac, next to Grantaire’s revered Apollo.

His eyes, inevitably, slid back to Courfeyrac, and saw the man looking at him with curious eyes, his head tilted. “Oh – he reminds me of someone I know,” Jehan explained a hand randomly flopping towards Bahorel. Elegant. Smooth. Well done, Prouvaire... “Um, he owns the shop I live above... gets exasperated easily, and more often than not storms off swearing...”

Courfeyrac laughed. “Yeah, that wasn’t an uncommon occurrence. In poor ‘Orel’s defence, he’s an intern at this big-shot inner-city law firm. Fucking hates it. He’s probably... had a long day... or something.”

Jehan hummed in the way people do when they understand. He hoped.

He watched, waiting, hoping, as Courfeyrac’s mouth opened, shut, as he glanced down at the now empty stool between them.

And then, cool as a damn cucumber, Courfeyrac slid from his stool onto the one Bahorel had just vacated, bringing him a full meter closer to Jehan. A smile spread across his face. “But, as he’s no longer here – Barkeep! A bottle of your finest-” but before he’d even finished, the guy behind the bar had slid a bright blue bottle of WKD onto the bar by Courfeyrac’s hand, before going and serving someone else.

Courfeyrac played with the rim of the bottle awkwardly. Jehan just kept smiling, waiting. “Well, I’d say I don’t come here often, but...” he trailed off, shoving a thumb at the people behind and around him.

Jehan laughed. “I guess you do have a decent excuse,” he agreed, absently reaching up to push an escaped strand of blonde hair back behind his ear. His sleeve slipped down his arm, and he saw Courfeyrac follow its path down.

When Courfeyrac frowned, eyes still fixed on his arm, Jehan twisted his head, not moving his arm, trying to see – writing. He still had – well, of course, he always had writing on his arm. “Um-”

“Is that poetry?” Courfeyrac asked, eyes wide, a smile just playing at the corners of his lips now. Jehan could only nod. “What is...?”

“Shelley,” Jehan admitted wryly. A bit cliché, but this was one his favourite quotes. “Rome is fallen, ye see it lying / Heaped in undistinguished ruin. / Nature, alone, is undying.” He shrugged, fingers now absently playing at the edge of his sleeve. “I like it. Probably a bit, well, silly, people tell me I should just get tattoos, but I like being able to change it with my mood-”

“Is that the only quote you have on you?” Courfeyrac asked, eyes jumping up to meet Jehan’s. He looked so enthusiastic, so amazed, it was all Jehan could do to shake his head. Courfeyrac’s hands started forwards, twitching, before he remembered to ask, “Uh, um, d’y you mind?”

Jehan shook his head fiercely. “No – no, it’s, it’s fine.”

Hesitantly, now, Courfeyrac reached out and carefully wrapped his fingers around Jehan’s wrist, holding his arm still as he pushed the sleeve of the grey cardigan down his skin, his fingers leaving goosebumps on Jehan’s skin. With the sleeve out of the way, Courfeyrac started to trace the words
on Jehan’s skin with the tip of his forefinger, reading some of them aloud. And if some of the quotes were of Jehan’s devising, for the first time he found he didn’t mind saying so.

William Thatcher had it right, Jehan thought mutely, completely unmoving as Courfeyrac traced the words he’d written on his skin. *If I could ask God anything, it would be to stop the moon, and make this night last forever...*

* 

“A bit piss-poor of you, mate, getting me stuck in the middle of *that,*” Bahorel growled, shoving his thumb over his shoulder at where Courfeyrac was now getting handsy with his poet. It wasn’t even *good* handsy. All the idiot was doing was holding Jehan’s arm. “You owe me. Massively.”

Enjolras smirked. “I think you’ll find it wasn’t me who sent the poet your way. All *I* did was charge you with babysitting Courfeyrac, not play his chaperone. You’ve got the new girl to blame for that.”

When Bahorel grunted, Enjolras decided to take it as an apology. He didn’t like being in a friend’s debt; they always reminded you of it in the most embarrassing moments. “Oh yeah, that brunette chick. Yanno, for someone hanging out around the other two, she doesn’t seem too bad. Streetwise, I’d say.”

“Is that why she’s ogling Marius?” Enjolras mocked, peering around to look at her, a knee-jerk reaction. When, instead, he saw Combeferre and the artist in another heated discussion, he turned away sharply. “What’s her name, anyway?” he asked.


Ignoring him entirely, Enjolras proceeded to take a swig from Bahorel’s beer.

“Not cool, man, *not* cool. What *is* it with you and drinking other people’s drinks?”

“You have a paying job,” Enjolras said simply, setting the beer down precisely halfway between them, “and I don’t. Do the maths.”

“You’re also the one who has parents who don’t notice when you nick a couple of grand from their account, so don’t try that with me,” Bahorel said, snatching the beer and slamming it onto the bar in front of him.

“You always buy everyone’s drinks *anyway.*”

A pause, and Bahorel shrugged. “Eh, fair enough. Now, look, I’ve meant to say, before I forget—”

“-or become so drunk you can no longer string together a coherent sentence?”

“Or that – look, the guys over at ‘Parnasse’s have this idea—”

From the corner of his eye, Enjolras watched as Combeferre smile good naturedly, and shook the hand of the artist, who was now laughing.

“-this whole uni fees thing, they want to go one step further—”

And now Grantaire was rising to his feet, absently passing an empty glass between his hands as he headed *this way.*

“Tell me later,” Enjolras said, not even knowing what it was he was interrupting as he spoke. “I
need to talk to Combeferre.”

Bahorel might not have been one of Enjolras’ oldest friends, but it didn’t mean he didn’t understand Enjolras far too much. “Mm-hm,” Bahorel muttered, “sure you do. Don’t walk into R on your way over there.”

Already a few steps away, Enjolras shoved a two-fingered V over his shoulder, not looking around to see Bahorel’s smug grin as he laughed.

*

As the stool Enjolras had just vacated was taken by R, Bahorel hid his smirk by downing what was left of his beer. Third bottle.

“Wow, he really doesn’t like me, does he?” Grantaire asked, and Bahorel watched with amusement as his eyes flickered over to where Enjolras was now sitting back where he had been originally, by Combeferre.

Objection! This fucking idiot is wasting breath stating something known by the whole fucking court. “When your graffiti started getting praise from the cultured people, I would have put good cash on Enjolras dying from an aneurism,” Bahorel mused, absently signalling at the barman and swinging his empty beer bottle around lazily. “And last night? Well, man, no offence, but I was looking forwards to watching him deck you.”

That seemed to get the guy’s attention. He was turning on the stool, incredulous. “That guy fights?” he asked, outstretched arm pointing unashamedly at Enjolras. But, luckily for this R guy, Enjolras was now in a relatively calm discussion with Combeferre and Joly. This did mean that Bossuet was on a table by himself, now, but hey. What was life without a few risks.

“Rarely,” Bahorel admitted. “But he’ll knock a guy out, if he feels he has to.”

“If it’ll benefit ‘The Greater Good’?” Grantaire asked scathingly, but Bahorel wasn’t as blind as Enjolras – he caught the amusement that was very, very buried.

“You are not pulling me into this,” Bahorel said, flat out, no arguments. “I’m doing this cos it’s far better than doing nothing, and it’s the next best thing since Fight Club doesn’t exist. That’s it. You want an argument over it, go back to our marble leader over there.”

Grantaire laughed, and Bahorel started to like the guy a bit more. “I thought you weren’t meant to talk about Fight Club?”

Bahorel raised a hand and shoved a V in Grantaire’s face. Grantaire just laughed even harder.

Finally, the barman got to them. Bahorel tapped the rim of his beer bottle, and got another one put in front of him almost immediately. “Jack’s,” Grantaire said, “the bottle’ll do me fine.”

The barman met Bahorel’s gaze, enquiringly, and Bahorel shrugged, because why the fuck not. And, though the poor barman was probably mentally waving goodbye to his job for following this decision through, the bottle still appeared by Grantaire’s hand.

Completely stunned, Bahorel watched as the glass was discarded, and Grantaire took a swig from the whole bottle. “Jesus fuck, R,” Bahorel gasped, more than a bit in awe, “you planning in crawling out of here?”

Grantaire tilted his head as he considered this. Then, he leant on the bar around Bahorel and yelled
Anyone who would happily cockblock a friend, was a friend of Bahorel’s. He calmly turned on his stool a bit, looking over at where Courfeyrac was starting to blush – and now the story behind that was one Bahorel wanted to know – actually, no, no he didn’t – and the poet was looking like a deer in headlights. “Grantaire?” Jehan replied, looking more than a bit scared.

“You know you’re driving tonight, right?”

“Aw, no, but, make Eponine drive-”

“Too late, she’s already smashed the legal limit. You’ve had, what, one lemonade and half a beer?”

The poet sighed out, slumping forwards onto the bar. “Fine.”

Bahorel turned back to face Grantaire, one eyebrow raised. Cheerfully, Grantaire picked up the bottle by its neck. “Yep, crawling out of here sounds about right!” Bahorel’s, well, admiration must have shown in his face, because R just started laughing again. “Hey, I’m already drunk! Can’t imagine another bottle or two making the situation any worse.”

Yeah. This guy could stay.

* * *

“Now, are you actually planning on getting anything done, tonight,” Combeferre mused, as Enjolras slid back into the chair beside him, “or are you just going to keep playing musical chairs with our new artist?”

“You know me,” Enjolras muttered in reply, “I just love those party games.” Combeferre snorted. “But no, we should actually get down to business-”

“-to defeat the Huns-”

Enjolras levelled a glare at him. Combeferre merely smiled back. “With Courfeyrac distracted, I felt I should have the honour,” he said calmly.

He had a point. “At least that’s one good thing that should come of tonight, if Courfeyrac doesn’t balls it up,” Enjolras said, nodding towards where Courfeyrac was, now, damn near to being in Jehan’s lap. “We won’t have to listen to rants about his deprived sex drive.”

“No, we’ll just hear about his wonderfully fulfilling sex life, instead,” Combeferre countered. “If he tries-”

But he was cut short by Combeferre holding up a hand. “Come on, now, Enjolras,” he tutted, shaking his head at Enjolras’ increasingly disbelieving stare, “don’t get distracted. We really should get to business.”

Enjolras waited for a moment, to see if Combeferre was going to excuse his shocking behaviour. “You know,” Enjolras said eventually, “there must be a reason why I’ve put up with you all these years, but I can’t think of it right now.”

“It’s my singing when I’m in the shower, it’s unmatched,” Combeferre reminded him. Enjolras nodded sagely. “Now, do you want to call the court to order, or shall I have that duty tonight?”

Enjolras shrugged, really not too bothered. Understanding perfectly, Combeferre quickly
swallowed the last of his cider before rising to his feet and calling out across the bar, “Ladies, and the occasional gentlemen!” The general chatter around the bar gave way to laughter at Combeferre’s comment, a few good-mannered pokes and jibes following it. “If you all wouldn’t mind, we do have work to get done.”

“Aw, must we?” Courfeyrac called from the bar, drawing another few laughs from the group.

“Yes, shockingly,” Enjolras told him, receiving a stuck-out tongue from Courfeyrac in return. He smiled slightly, shaking his head. Sometimes, Enjolras could swear that Courfeyrac’s birth certificate was out by about ten years. “We did brilliantly last night,” he said, carefully rising to his feet so he could turn, see everyone – some he knew well, but there were a few that only came occasionally, brought by Bahorel from other groups, or just curious. “Not that it was anything special,” he continued, watching with a smirk as a few faces fell before he continued, “just our usual standard.”

Some cheers. Enjolras grinned. “But that doesn’t mean we’re going to rest. We sit here drinking, and there are other people sat in a lot more expensive bars, wearing clothes worth ten times what we’re wearing, destroying their livers using what should be out money. Now, I’d say they’re stealing from us. That should be our money, to spend on our alcohol.” More cheers. “Our education, our healthcare, our living. Now, hey, sure, sit here and get drunk. I’m not going to stop you drinking.”

“Good!” Bahorel yelled, inspiring more good natured laughing. Enjolras smirked and nodded at him (ignoring the artist seat nearby, clutching the whiskey bottle like a lifeboat).

“But, personally,” Enjolras continued after the laughter had died down, “I’d much rather spend the time drinking and plotting ways to fuck up the lives of those suited, stuck up douches who are ruining ours! And I mean, I could probably do it alone...” he smirked – a few chuckles there, Combeferre shaking his head and Bossuet giggling until he fell off his chair, “but does anyone feel like giving me a hand?”

He didn’t mind the silence that followed his words, it didn’t worry him. He waited a few seconds, watching his friends exchange glances, silently deciding who would speak. Eventually, it was Courfeyrac who spoke, sighing heavily and saying, “Well, if you insist.”

“Yeah, we can’t leave all the world-saving to you,” Joly chimed in.

“God knows what terrible things would happen,” Bossuet said, once again close to the edge of his chair and probably seconds away from falling off.

“You’d probably mess everything up in about, oh, a week?” Combeferre agreed, almost smiling. Enjolras almost smiled back.

Shaking his head at the lot of them, giving them all another small thing to chuckle at, Enjolras said, “It’s always nice to hear how committed you all are.” Bahorel cheered and eventually, after a while, the laughter trailed off again. “So yes, we’ve finished one project. Now, we need another, and I think I’m right in saying... Joly?”

The medical intern nodded, clearing his throat and tugging at the open, red plaid shirt as he rose to his feet. He was still wearing it over a green top, which meant either Courfeyrac hadn’t been able to drag him on a shopping trip yet, or he was making an ocularly offensive personal statement. Enjolras suspected the former. “Ah, yes, me,” Joly said, grinning at everyone nervously. “Yeah so, some of you might know, I’m an intern studying medicine at St Bart’s-”
General ‘yeah yeah’s filled the room, and Courfeyrac started waving his hands in a fake attempt to cool himself, saying in a really quite accurate imitation of Joly’s high-pitched panicked tone, “Is it hot in here? It’s not hot in here is it, it think I have a temperature quick someone fetch me a thermometer and can you please play Einaudi when they lower my coffin and will you miss me when I’m gone-”

In Joly’s defence – even though the to-be doctor was laughing with the rest of them – Bossuet yelled a friendly expletive at Courfeyrac, who cheerfully grinned back.

“Yes but anyway, all your disgusting and contaminating habits aside,” Joly pressed on, grinning with undaunted cheer as everyone yelled out at him, “We have a problem. In the NHS.”

“There is always a problem in the NHS,” Bahorel yelled out. “It’s called ‘timekeeping’!” Beside him, the artist snorted into his drink. But he was keeping quiet, Enjolras noted. He wasn’t heckling Joly as he heckled Enjolras, not even muttering under his breath, and for that Enjolras couldn’t help but feel... grateful. Joly, whilst fierce when he needed to be, wasn’t very good at keeping criticism impersonal.

“Yeah, clocks, what are these mythical things?” Joly agreed, a grin away from being completely deadpan. “Sorry, though, mate, that wasn’t what I was referring to. Nah, and you’re not going to like this.”

Courfeyrac leant over and started taking easily breakable things – glasses, bottles, stools – out from Bahorel’s reach. Soon, chuckling, Grantaire had joined in. Even Bossuet pulled the table he and Joly were by a little further away.

“Yeah, yeah, good move, um. Well now. Several of my colleagues – well, superiors, I suppose – have mentioned that the government’s been fucking with the donor list.”

The silence that settled on the room when Joly said that was, quite honestly, scary. And it sent Enjolras’ heart thudding and gave him an irrational desire to smile because these scary guys, in their granddad jumpers and blazers and bowties and waistcoats, these people who were ready to fuck the government’s shit up, were his friends.

“People are still getting transplants, that’s working fine – but they’ve made adjustments to the system. A mate of mine – David, have I mentioned David? – but anyway, he has this patient with serious liver issues, who’s waiting for years. A liver came up, and due to a new government policy, this patient was rejected for another patient who has been waiting for around two months. This new policy they’re introducing is... well, simply, it forces the NHS to do whatever it takes to shrink the waiting list for organs, however they can. This includes de-prioritising long-standing patients for more recent, more easily treated and cheaper ones, but also telling patients they’re too far gone for a transplant to be able to help them, when in truth, they can. The government is fucking with our system because they want to make it look like they’re fixing the NHS! All the government cares about is making digits go down, so it looks like they’re doing something productive. They’ll only care about people suffering when we find a way to empirically measure that, too.”

When Joly finished speaking, breathing fast and fists clenched, silence took over the bar. Eventually, Courfeyrac said, speaking through gritted teeth, “We’ve got to fix that.”

“No shit,” Bahorel replied, looking caught between astonishment and rage. “How? Can we find the people in charge and punch them? Please tell I’ll get to punch them.”

Combeferre started to chew on the tip of his thumb, deep in thought, and everyone turned to look at
him, waiting. “It’s not really something we have the power to change,” he began, and mouths fell open in shock, people almost seeming ready to rise with outrage and shock at this admission, especially coming from Combeferre.

Enjolras just waited for his friend to continue.

“If you would all kindly sit down and listen to the rest of what I was going to say,” Combeferre said calmly, but with an underlying hardness to his tone that inspired obedience. “The thing is, it’s not ours to change. Joly, perhaps. But the people who really should change this, who have the knowledge and therefore the voices to change this...”

“...are the doctors and surgeons,” Enjolras finished for him.

Combeferre tilted his head. “Exactly. If we appeal to the government, they’ll dismiss it as angry students who don’t know what they’re talking about.”

“But if the trained professionals raise the topic, not only will the government have to listen, but the public will also believe what their GPs over their MPs,” Bossuet added, smiling and nodding as he understood.

“So is that what we’ve got to do?” Marius asked, leaning forwards and looking between Enjolras, Combeferre, Courfeyrac, Joly. “We’ve got to rally the medics?”

Joly snorted. “Now, the nurses might be fierce, but I’m not sure you want them rallied. Perhaps... inform them of what’s happening, and they’ll deal with it. They’ve got committees. They all took the oath, they’re not going to be happy to hear the government’s leaving people to suffer.”

“This is a story that belongs to Chaucer, not to the modern media,” said Jehan. Enjolras almost did a double-take, realising that it was the new poet who’d put forwards a view, a supporting view, but Jehan didn’t seem a touch self-conscious; he just looked concerned.

Surprise surprise, to his right, Courfeyrac was looking at the poet with such a look of wonderment that it was a miracle Jehan hadn’t developed a halo.

Chewing the inside of his lip – and it would be bleeding in a few minutes (it always bled), and then Joly would have a fit and try and remember where he’d put the oral antiseptic and not remember and make Bossuet swill with salt water instead – Bossuet tilted his head and mused, “You’ll want someone emailing this to the media, right? Untraceable? Which newspaper? ‘The Guardian’ will eat this up.”

“Do it,” Enjolras said, nodding. “But not tonight. Tomorrow, compose the email with Courfeyrac. This is a new issue,” Enjolras continued, raising his voice and turning back to the whole group. “We can afford to leave it a day before we act, but I’m not going to leave it any longer. One day. Tomorrow, meet back here and I want everyone to have fresh ideas on how we’re going to deal with this. We need to get the message spread.”

“And let’s see if we can try something other than the obvious,” Courfeyrac cut in, his encouraging tone adding to Enjolras’ determination. “I mean, pamphlets are all well and good, but let’s be bold, people! Jazzy and shiny and new!” His eyes were gleaming as he got to the end, and Enjolras could see the ideas forming behind them. Fortunately for everyone involved, Enjolras looked away before Courfeyrac’s eyes darted across to Grantaire, then back to Jehan.

There was a few more seconds silence before Combeferre shuffled on his chair, shifting from formal to slightly slumped and called, “Right, that seems to be it for today, people. Depart, stay, go
buy a suit, I don’t care, but you will no longer be shot for walking through that door. Thank you for your time, and see you all tomorrow!” As a few people made to move, Combeferre leant back in his chair and muttered to Enjolras, “Beer here, beer at home?”

“Home,” Enjolras replied. “I want to do more research on Joly’s problem, and besides, if we stay we’ll just be subject to endless laments by Courfeyrac.”

Combeferre hummed, wordlessly agreeing. “Actually, thinking on it, Courfeyrac has an Education lecture first thing tomorrow I was going to infiltrate... Marius!” Combeferre switched his attention to the bimbo of a brunette, who obediently spun his head from the new girl to peer over his shoulder at Combeferre. “Courfeyrac has a lecture first thing tomorrow – you should probably get him back home some point before it starts, even if just for a change of clothes...”

Marius nodded cheerfully. “Will do!”

“How about now?” Enjolras suggested, trying to keep his tone nonchalant and not exasperated. One love-sick person was bearable, and avoidable. Any more than two was sheer, pure nuisance, that must be disposed of – perhaps he’d allow ‘cured’ in Courfeyrac’s case, he should consider their history together – at their soonest convenience.

Marius probably would have stayed for another drink or so, if Combeferre hadn’t been not-so-subtly checking his watch right in Marius’ eye line. “Yeah, perhaps,” Marius conceded, “I’ll go get him now, get him home.” With that, Marius pushed himself to his feet, brogues slipping a bit on the well-worn wooden floor, before walking over to Courfeyrac and tugging on his sleeve, muttering something.

If Enjolras and Combeferre had been different people, they might have high-fived at their success. As it was, they caught each other’s eyes and nodded proudly.

“I don’t even know why he still comes here,” Enjolras muttered, too tired to be entirely serious.

“Well, I suppose for us to be politically correct, we do need a female quotient.”

“True. And he’s not too bad with computers, I suppose. At least he doesn’t leave them in two pieces...”

“Not to mention, he drives Courfeyrac to his fancy clothes shops so we don’t have to.”

“Mm. I guess we do owe him some civility, then,” Enjolras admitted. He looked sideways across at Combeferre, and when Combeferre caught his eye he let the corner of his mouth curl up.

He was about to ask Combeferre if he was going to move, then, if they were leaving, but instead, the new girl who was still across the table and who, Enjolras had to admit, he’d entirely forgotten about, spoke first. “So – is that it, now, then? You all just... go?”

Enjolras turned and contemplated her for the first time. She was unflinching, even in the face of his stare, and several reliable sources had reported his gaze as intimidating. The clothes she was wearing were practical – good – as was her tied-up hairstyle, but she was still wearing touches of makeup and her nails were painted a pale brown. A few splatters of paint covered her hand, but nothing like the amount of paint over Grantaire’s skin – and that was something Enjolras didn’t even remember noticing. “What was your name?” Enjolras asked, tone as polite as it went for him.

“Eponine Thernadier.”

Full name. Not entirely friendly, then. “Eponine. Yes, now we all just ‘go’. Some people will be
lingering, but considering it’s mid-week I doubt many. Perhaps Bahorel. But we’ve done what we needed to get done so, if that’s all right with you, Eponine, I would like to go home and get some work done.”

She tilted her head ever so slightly as he spoke and he realised, that as he was taking a measure of her, she was doing the exact same thing with him. “You’re Enjolras, right?” she asked suddenly.

“Yes.”

And, slowly, her lips curled into a smile. “Pleasure,” she holding out a hand. He shook it, making sure his grip was firm, the shake short and sharp. Her handshake was exactly the same. “So if everyone is going their separate ways, I’d better round up my own pair of miscreants.”

“You came with the artist?” Enjolras asked. What a stupid question. Of course she had, he knew that.

“And Jehan,” Eponine nodded. “They live in the flat above the shop I work in. And my boss is their landlord. I get a kick out of watching them be socially awkward, and occasionally I return the favour. Any more questions, Commandant?”

Enjolras couldn’t stop blinking at how she’d addressed him, but as he opened his mouth to protest really furiously, she just laughed, winked, waved, and walked towards the bar.

He’s not ashamed to admit he stared after her for a little while, watching as she strode over to Grantaire and poked him hard in the back of the head. Someone that strong-willed was allowed a few minutes of his attention. Beside him, he heard Combeferre whistle low. “Well, now.”

“She’s tough,” Enjolras agreed. “Her, she’s not too bad. Bahorel got a good measure of her, straight off-”

“We do not have a lecture tomorrow morning!” Courfeyrac suddenly yelled across the bar to Combeferre.

Rolling his eyes at Enjolras, who smiled slightly and shook his head to swiftly remove himself from that conversation, Combeferre called back, “Yes, we do. And you know it. Go to bed, Courfeyrac.”

“You’re not my real dad!”

Combeferre raised an eyebrow, looking across to Courfeyrac who had put on his favourite stroppy toddler pout, before saying, totally deadpan, “Your mum and I remember differently.”

Bahorel roared with laughter so fiercely that he fell off his barstool. So did Bossuet, but that was nothing new.

Head bowed low so no one would see his grin, Enjolras chuckled, “Very witty, Mr Morcambe.”

“Why thank you, Mr Wise,” Combeferre replied, smile barely visible. “If you want to head out to the car, get it started, get it warmed up – and god knows in this weather I wouldn’t be surprised if the windscreen had already frozen over.”

Enjolras nodded, sliding his chair back and pushing himself to his feet. “You gonna give the bar keys to someone?”

“Bahorel, probably,” Combeferre said, pulling the car keys out of a pocket and chucking them to
Enjolras, who deftly caught them in one hand. “Won’t be long.”

“No, you won’t.”

“Don’t tempt me.”

“Whatever,” Enjolras said, waving a hand at his flatmate over his shoulder as he head towards the door. He peered towards the bar before he left, nodding to Courfeyrac who sent him a semi-joking salute before turning back to keep bickering with Marius, clearly well aware of Jehan watching the two of them with amusement. Bossuet and Joly were – yes, were arguing over Bossuet’s split lip from where he’d chewed on it earlier. Bahorel raised a glass to Enjolras in farewell, and then Enjolras’ gaze slipped across to the artist – who was looking back at him.

Grantaire smiled tentatively at him. Enjolras couldn’t smile back, not at him. So Grantaire’s face slipped to an expression of cruel amusement, before bowing in his seat and then reaching for his bottle when Enjolras finally turned away from him, and left the pub.

* * *

Combeferre pushed himself to his feet, tossing the Musain’s keys from hand to hand. First, he walked to the coat rack, carefully tying his scarf into place and then slipping on the trench coat. His satchel was hung across his chest.

Right, then. Now.

He went to Courfeyrac first, nudging Marius to the side and physically man-handling Courfeyrac off his chair. As Courfeyrac squeaked a protest, Combeferre hissed into his ear, “Get his number and go home.”

Courfeyrac hissed back, “How do I get his number I can’t get him number it’ll be-”

“Make up your usual bullshit about needing it to keep him informed about future meetings.” Combeferre stepped back, patting Courfeyrac on the shoulder. “Bring your laptop tomorrow,” he said, “we’re gonna need the art programmes you’ve got on there, most probably. By the looks of it, Enjolras is thinking posters again.”

“Posters, in a hospital?” Marius asked.

Combeferre nodded.

“Actually,” Jehan said, and Combeferre noted, just as Enjolras had earlier, that Jehan met his gaze with confidence. “Actually, Courfeyrac had an idea…”

Eyes widening with mock surprise, Combeferre turned to look at Courfeyrac – who did blush. “What a shock!” he said, and Courfeyrac grinned nervously. “That’s fine, that’s good – pass it on to your artist, will you?” he asked, smiling at Jehan. That time, Jehan blinked in shock. “I had the same idea,” Combeferre admitted, and Courfeyrac laughed, knocking their shoulders together. “So yes – your laptop, and your artist,” Combeferre summarised, pointing between Courfeyrac and Jehan.

“I thought blond Apollo was the leader?” Grantaire had come up between Jehan and Eponine,
barely swaying, something quite impressive considering the few dregs left in the bottle of whiskey. Combeferre smiled. “He is,” Combeferre confirmed. “We would have done nothing without him. But, sometimes, he needs someone to look at the smaller picture, i.e., how this grand plan is actually going to happen.”

“Basically, Combeferre’s his butler,” Courfeyrac teased, nudging Combeferre with his shoulder. And here they go again. “I’m not his butler-”

“Oh my god, you really just are-”

“I’m-”

“-are-”

Well, Courfeyrac was owed a few wins. Combeferre sighed. “Very good, sir,” he admitted, smirking, his eyes landing on Eponine who was grinning, apparently catching Combeferre’s reference. “But, I must be going, as our fearless leader is waiting in our very cold car-”

“-cold as his heart-”

“Behave, Courfeyrac,” Combeferre said absently. Courfeyrac grinned again. “Now, thank you for coming,” he said, nodding gentlemanly to Eponine, then Jehan, and finally Grantaire. “And on behalf of all of us, because the rest of our team are brash, rude heathens – may I welcome you to our little group.”

Not entirely unexpectedly, Grantaire snorted. “I’m not entirely sure we’re that welcome,” he said. Amused, not so much by what Grantaire said but by the whole situation, Combeferre gave him one of his rare grins. “And? Now – goodnight.”

There were a few chorused goodbyes, and an ‘adios!’ from Courfeyrac.

Before he headed out the door, Combeferre stopped by Bahorel, dropping the keys on the bar beside him. “Is there a pool open yet?” he muttered.

Bahorel snorted. “Already? Give me a day.”

“Well, I put... twenty, on a fortnight,” Combeferre said, slipping the note onto the bar beside the keys.

“Fortnight?”

Combeferre hummed. “Three beers.”

“What?”

“Enjolras drank from three beers tonight,” Combeferre said, stepping back and pulling his coat tighter, “but didn’t get himself one.” And with that leaving Bahorel thoroughly confused, Combeferre nodded a goodbye and headed out into the cold.

“You took your time,” was Enjolras’ greeting comment when Combeferre slipped into the passenger seat.

“Your life would crumble without me.”
“Debatable.”

“KFC on the way home?”

“Definitely.”

Eventually, after it took more than three minutes for Jehan to get the car keys into the ignition, Eponine made the executive decision to call Feuilly, who then turned up fifteen minutes late with, if not a Starbucks, then at least hot chocolate in a camping flask.

“Let it be known,” he said, leaning over to fling open the passenger door, “that I really, really hate you.”

“Sorry about this,” Eponine said, sliding into the passenger seat and really not sounding all that sorry at all. “What have you done with the shop, closed it for the moment?”

For a moment Feuilly didn’t reply, too busy chuckling at how Jehan was trying to pour Grantaire on the back seat when Jehan would have appreciated Feuilly’s help much more but, hey, he was well aware he would see a pig fly before Feuilly would offer a hand. Eventually, when Jehan had managed to get Grantaire to cave and put on his seatbelt, and Jehan had managed to find his own seatbelt, he heard Feuilly say, “Oh, don’t worry about the shop, your brother’s manning the station.”

Feuilly was going to have to start paying Gavroche soon – weren’t there laws on stuff like that? “My brother?” Eponine asked, and it was amazing she was that shocked, considering how often Gavroche was in charge of the shop whilst Feuilly and Eponine ran off in emergencies, such as the kettle breaking again. “Feuilly, it’s half twelve! What the fuck is my brother still doing awake? Why the fuck haven’t you sent him fucking home?”

“Are you kidding me?” Feuilly yelled back, almost running a red light as he turned to stare, aghast, at Eponine, “I can’t send him to bed! That little kid fucking terrifies me! I send him to bed and I wake up with frogs in my bed, no, no, I am not doing that again – I still don’t know how he got a copy of my damn key.”

Jehan laughed – Feuilly’s fear of the kid under half his age would never not be amusing. Though the mention of Gavroche did cause him groan momentarily – he had to be up and dressed by nine tomorrow – he’d forgotten.

And then Jehan’s mobile buzzed in his pocket.

Confused, he looked across to Grantaire, wondering if it was him – ninety-nine percent of the time, it was. And besides, it was too late from anyone from his classes to be asking about work, nor would it be Feuilly berating him about that poem he’d scrawled onto the checkout that the shopkeeper was yet to find...

His phone buzzed again, second message.

Frowning, Jehan pulled it out of his pocket – unknown number.

Hey! Just checking that this IS the number of a certain Jehan/Jean, poet extraordinaire. If it is – reply! I need your number! If not... how YOU doin? ;)

Second message:
**Oh, this is Courfeyrac, btw. From the cafe.**

Just as Jehan finished reading, his phone buzzed again, and then a fourth time.

_The revolutionary one. That’s plotting the downfall of the Government. Just to separate me from all those other guys who must ask for your numbers in cafes._

_Wow I just said I was planning to take down the Government in a text can they arrest me for that?_

Jehan grinned before he could stop himself. He shot a glance to Grantaire, but he was collapsed against the window, eyes staring out into the night, eyes flinching whenever they passed a streetlight – he was too wrapped up in his thoughts too bother mocking Jehan.

So, quietly as he could, Jehan texted back.

_Probably. Definitely recommend checking your rights with your lawyer-in-training flatmate before the police get there._

The reply was almost instantaneous.

_Aww but to do that I’d have to TALK to him._

_...how long do you think I’ve got?_

Jehan chewed his lip before smiling silently, and replying, _Perhaps until tomorrow. If you’re lucky._

Once again, the reply came within seconds.

_So I might still see you again tomorrow night?_

Grantaire was still staring out of the window, Eponine and Feuilly still bickering in the front. No one was paying any attention to Jehan typing away quietly in the back, but he was starting not to care. Grantaire could mock him all he wanted for this, and he didn’t think he’d care.

_We can always live in hope._

*  

“I’m probably going to regret this,” Eponine said, keeping a firm hold on Gavroche’s collar as they walked from the Corinthe, Feuilly’s art shop, to the poky little flat they’d been sharing since Eponine had been able to take legal custody of Gavroche upon turning 18 two years ago. “But – dude, the fuck’s in the box?”

Gavroche lifted up the small cardboard box to eye line and peered through one of the holes poked into the side. That it had what seemed to be breathing holes wasn’t a good sign. Nor was how Gavroche seemed to have to check what was in it. “A tortoise,” he said eventually. “Here, wanna see him?”

That her kid brother had managed to acquire a tortoise in the twenty minutes he’d been left alone probably should have surprised Eponine more than it did. “Tell me you didn’t just grab that-” she half-begged, half ordered.

“Nah, don’t be stupid,” Gavroche snorted, peering through the air holes again. “I’m pretty sure some cove would notice if I walked into a shop and lifted this little fella out of his tank. Nah, this gent gave him to me.”

“Just... walked into Feuilly’s shop and gave him to you?”
“Yeh.”

“Why?”

Gavroche shrugged. Eponine sighed. “I dunno.” Clearly she still had some sisterly control over him, because he looked up at her with almost scared, big puppy-dog eyes. “I didn’t do anything! Honest! I mean, I think Big Mac might’ve suggested me but I didn’t go *advertising* tortoise housing!”

It kept her awake some nights, knowing that her twelve year old brother knew a man called Big Mac. “Okay, fine,” she sighed, “but now what were you planning on doing with it?”

“I heard they make good soup—”

Eponine shoved him to the side, and he grinned and readjusted his too-big tweed jacket – sleeves safety-pinned into a clump above his elbows – before stepping back up onto the pavement and elbowing Eponine lightly in the stomach.

“*Fine*, we can keep him,” Eponine sighed, and Gavroche cheered.

“Can we go buy him—”

“Tomorrow,” Eponine promised. “We’ve both got work first thing tomorrow, so now, *sleep.**”

There was an earth-shaking moan, but Gavroche made no verbal protests, so Eponine assumed she’d won. Besides, Gavroche was almost vaguely sensible when it came to his ‘work’, if it could be called that. “You gotta name it,” Eponine pointed out, after a while. “Whatcha gonna name it?”

“I was thinking... Soup.”

“...Of course.”

*

It was always nice, Enjolras thought, to share a flat with a faithful, caring, long-time close friend. Always. Always a nice thing.

Even – *even* – when said friend storms into your room at half seven in the morning and throws three books onto your bed before you’re even awake yet.

Because that’s a sign they *care*, right?

“I am going to murder you in your sleep,” Enjolras groaned, rolling face-down into his pillow as Combeferre continued to stomp around his room.

“You wouldn’t be that stupid, you know I booby-trap my room,” Combeferre muttered. “Have I borrowed this one yet?”

Chances were, he was at Enjolras’ bookshelf. Though if he was looking at DVDs, books, or CDs, or even the bloody *ornaments* Enjolras couldn’t tell because he was trying. To *sleep. “What is it?”*

“‘The Globalization Paradox: Why Global Markets, States, and Democracy Can’t Coexist’.”

“Nnngh.”

“Thanks.” More loud, clompy footsteps. “Oh, those’re your books on global law, by the way. Thought you might want them back before the study session this morning.”
“I have a study session this morning?”

“Mm, with Bossuet and Marius, at Bahorel’s. At nine. And you’re the one bringing coffee.”

“Nnggr.”

“You’re welcome. See you later. And stop chewing your pillow, that stopped being cute ten years ago.”

With a sudden burst of energy, Enjolras grabbed the nearest thing to hand – a sock, for some reason – and chucked it at Combeferre, but the bastard had already left the room, the door slamming shut behind him.

Enjolras glared through sleep-stuck eyes at the digital clock at his bedside. Seven thirty-two. He fell face first back onto his pillow.

“Nnuhg.”

*

Jehan shuffled into Grantaire’s room quietly, barely having to look on the floor anymore to avoid the piles of clothes, paints, brushes, pastels, bottles, shoes, lamps, vases... it’d become second nature. He pushed aside some lilies on Grantaire’s table to make space for the glass of water and flask of coffee. He extracted Grantaire’s phone from where it had been shoved under his pillow, and re-set the alarm back to 9am from where Grantaire had tried to put it at 9pm. He then carefully put it just out of Grantaire’s reach.

A curl had fallen over Grantaire’s eyes. Tutting at it, Jehan carefully lifted it and set it back in place behind Grantaire’s ear, before turning and finding a path back into the main room.

His pillow-case from the night before was hanging over the back of the tattered sofa, now covered in careful, cursive script in sharpie. Grantaire would probably understand anyway, but just in case, Jehan pulled his pen from his pocket and grabbed a Post It note, scrawling a note and sticking it to the middle of the fridge, where Grantaire couldn’t miss it.

Satisfied his morning chores were done, Jehan swung his cassette-shaped bag over his shoulder and slipped his headphones into his ear, nudging a few strands of hair out of the way to do so. He grabbed his phone and keys on the way out. For a second, he paused, looking at his phone before decisively sliding it open and texting.

Then, skipping down the stairs and out onto the street, he started humming cheerfully to himself, and proceeded to do so during the whole walk to Covent Garden, where, no doubt, the young taskmaster would be waiting impatiently.

*

“You’re late.”

Enjolras paused to sigh for effect, before closing Bahorel’s front door closed behind him. “Look,” he said authoritatively, “do you want your damn coffees or not?”

A sorrowful lament echoed through from the kitchen. Bahorel was the only one out them all who could afford a flat with a kitchen separate from the main living space, and all without a flatmate, the lucky bastard. Hate being a law associate though he might, he did seem to be relatively good at it.
Hence their almost-weekly invasions of his flat to make him teach them enough about law to get through University.

Thoroughly confused, Enjolras frowned towards the kitchen as he stepped forwards and deposited the coffee carriers on the table. Four pair of hands dived at them, barely avoiding sending them flying over the textbooks strewn across it. The textbooks were even open, which was a shock. “Was that Courfeyrac?” Enjolras asked, jabbing a thumb towards the kitchen from which a second sorrowful lament echoed.

“Mm,” Marius confirmed, choosing to drink coffee rather than give a full explanation.

Thankfully, Joly obliged. “He went in there about twenty minutes ago to make himself some tea. I think he got distracted by his phone again.”

Something wasn’t quite right here. Enjolras stared blandly at Joly, who had his head buried in a medical textbook, until it clicked. “Why are you _here_?” he demanded.

“My fault,” Bossuet claimed, raising a hand and consequently almost dropping his coffee down his front. “Ach – ah, um, he thought I was coming down with – what was it?”

“Salmonella.”

“Yeah – and he both wanted to keep an eye on me and get out of the flat ’cause ‘Chetta was yelling at him for insulting her chicken.”

Enjolras had to admit, that was a better excuse than the one Joly had come up with the previous week. Or the few weeks before that. “And Courfeyrac?”

“His lecture was cancelled,” Bahorel informed him, sounding... well, about as moody as you’d expect him to be, after having Courfeyrac forced onto him without warning.

Oh. Well, Combeferre’s text from about half an hour ago now made more sense: _Tell that gutless cowards he’s not getting my notes this time._

“Combeferre wants me to call you a gutless coward and tell you that you’re not getting his notes this time,” Enjolras yelled to the kitchen, sliding into place on the floor beside Bahorel, back resting against the base of the well-worn red armchair. Joly and Bossuet were sat with their backs leaning against the base of the almost-leather couch, and Marius was sprawled face-down on the carpet, surrounded by a minefield of test papers, sample essays and photocopied textbook pages. Enjolras thought he recognised one of the essays.

“Yes, I will,” Courfeyrac said in a sing-song voice, quite happily skipping back into the living room, mobile grasped in one hand, tea and a pile of biscuits precariously balanced in the other. He was very careful to set the tea safely down on the table beside everyone’s coffees before diving onto the couch. “I shall strike when he least expects it, and, voila! His notes I shall have.”

To his left, Bahorel was miming tying a noose around his neck. Marius was still lying, unresponsive, on the floor. “I don’t get you,” Bossuet mused, tilting his head back to look at where Courfeyrac was lying on the couch behind him. “I mean, you were trying to figure out if you could drown yourself in your tea a second ago, and now you’re all chirpy and speaking Yoda speak. What _gives_?”

“Sell us your secrets!” Joly added.

Now, there was always the hope that Enjolras had misheard – after all, Courfeyrac’s face was half-
buried in a cushion – but it sounded horribly like he’d replied, “He texted back.”

Oh, lords.

Bossuet flailed a bit before declaring to Joly with mock outrage, “You see?! It’s not my fault I’m a moany little shit, it’s clearly yours, for not texting back, you bastard!”

“Oh, and who threw my phone down the sink last week?”

“Now, that was an accident – the time before it wasn’t, but that time it was definitely an accident-”

“So,” Enjolras shouted, slamming his hands down on the coffee table, “what were you all working on, before I so rudely interrupted with coffee?”

Bossuet, Joly and Bahorel all frowned between each other. Marius and Courfeyrac remained comatose. “Um, I think we were trying to decide to decide whether anchor tattoos were worse than infinity tattoos, whilst mocking Courfeyrac over his poet and Marius over the blonde waitress.”

“You were also trying to figure out if Bahorel would have any space on his back for a tattoo of a Greek helmet,” Courfeyrac pointed out, an arm unfolding and waggling with his face still pressed into a polka-dot cushion Bahorel had stolen from a showroom that one time.

Only the three topics of conversation? “And what was the conclusion?” Enjolras asked, relaxing back and resting an arm on a bent leg.

“Think it might fit between the snake/apple curled on my left shoulder and the Aztec god on my lower back.”

“Ah, sounds good. Who’s coming to hold your hand this time?”

“Fuck you.”

“Love you too. Now, care to teach us some theory of law?”

Bossuet’s head landed on the coffee desk with a loud crack that drowned out his groaning. “That had better be your fucking head,” Bahorel growled.

Pouting, Bossuet raised his head. “Nope,” he said, “my pencil.” He prodded the two split halves absently.

Joly chewed the inside of his lip absently. “You know,” he mused, “some people would consider breaking a pencil with their head a talent. With you it’s just more sheer dumb luck.”

“What is it with you and breaking stuff in half, man?”

“I dunno, I’m just glad it wasn’t my arm. Again.” He tilted his head, considering the pencil. “I dunno, that is pretty cool.” He pursed his lips. “I’mma tweet this shit.” And his phone was flicked out from his pocket, camera pointing at the decapitated pencil.

As if on cue, Courfeyrac moaned.

“What now?” Enjolras tried not to snap. Okay, perhaps he didn’t try all that hard.

A second groan preceded his response. “It’s been five minutes since I texted and he hasn’t text back yet...” The final world slipped into a third moan.
Exasperated, Enjolras rolled his head back to look at Bahorel, who exchanged a desperate glance with Joly, who shrugged, but eventually caved under the combined glares of Enjolras and Bahorel.

“Um... he texted you first, right? And... that's a good thing?”

“But he hasn’t texted me back...”

“Huh,” Bossuet said, peering at his phone screen. “Apparently My Chemical Romance split up.”


“Well that sucks,” Joly mused.

With a sudden burst of energy Bahorel surged to his feet, almost upturning a coffee cup but, and quite understandably in Enjolras’ opinion, not caring. “Say it’s not true,” he ordered, eyes wide and a shaking finger pointed at Bossuet.

“No, it’s been confirmed, it’s been tweeted—”

“It’s not true—”

“No, yeah, Bossuet’s telling the truth, there’s a link to their website and everything—”

Bahorel has closed his eyes, biting on his lips to hold back either rage or tears, it was often hard to tell. “And right here, and right now—”

“How?” Enjolras demanded, mouth suddenly deciding it wanted to work. “Why? Why would they do this to us?”

“-all the way in Battery city-”

“Six minutes, and no text, six minutes-”

“Yes why would they do this? Why?”

“Hey, weren’t they said to be working on an album? I remember you two freaking ‘cause there were rumours that they were working on a fifth album—”

“-the little children raised their open and filthy palms-”

“How could they do this to us?”

“Seven minutes, oh god, he must hate me – or not even that, just, just not like me—”

“I’m never going to see her agaaaain...” Apparently Marius was joining in the moaning.

“-like tiny daggers up to heaven-”

“We relied on them and they’re letting us down! Why? How? Why?”

On reflection, it was probably a good idea that Courfeyrac chose that moment to fall off the sofa, because otherwise the moaning could have gone on for a while. Which would have been fair enough, where he and Bahorel were concerned, Enjolras thought, but he would have probably strangled Marius if he’d continued lamenting over his waitress for much longer, and Combeferre had threatened to hide his protein shake powder if he strangled Marius again.
So yes, Courfeyrac falling off the sofa onto Bossuet and Joly, probably a good thing.

“He texted back! He texted back!” Courfeyrac was screeching, limbs flailing and barely missing Bossuet’s vitals. Joly was cowering behind his medical textbook.

Though, Combeferre hadn’t made any rules about strangling Courfeyrac...

Enjolras tugged at Bahorel’s jeans, pulling him back to the floor. They shared a comrade’s nod, understanding in their eyes. Now was not the time. They were surrounded by uncaring bastards who needed minding. A true send-off could be carried out later.

“Holy shit!”

Courfeyrac had now surged to his feet, spinning back and forth with apparent confusion, eyes wide and mouth fallen open.

Everyone waited, enraptured, before Joly eventually said, “...Well?”

“Performer!” Courfeyrac gasped out. “Street performer! He’s in – street performance! Covent Garden! Asked if I’d like to come – Street performer!” And with that he promptly climbed back onto the sofa and draped himself over the back. “Goodbye friends I am goooooneeee...”

There was the common exchanging of glances, where the entire group tried to get someone else to deal with the Courfeyrac issue. Enjolras eventually, again, settled his gaze on Joly again, as he was the most likely to give in first since Marius was, still, face down on the floor.

“Uuhhm... are you gonna... go, then?” Joly suggested tentatively, peering nervously over his shoulder. Which was kind of pointless, seeing how only Courfeyrac’s too-tight navy jeans were visible this side of the sofa.

A squeak, and Courfeyrac somehow pulled himself fully over the back of the sofa, dragged himself onto his feet and started flying around. He kind of turned into a blur – which may have had more to do with how Enjolras wasn’t paying attention to him than his actual speed – but he definitely at one point shoved his face into Bossuet’s, demanding to know how he smelt. Bossuet, being Bossuet, told him he smelled like a meringue, which caused a few more minutes’ panic.

Eventually, with his usual cotton blazer on inside out and keys shoved into his back pocket by Joly as he’d dashed by, Courfeyrac yelled a ‘hello’ and left the flat.

“...I think he meant ‘bye’?” Bossuet asked, looking round to check with everyone.

“It’s a possibility,” Enjolras sighed. “Now, is it possible we can get some work done?”

Bossuet chewed his lip guiltily. Joly ducked his head further into his medical book. Marius actually moved, raising his head and slamming a hand on a textbook to drag it closer and into view.

Good. They could actually be productive for once.

Then, Bahorel asked, “Actually, I might get a Roman helmet. They had all those red ruffles, right?”

Quickly, clearly expecting Enjolras to cut the conversation short if they didn’t speak fast enough, Joly chimed in, “But for that you’d need somewhere with more space-”

And thus, the topic of law and studies was dismissed once again.

Enjolras reluctantly let them get on with it, reserving his own opinion that choosing a roman
helmet over a tattoo of the traditional Greek helmet was a fucking stupid thing to do.

*

Grantaire finally fell out of bed at the grand, early time of ten a.m.

And that crack was either a plate or a rib, but he was still too asleep to care.

He’d downed the paracetamol Jehan had left on autopilot, the instant his alarm had woken him, so his head was only its usual slightly throbbing self, nothing he can’t deal with. But he can’t even think of touching the coffee left there without scrubbing at the inside of his mouth with a loofah and Listerine, so he crawled his way to the bathroom to deal with that, because if he didn’t get caffeine into his system he’d be unconscious again in T-minus ten minutes.

Thirty minutes later, he made it out of his room and into the kitchen/lounge, smothering a yawn with one hand and buttoning up his jeans with the other. Thinking there was probably some pizza left over from yesterday’s lunch, he staggered over to the fridge. A fluorescent pink Post It note glare at him. He glared back until Jehan’s scribbles deciphered themselves. Then he tugged it off, shoved it in his pocket, didn’t bother looking over to where he knew the writing-covered pillowcase would be, prioritising pizza over that.

True enough, there were two slices left. Grantaire grabbed both.

His wallet was on the floor by the microwave, for some reason, but he found it eventually. Keys were harder, having slid behind the TV.

Brain starting to kick in, he stumbled over to the calligraphied linen, holding it up – not bothering to try and read it, he’d need far more caffeine before that was even possible – and tried to measure up how much fabric paint he’d need to trace all that, if he had enough or –

Nope. Need to buy in more. Or ‘borrow’ from Feuilly’s stores, which seemed more likely.

But, as always, waffles were of a higher priority than logic, so Grantaire dropped the pillowcase for now, slipped into his Vans, and remembered to grab his jacket before he left.

Half way to Covent Garden he remembered that, even after spending the time to find the keys, he’d then gone and left them beside the pillow case. Ah well. Joly would have some. Or Feuilly, as chances were he was the market.

He yelled a general expletive to Eponine as he left through the shop, and she swore cheerfully back, adding an order to make sure her brother ate something green.

Yeah, considering the food options in Covent Garden... not going to happen.

He chose not listen to music on the walk to the market, deciding instead to eavesdrop on the general populace. That way, you heard fascinating stories, like a guy who’d knocked over his girlfriend’s mother’s ashes only to hoover them up. And besides, ten minutes strolling, and he could already see the crowd.

He elbowed his way through like a champ, the general smell of whiskey that hovered – oh, yeah, this was the jacket he’d spilt Jack down a few days ago – tended to move the mothers and young children aside, and the guys could be budged with an ‘accidental’ hand too close to their upper thigh. And soon enough, he’d got through to the central ring, and had perfect view of the street performer, perched on a high stool and singing random snippets at the top of his lungs as he performed his tricks.
“Now the moon is risen high, into the forest let us fly, said Charlot to Charlotte-”

Said performer was too busy to spare a nod in Grantaire’s direction, juggling what seemed to be his top-hat, a cutlass, and a loaf of bread, and with a member of the audience looking terrified but thoroughly prepared to throw a macaroon into the mix as well when ordered, but as Grantaire watched, Gavroche caught his eye, and that was enough to show that he’d been seen.

Jehan was sat on a stool a few meters behind Gavroche, still within the circle of the audience, but so buried into his notebook and so dwarfed by his coat and scarf and hair that he clearly didn’t seem worth noticing. He’d long ago mastered the art of being invisible. So had Grantaire, who managed to slip around to the circle to crouch down beside his friend. “How’s it going?”

He was ignored for a few seconds as Jehan finished whatever it was he was writing. “Mm, same as ever,” Jehan muttered, brushing his loose braid back so he could see more than just the notebook in his lap. “The audience is wrapped around his little finger, as ever.”

Obviously. The kid had charisma that Alexander the Great would lust over. “And no sign of our dear detective inspector?” Grantaire asked in a low voice. The people near them were cheering too loudly for anything they said to be overheard, but Grantaire knew he’d be lynched if Gavroche thought he’d drawn people’s attention from him for more than a second.

“None,” came the reassuring response. “I think he took Valjean’s words to heart, this time. Should give us a few days of freedom, at least.”

“Everybody bless our landlord,” Grantaire muttered under his breath. Technically – well, legally, let’s be honest – Gavroche was still four years too young to be allowed to perform on the street. So for the first few sessions, they’d applied for the patch under Jehan’s name. Jehan would audition, use those acting skills he’d developed from all those clubs he’d used to attend through high school up through sixth form, and then would pull up a chair, sit back and work on his poetry whilst Gavroche took control of the street. But, of course, the authorities had found out. Grantaire didn’t know the details – it had been Jehan, Gavroche’s legal guardian Eponine and Feuilly in businessman-mode that had worked it all out.

And it had all been worked out. It turned out that the man in charge of who was given a license to perform in Covent Garden and who wasn’t, was a fan of everyone’s favourite (male) Thernadier. And so, when police Detective Inspector Javert had dragged the culprits in by their ears, dear old Valjean had looked at the paperwork, declared it all in order, and had turned a blind eye. And then, when Javert had persisted over the years, Valjean had gone from a blind eye to a protective, raised voice.

A year into Gavroche’s performances and it was too late, anyway. They’d gone from being the streets, to Gavroche’s streets, and if Valjean so much as attempted an eviction, most of the market’s performers, stall-holders and even some of the shop-owners would be up in arms. It was a pretty tight-knit family, around there.

“Right,” Grantaire muttered, using Jehan’s knee to push himself to his feet, “I’ll see you later.”

“Off to get breakfast?” Jehan asked absently.

“Yup. And locate Feuilly. It looks like we’re going to need more fabric paint...”

“I just – it was late, I had an idea, I couldn’t find my notepad, and it came out really well-”

“You already have about five pillowcases and a whole fucking duvet I’ve painted the words onto in...”
your room somewhere—"

“Then what’s the harm in having one more?”

Jehan was using the puppy dog eyes. Damn him and his puppy dog eyes. “Fucking fine, whatever. I demand payment. When the money from that next pamphlet comes in—”

“I don’t get all that much from having poetry pamphlets published, you know that—”

“Then pay me in booze!”

“Shhhh!”

Apparently, the crowd around them was getting antsy. Better get going. Grantaire made to move, but Jehan grabbed his arm and muttered, “Look, if you see Courfeyrac wondering around, point him this way?”

Grantaire stared at him. “You invited him here?”

Jehan smiled cutely and used the puppy-dog eyes again.

Scowling and sighing, Grantaire flicked at the hair falling out of Jehan’s braid as an affirmation, before pushing his way out through the crowd. One last look over his shoulder showed him that Gavroche had moved on from juggling and had started, whilst nattering away and keeping the audience laughing, to pull out a can opener.

The audience was going to go nuts. Best get out of the way, for his eardrum’s sake. Besides, he’d watched the little guy practise this act. Not quite so impressive when you were the one who had to take him to hospital the first seven failed attempts.

He made it about seven steps away before he was faced with a severe problem. Frantic, he pulled out his phone.

Waffles or cupcake?

Jehan replied instantly. Waffles. Also, Feuilly was chatting by the artist stall outside Laduree, last I knew.

Two problems solved. Laduree was... vaguely on his way, anyway.

And yep, sure enough, there Feuilly was, either arguing or gossiping with the artist there. And though this guy was familiar, had used Feuilly’s little backroom gallery to display work from time to time, for the life of him Grantaire couldn’t remember his name, just that he made his own good, thick, bright, fucking expensive paints. No doubt what Feuilly was trying to get his hands on.

Sidling past a group of teenagers trying on jewellery made out of cutlery, Grantaire waved his hand to get Feuilly’s attention.

The artist saw him first. “Oh, yeah, sure, bringing in the guy I actually like, that’s not cheating—”

Grantaire grinned. Feuilly scowled. “Ah, you like me?” Grantaire asked, still completely unable to remember the guy’s name. “Good to know! Is my horrid landlord trying to steal from you again?”

“Damn near,” the artist agreed, laughing.

Feuilly crossed his arms and spun to face Grantaire. Grantaire determinedly did not quiver. “Why
are you here.”

Grantaire mentally translated that as *get out in under ten seconds and no bones shall be broken.*

“Uhm, just came to say that we need more fabric paint-”

“You mean the fabric paint you said you’d fill out the order form for a week ago?” Feuilly asked. Grantaire started to count his exits. “Along with the order forms for the twelve-pack oil pastels, ten square inch canvases and the super superglue? *That* fabric paint?”

If Grantaire headed straight down the middle, he could lose Feuilly in the crowd. “Er, no?”

Slowly, jaw clenched, Feuilly raised an eyebrow.

Back ing up seemed like the sensible option right now. “I’m going to go get a waffle, and then I’ll fill out the forms,” Grantaire promised, carefully putting one foot behind the other. Then, leaning around Feuilly a touch, he said to the artist (who was grinning like it was Christmas), “I’d just give him what he wants for free, if I were you,” hissing the words as if Feuilly wasn’t under a meter away and could hear everything they said. “He seems in a pretty bad mood.”

Then, following all safety instincts, he turned and ran, the artist’s – *Benjamin,* his bloody name was *Benjamin* – laughter following him through the crowds.

The red stall of the waffle shop – well, in truth, it was the extension of the damn good cafe behind it but the connoisseurs only ever went to the stall for their waffles – was a beacon of glory to Grantaire’s eyes. Just as he joined the queue, his phone buzzed.

*Fucking hate you.*

Laughing, Grantaire replied, *And how much of a discount did you get?*

...*not the fucking point. You still need to fill out those fucking forms.*

Yeah, he probably should, actually.

As he stared randomly into the distance, waiting for the queue to move, something caught his eye...

Well, in truth, it caught his eye because it was a person moving in the bumbling, not quite sure what they’re looking for but they’ll have a good look anyway movement that signified a person new to the area, and it was always fun watching them make about ten circuits of the area before they managed to figure out where they were going, but, after a few seconds staring, the guy started to look familiar.

So Grantaire kept staring in the hope that eventually he’d realise where he knew the guy from.

It was only when the guy then spotted *him,* grinned with relief and started to move towards him that he realised. Loverboy. Of course.

Oh good *gods* someone get him alcohol and get him alcohol *now.*

“Don’t talk to me whilst I’m ordering waffles,” Grantaire stated simply as Courfeyrac came up beside him, before turning to the waitress on duty.

“Oh... kay?” Courfeyrac said, before continuing as Grantaire hadn’t said anything. “I was all but ready to give up, I’ve been wandering around here for... I don’t even know, I’ve lost count.”

Really, now? Must he? “*Dude,*” Grantaire cut in, appalled, gesturing at the stall from which the
sweet scent of the soon-to-be-his waffles was wafting from. “Waffles.”

“Which I’m sure will be made all the more fabulous by my presence,” Courfeyrac said, a statement which he wouldn’t have got away with if he hadn’t been grinning widely as he spoke.

Waffle, served. The world was suddenly a much brighter place. Grantaire grabbed the proffered syrup bottle and slathered on a decent amount. Not too much. He was going to be healthy today.

“Will you be wanting any waffle with your syrup, sir?” Courfeyrac asked, still grinning, arm now in place across his waist like a waiter. When Grantaire swore at him, using his middle finger as his tongue and teeth were too preoccupied with devouring his breakfast, Courfeyrac only laughed.

“Don’t sass me, child,” Grantaire tried to growl, but growling is hard when your lips are stuck together with syrup.

“I will sass whomever I desire, as is my prerogative of being the youngest,” Courfeyrac thoroughly sassed back. Chewing the inside of his cheeks so not to smile, Grantaire shook his head in despair. Courfeyrac’s smile faltered slightly, a confused frown taking place as he checked, “Wait, how old are you?”

“Isn’t that a rude question to ask a lady?”

“Sorry, ma’am,” Courfeyrac replied without missing a beat, also falling into step beside Grantaire worryingly easily, as Grantaire multitasked, both eating and walking through the crowd. “No but really, what are you, 23? You’re an artist, yeah?”

“22, and an art student,” Grantaire grudgingly admitted.

“Phew, because I like being the youngest too much-”

“Jehan’s 21 as of one month,” Grantaire cut in. “Sincerest apologies.”

Once again, he bit the inside of his cheek to stop from smirking as Courfeyrac groaned. “Aww, I really wish I could hate him for that but I really can’t,” he moaned, slumping and feet dragging for a few steps. “And shit but I think I just admitted a stupid puppy-dog crush to the best friend... am I over-sharing? I’ve been told I over-share.”

“You do, but your babbling’s drowning out those damn toddlers over there so keep going.”

“And drown out the wondrous sound of children playing? Hell no, I’m gonna steal some of your waffle instead.”

He was even given a warning, and yet, Courfeyrac somehow managed to pick an unfairly sized chunk of waffle and drop it into his mouth before Grantaire could even raise an arm in self defence.

“What – no – dude.”

“Oh my god that is lush!” Grantaire did not need to hear those noises coming from Courfeyrac’s mouth (even though it was becoming worryingly likely that he’d be hearing them through his bedroom walls some point soon). “Gods, I need more of that shit!”

“You don’t often come to Covent Garden, do you?”

Courfeyrac winced. “Is it that obvious?” Grantaire hummed an affirmation. “I live right next to Borough Market, it just makes more sense to go there... wait, where exactly are you walking to?”
“Where do you think?”

“Madam Tussauds?”

This time, chewing on the inside of his cheek didn’t work, and Grantaire found himself grinning. “You know, you being funny is really inconsiderate.”

“Sincerest apologies.”

“I mean, I’ve promised myself I’m going to hate you revolutionary little shits.”

“I will bear that in mind in future when witty retorts spring to mind.”

“Thank you.”

Courfeyrac laughed, and it wasn’t even a sarcastic little chuckle, but a full, open and honest laugh. It kind of left you feeling you could drape your arm around the guy’s shoulders and he’d just poke your ribs and steal some more of your food, all still grinning. Damn him.

Finally, they pushed past a gaggle of Asian tourists and Grantaire once found himself at the edge of Gavroche’s enraptured crowd. The kid himself was barely audible, this far out, but there was laughter so it was presumably going out.

Quickly, having experienced first-hand what a distract crowd could do to an unsuspecting waffle on an open plate, Grantaire shovelled a huge chunk of his breakfast into his mouth and shoved the rest at Courfeyrac, who absently took it and started chewing. “C’mon, eat up Goldilocks.”

“What, I’m not even blonde—”

Too late. Grantaire grabbed his arm and pushed Courfeyrac in front of him, using the poor kid almost as a snow-plough for the crowd. “Ack – eek – sorry, sorry ’scuse me – ah what are you doing?”

But, merciless as ever, Grantaire kept pushing until they’d broken through to the front of the crowd. “There,” he said, flopping his hand forwards as he squeezed through to stand beside Courfeyrac. “That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

Gavroche was – actually, at a single glance it was hard to tell what Gavroche was doing, but he was managing to make a random man look like an idiot without, somehow, embarrassing him, and everyone was laughing and having a good time so Gavroche would have a few notes in his top hat at the end of it all. As per usual.

But, of course, Courfeyrac wasn’t looking at Gavroche, but at Jehan, still sat on his stool, buried in his books and hidden behind his hair. “Yeah,” Courfeyrac breathed, “yeah, that’s... why I’m here.”

Grantaire waited a few seconds to see if Courfeyrac was going to edge around the circle and actually say hello, possibly, but no. So, sighing, Grantaire pulled his phone out of his pocket and sent a quick text.

Look up, Prufrock.

And sure enough, a few seconds later Jehan was raising his head and shoving loose strands of his hair behind his ear, scanning the crowd. His face split into a smile when he finally saw Grantaire. Well, no, he never smiled like that for Grantaire. He usually only smiled like that when he bought himself a new hundred-year-old book of poetry.
Beside him, Courfeyrac waved awkwardly. Not sure whether to laugh or groan, Grantaire lifted a hand to block his face from Courfeyrac’s view, and made sure to catch Jehan’s eyes before rolling his eyes. He got a tongue stuck out at him for his trouble, before Jehan started to pack the notebooks he had stacked on his lap back away into his bag.

“It’s looking like that’s my cue to leave,” Grantaire muttered, turning to Courfeyrac. The guy wasn’t looking at him. Grantaire tilted his head expectantly, but no, the guy was still too focused on ogling Jehan. Eventually, Grantaire poked him sharply, which made the Courfeyrac yelp but also got his attention so hey. “No doubt the two of you are going to be disgustingly happy together and all that, using up all my maple syrup and stealing the couch and I will try my hardest not to hate you for it.”

Courfeyrac started to wince in a way Grantaire was finding remarkably satisfying. “You’re going to threaten me, aren’t you?”

“Well, no,” Grantaire confessed. “I mean, Feuilly and I – that’s a our landlord, by the way – we box at least twice a week, and Eponine, you met Eponine, she kick boxes and she grew up on the street, and I’ve no doubt that little kid over there has seven of the street’s finest warriors at his beck and call, everyone’s wrapped around that kid’s little finger but anyway, that’s all beside the point.”

“And, um, what is the point?” Courfeyrac asked, looking severely concerned.

Grantaire stuck a finger out towards Jehan. “The point is, our very own Keats has been taking classes in this scary shit called krav maga since he was three. No, I don’t know what the fuck that is either, but I do know the last guy to try and make a ‘move’ on Jehan ended up in hospital with... some trauma, I don’t know how much, I lost count. You hurt him? You won’t have to worry about how good a boxer I am. You fuck up and you’ll be facing him. Savvy?”

Before answering, Courfeyrac looked across to Jehan. “Savvy,” he said, nodding. “Very, very savvy. Thanks for the... warning, I guess? But...”

At that, Grantaire willingly smiled. “But you think it’s worth the risk?” he finished.

Courfeyrac smiled then, too. “Yeah,” he said. “Yeah, I really do.”

“Then I shall get going before the love in the air asphyxiates me,” Grantaire decided, just as a soft ‘Hi’ behind him declared Jehan’s arrival. He turned and raised his eyebrows as a kind of hello and excused himself with, “Got forms to fill out.”

He didn’t say anything else, nor give the other two give any time to say anything (as if they could take their eyes off each other long enough to spare a word for him), instead turned and headed back home, quite content that his role of best friend had been sufficiently filled, and firmly of the opinion of drinking until he could paint something that was neither red, nor black, nor had a blonde halo of hair.

* *

Combeferre got back from his – well, technically not his, but the professor hadn’t complained about (read: noticed) his appearances yet – education lecture at around midday, his writing pad wonderfully full of new notes which Courfeyrac was not having.

Enjolras and Bahorel were sat on the sofa, which wasn’t unusual. Both were in tracksuit trousers, with Enjolras wearing a vest and Bahorel his usual band top with the sleeves torn off, which meant they’d probably spent the morning in the gym, after the study session had ended, probably
spending most of their time in the boxing ring. This, too, wasn’t unusual.

The *vaguely* unusual thing was how they were sitting in silence with beers in their hands and music playing loud enough to hurt from the speakers. But Combeferre didn’t comment, just took off his satchel, hung up his coat, and turned the volume down as he passed the CD player.

Almost immediately, someone whimpered.

Now *that*, was *very* unusual. Curious, Combeferre turned back around and an eyebrow at Enjolras. Bahorel was too focused with trying to bury his head into his beer to look up.

Enjolras looked back at him with weary eyes, and said, “They broke up.”

Combeferre considered this for a second. Then, he strode to the fridge, grabbed a beer from it, and whacked the volume back up again on his way to the couch.

He slid into place beside Enjolras just in time to join them in yelling out the chorus to ‘SING’.

*

When Jehan finally slipped back into the flat, the sun was only about an hour away from setting, and he was grinning like a fucking idiot.

“How’s his dick?” Grantaire drawled, setting his paintbrush down momentarily to pour Jehan a general libation from the bottle of gin Grantaire had currently substituted water for. “Is it nice and comfy? Were you sat on it long?”

The ickle poet was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to even notice how coarse Grantaire was being until he’d taken the drink and tried to drink it like it was water. Or at least, from how he was spluttering, Grantaire assumed that Jehan hadn’t been downing it like that and expecting it to burn his throat so much. “Wh – *what?* No! No, I wasn’t – we didn’t – we didn’t do anything. Really.” When Grantaire raised a disbelieving eyebrow, Jehan glared at him, and set the (now half-empty – splutter though he might have, he’d still managed to down a fair amount) glass on the table. “*Really. We... talked.*”

“And made out like teenagers?” Grantaire suggested, taking the glass back. Just because Jehan didn’t want it...

Jehan was blushing, now. “We didn’t even do *that,*” he admitted quietly, almost causing Grantaire to splutter on the gin himself. “Really. We just talked. He stayed to the end of Gavroche’s set, and we all got sandwiches from the cafe, we let Gavroche go and do whatever it is he does on his own, and we... walked and talked?”

“Huh.” Jesus, this really was a thing, wasn’t it? The last few ‘crushes’ Jehan had been through, he’d got into their pants within a week, left them within a month. And he hadn’t even kissed Courfeyrac yet... “Christ, did you even hold *hands*?”

“No,” Jehan admitted, sounding the smallest bit disappointed. He slowly walked over to Grantaire, looking at the easel, and Grantaire let him. “We... well, I told him about my poetry.”

“Oh, yeah,” Grantaire said, something coming to mind quickly, “your ‘Ghost Heart’ pamphlet arrived in the post today. Available for sale at all good poetry shops, now. That’s the fifth; you really should start looking at publishing an actual *book*, I bet there’re publishers out there who’d *love* to publish your stuff.”
Jehan just hummed. “That looks like...”

“The philosophy guy from last night,” Grantaire confirmed, fingers smudging the navy-blue of the scarf. “He was the only one I remembered well enough.”

“Are you hoping that if you paint more than one of them, it won’t look like you’re becoming fixated?” Jehan asked, stepping back and moving towards the now discarded cluster of canvases leaning against the wall beside Grantaire’s bedroom door.

“Fuck you,” Grantaire said cheerfully. “No – last night, they gave me an idea. The lot, the group, all carefully positioned around the cafe, like a display.”

“So you’ve made them your project?”

Jehan was really making it sound creepier than it actually was. “They’re – look, if you wanted to, you could find all of humanity in that cafe last night, all the, the bright aspects of humanity. I just think that’d make a good series of paintings, okay?”

“Mm-hm,” Jehan muttered, lifting up two of the canvases and brandishing at Grantaire the unfinished painting of Enjolras. “Sure. They were the brightest-”

“Oh shut up, I just couldn’t... get him right, okay?” Grantaire protested, irritation starting to take over. He grabbed for the neck of the gin bottle, cursing as he almost knocked it from the table. “Look – I like all of them. That atmosphere is bright, and colourful, and I wish everything was like that. But it’s not, it’s only a small part of the world and yes, I want to make an exhibition showing how they’re contrasted against the true grim reality that is the rest of the world. Nor will I deny that, that one is the one that captivates me the most. I would paint him over and fucking over, if I thought it was humanly possible to capture his passion with paint.”

“Then don’t use paint,” Jehan suggested.

“If you even try to mock me-”

“I’m not going to,” Jehan assured him quickly and calmly, smiling, and a hand settled between Grantaire’s shoulder blades. “After all,” Jehan said with a sigh, and a teasing quick tap over Grantaire’s shoulder blades that made him want to tickle the poet until he was squealing, “I’m the one with a whole notebook filled with poems to a man I met two nights ago.”

Grantaire whistled. He couldn’t quite get the shadow of the glasses right – he didn’t want to show the face, just get the outline of the glasses, it didn’t look right - “You’ve filled a whole notebook, now?”

“Yep.”

“There’s your poetry book, then.”

“Or not.” Jehan had pulled out his phone. “Oh, you coming to the meeting this evening? Apparently not much is going to happen – apparently it’s all very relaxed, until the evening before an event – but Courfeyrac said there might be a few debates?”

What did Grantaire care what happened? He knew who’d be there. “Of course. Do we have time to order pizza before we go?”

“Well, people are meant to start gathering at about 7...”
“What time is it now?”

“Quarter to... 7?”

With an internal moan, Grantaire wiped his hand on his jeans, smudging a marbled white and grey down the side. He didn’t think there was more than a few centimetres of these jeans that weren’t covered in paint, anymore. The painting still wasn’t quite right – he looked more like a serial killer than a philosopher – but he’d have to dwell on it, and fix it later. “Fine, fine – we can pick up Dominoes on the way.”

“We’re picking up Eponine, too. Not for eating. I don’t think.”

“Oh. Good.”

“Good that we’re picking her up, or good that we’re not eating her?”

“God, you really are a gothic little soul inside, aren’t you... Both. I... think?”

*

The door opened to reveal Combeferre’s exasperated face.

“Aw, I love you too,” Courfeyrac told him, grinning, before reaching up and pushing Combeferre’s nose lightly.

“Why are you here,” Combeferre demanded.

Combeferre loved him really. Courfeyrac had the drunk texts to prove it. And Bossuet had the drunk kiss picture on his phone, just in case exhibit A wasn’t enough. “Enjolras has my cardigan? I think?”

He was subject to another few moments of scrutiny before Combeferre stepped back and let him in. “You’re not getting my notes.”

“Aw but-”

“No.”

“If I-”

“Here, Courfeyrac, have an exclusive – the answer will always be no.”

Courfeyrac grinned. “Fine, fine. I respect your elder wisdom.” As Combeferre as grabbed his coat from where it was hanging on the back of the door, Courfeyrac grabbed his cardigan from where Enjolras had set it on the coffee table. “Going somewhere?”

“Yes,” Combeferre said. “Musain. We have a meeting in fifteen minutes.”

“No, we don’t, Mr A,” Courfeyrac tutted. “The meeting is at seven.”

In answer, Combeferre just pointed at the carriage clock resting on the top of his and Enjolras’ TV set. And, true enough, it was showing quarter to seven.

“What – but – it was early afternoon not half an hour ago!” Courfeyrac yelled, really, really not understanding. “I was – it was – what?”
“No one’s broken the laws of physics, if that’s what you’re thinking,” Combeferre informed him dryly. “I know, because I watched each hour go by, on the nice, big, noisy clock in the library. How about you Courfeyrac?”

Feeling dreadfully caught out – and his friends were all really unfair to him, sometimes, they really were – Courfeyrac bit his lips. Combeferre rolled his eyes and smirked. “Oh, um, Jehan and Grantaire are coming again tonight,” Courfeyrac said casually, hoping for a change of topic.

He should have known better. Combeferre had more cunning than that. “Oh, so were you with both of them the whole day, or just Jehan?” Combeferre asked with complete and utter innocence.

“...just Jehan,” Courfeyrac admitted, not quite reluctantly. All it took was for Combeferre to smile at him, just that little bit, and Courfeyrac was grinning again. There was, as there always was, a silent exchange between them in those two smiles. *I’m happy for you, and, so am I.*

“Did you hear that, Enjolras?” Combeferre called suddenly, turning and looking over his shoulder towards Enjolras’ room. “He’s coming back again tonight. Your *favourite.*”

“Grantaire,” Courfeyrac added.

Combeferre gave him a look. “Trust me, he would have know who I was talking about.”

When Enjolras didn’t reply with his usual prompt, witty retort, Courfeyrac looked back to Combeferre and frowned. Frowning himself, Combeferre called out again, “Enjolras?”

Still nothing. And that wasn’t right.

“Enjolras, c’mon buddy, we gotta get going or we’ll be late!” Courfeyrac called.

And, finally, Enjolras emerged. He didn’t have his shoes on yet, his hair was mussed from running his hands through it and he looked shocked. He was holding his mobile carefully in his hands, as if it might break, and he wasn’t looking at either of them.

Within seconds, Combeferre and Courfeyrac were at his side, Combeferre slowly taking his phone from him. Neither asked, just waited.

“Lamarque’s dead,” Enjolras said, and Courfeyrac groaned, letting his head fall to rest against Enjolras’ shoulder.

“How?” Combeferre asked quietly, and there was more than curiosity in his tone, there was disbelief.

“Stroke,” Enjolras muttered. “He had – he had a stroke, and he died, on the way to the hospital, and they couldn’t wake him up. He’s dead. He died. He’s... he’s dead.”

* 

“Can you *not* move-”

“Can you *not* pour whiskey on my face, please?” Bahorel bit back, causing Joly to flick the edge of the cut and making Bahorel flinch again.

“The quicker I-”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve been through this before,” Bahorel muttered, eyes not even twitching as Joly’s fingers worked away on the cut across Bahorel’s left temple.
Grantaire couldn’t hide it – he was impressed. “So, this a bi-weekly thing, or more an every other day occurrence?” he asked, leaning back and smirking as Bahorel swore at Joly again, who hmphed and just pressed another whiskey-sodden wad of a napkin to the bleeding cut.

Bahorel snorted. “Please. As if I could keep my job if I went into work every day with cuts all over my face. I manage to keep it to once a month.”

“No. It’s just clever enough not to get the cuts on his face, most nights.”

“He likes to claim he’s keeping Joly in practise,” Marius added, laughing.

“But he seems to forget that I get enough practise all day,” Joly growled.

“Hey, no one’s fucking asking you to—”

Joly flicked the red skin again. Bahorel swore even louder.

Stunned, and starting to think he could fit in here, Grantaire turned to where Jehan and Eponine were surveying the whole scene from their barstools. Jehan was smiling, Eponine outright laughing. “We so have to get Feuilly in here,” she crowed, close to falling off her stool with laughter. “Oh my god, you two would get on like a house on fire.”

“I’m worried a house would actually catch on fire if they met,” Jehan added, chuckling. “Just spontaneously combust under the explosive weight of the collective fury.”

Bahorel was looking between the three of them, confused. “Fewy?” he said.

Sometimes, the way people pronounced Feuilly’s name just made Grantaire’s life. “Feuilly, yeah. Landlord, redhead, Scottish in all but nationality. Is exasperated 90% of the time, and raging the other 10.”

Bahorel tilted his head. Joly slapped him again, and dipped the napkin in more whiskey. “Sounds like fun. Yeah, you should bring him, too.”

“And a fire extinguisher,” Jehan promised.

Bossueet laughed. “Oh, don’t worry about that. There’s always two under the bar since the Pork Pie Incident.”

At the mention of the pork-pie incident, Marius winced, Joly whimpered, and Grantaire got to see Bahorel laugh for the first time. “Do we... want to know about the Pork Pie incident?” he asked, hesitantly.

Joly sighed, setting down the napkin and sliding back in his chair. “No one wants to know about the Pork Pie Incident.”

“Then I won’t ask.”

Bahorel almost seemed disappointed, as he grunted, and reached up to poke at the cut. Joly slapped his hand away fiercely. “Well, are you at least done wasting whiskey?” Bahorel demanded.

“Yes, I am done ‘wasting’ whiskey.”

“So can I have it back?” Grantaire checked. Getting the clear from Joly, he reached across the table and grabbed it by its neck. “Cheers!”
“Plaster!” Joly demanded, sticking out a hand.

“Plaster!” Bossuet replied, pulling one out of his pocket and slapping it into Joly’s outstretched palm. With all the precision of his profession, he stripped the paper from it and not-so-carefully slapped it into place.

“Jesus fu-weren’t you meant to have taken a bloody oath, or something?” Bahorel yelled, jumping back and causing his chair to slide back a few feet.

“I picked glass out of it and disinfected your cut, and you’re afraid of a little bruise a firmly applied plaster might give,” Joly translated, grinning – but still sliding out of the reach of Bahorel’s legs. “So manly.”

“Fuck you,” Bahorel said. He reached over to grab the whiskey bottle, and Grantaire let him do it quite happily.

“The application of plasters is abhorrent to the true man,” Grantaire declared solemnly, and Bahorel cheered and raised the bottle a bit. “For the application of a pink strip of fabric over a gaping bleeding wound of battle sucks out the soul of the cave-man.”

“Hear, hear!” Bahorel cried.

Marius tried to echo that.

“Shut up, Marius,” about five people chorused. Grantaire almost fell off his chair laughing.

“What do pink flowery plasters make you, then, Grantaire?” Jehan called from the bar.

Obediently, because he was an awesome best friend, Grantaire chanted out, “The most badass flowery badass to have ever prettily badassed, Jehan.” He tilted his head back over his chair, looking upside-down at Jehan, who raised his glass in thanks.

“I have SpongeBob Square Pants plasters,” Bossuet mused, eyes staring off into the distance. Bahorel and Grantaire laughed, and Joly slapped Bossuet up the back of the head.

“They’re cartoon network, ones, you fool!” Joly told him strictly, pouting with a disappointed fury. “You just make me always use the SpongeBob ones-”

“Because he’s awesome, he not only lives in a pineapple, but that pineapple is under the sea-”

“Yo, look sharp!” Bahorel called out sharply, eyes fixed on one of the windows of the cafe. “Spotted: one fearless leader and his two lieutenants.”

And yet, no one moved. “About fucking time,” Bossuet muttered, checking his watch. “Only half an hour late.”

“That not normal?” Grantaire asked. He let himself stare out of the window, at the blonde hair just about visible through the black evening, even though he knew that as soon as that door opened, he’d be looking down at the table top and drinking until he had an excuse to go to the bar. That is, until his tongue got away from him again...

“Courfeyrac? Not unheard of. But this is the first time Combeferre and Enjolras have ever been this late,” Bahorel muttered back.

Then the door swung open, and Grantaire’s eyes lingered on Enjolras for a second, before flinching
straight to the circular stain on the table.

“Evening, gents!” Bahorel was calling out, his chair scraping the floor as he tipped it onto the back two legs. “Nice to see you!”

“’Fraid we can’t say the same!” Courfeyrac replied, all sing-song. Grantaire waited for them to split, for Courfeyrac to take the empty stool beside Jehan, for Combeferre to possibly come say hello and for the marble, untouchable leader to do anything but talk to him, but that didn’t happen. He watched from the corner of his eye as the three of them took the table next to the one he and the four others were squashed around.

Everyone was waiting for Enjolras to speak, you could feel it. Just an expectation, something that always happened.

“So, what wonders of human consciousness have we missed with our unapologetically tardy behaviour?” Combeferre asked, smiling politely.

Grantaire looked at Enjolras. He didn’t meant to, he just... And Enjolras was looking at the table, eyes empty of anything but fury. Worried, Grantaire looked away. Somehow, he didn’t feel like he should be looking at Enjolras. Whatever rage he was dealing with, it looked private.

“Oh, nothing major,” Bossuet sighed, leaning back and putting his hands behind his head. Grantaire hadn’t known him all that long, but even he could tell that the looks Joly and Bahorel were exchanging held the knowledge that at some point in the not-too-distant future, that chair Bossuet was in was going to go toppling backwards. “Bahorel got his face cut open, Joly’s oath doesn’t stop him from using unnecessary force in the application of plasters, plasters remove your cave-manliness but flowery plasters make you badass, and yet, SpongeBob plasters apparently just make pre-pubescent.”

Grantaire raised his bottle. “A wonderful summary, nice and succinct.”

Bossuet tilted his head. “Why thank you.” And then lost balance and fell off his chair. With a weary sigh, Joly offered a hand, which Bossuet meekly accepted and used to clamber back onto his chair.

“How are you this clumsy?” Grantaire asked, genuinely curious. “Is that even scientifically possible?”

“Apparently?”

“The question of Bossuet’s severely misplace centre of balance has been covered already.”

Enjolras had spoken, finally, and the bar fell silent. But Enjolras still wasn’t looking up from the table, and now, in addition to his eyes seeming to burn, his hands were clenched on the edge of the table. “I really think we’d be better spending our time discussing the multiple issues with how the world is.”

And just like that – like he was one of Pavlov’s fucking dogs – Grantaire was talking. “Bit of a wide topic, that,” he mused, his mouth curling into a smirk. “Want to be a bit more specific?”

He didn’t get a response. As if he hadn’t spoken, Enjolras continued, “Joly, Courfeyrac spoke to me about an idea he had, posters to put around hospitals – nothing risky, just a cartoon or something, raising the issue.”

Joly nodded. “Yeah, sure I can get it spread from that.”
Enjolras nodded, and fell silent again. Grantaire watched, not quite sure what was wrong – there was something wrong here, there had to be – as Combeferre rested a hand on Enjolras’ back, before leaning across to mutter something to Courfeyrac. Only half-smiling, Courfeyrac nodded and got to his feet, heading to the bar. Combeferre muttered something to Enjolras. Grantaire didn’t know what, couldn’t read his lips, but whatever it was must have had some effect. One deep breath, a nod, and Enjolras was sitting straight, if the fury not quite gone, then at least, not quite desperate. There was a calmer set to the way he held himself, firm and sure. Grantaire hadn’t realised how broken Enjolras had noticed until he saw this contrast. Or then, perhaps it was because this man, this leader was still as strong as any of them mortals when in some, if unidentified pain.

Realising what he was thinking, Grantaire laughed at himself, shaking his head. This is what happened, when you spent too many years with an up-and-coming modern era romantic poet as a best friend.

“Something funny?” Enjolras asked, voice low, and there was a warning in his voice.

Or was that challenge?

“No, my liege,” Grantaire apologised, raising his bottle in salute.

“Good.”

Definitely challenge.

“I heard something that might be of note,” Bahorel said, quite casually cutting into the tension and sliding even further down into his chair – also reaching up to poke the plaster, but a glare from Joly halted his hand – “not sure, thought I should raise it with the teacher two amongst us – something about the Department of Education fucking with the teacher’s pay again?”

Not quite sure yet who the teacher two were, Grantaire followed everyone else’s gaze, first to Combeferre, then Courfeyrac.

Courfeyrac was, finally, sat at the bar beside Jehan, but whilst Jehan was watching him, Courfeyrac’s eyes seemed fixed on Enjolras as he waited for the barman to get their drinks. To anyone else, Jehan’s smile would just look tired, and perhaps understandably, considering it was the end of the day. But Grantaire was grateful when Eponine nudged his back, a careful reminder that she and Grantaire were still there.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Combeferre drawled, smirking, apparently, at Bahorel’s questions. “The NUT is most definitely on that issue. And, as we’ve seen before, I don’t think they need our help.”

“Yeah, it’s kinda funny, actually,” Bossuet cut in, dozily grinning. “Of all the Unions, the teacher’s one is probably the scariest of them all.”

“And what is so funny about that?” Courfeyrac asked, returning to his chair with the drinks, and, going from how Jehan was now holding an almost-empty glass, without a second glance to the poet. “We teaching lot are some bad-ass bitches!”

“You’re not a teacher yet, Courf,” Marius pointed out.

“Yet’ being the operative word there,” Courfeyrac said cheerily, but his good humour wasn’t reaching his eyes. “So yeah, we don’t need to help the teachers. They’ve got it covered.”

“What about the shuffling of power in the NHS?” Combeferre asked, looking at Joly.
Joly snorted. “You think most of us want to stop that from passing? They’re giving the power of choice to GPs. We can now say what gets funding rather than the government. Nah – aside from their little dallying into our donor list – oh, and the omnipresent fear of being dissolved entirely, whilst we’re under a conservative government – the NHS is fine.”

“Aren’t they closing a kid’s hospital in Leeds?” Grantaire asked, his grin feeling like it wasn’t quite fitting his face. “Or is that too far away?”

“Nah, we got guys up there, they’re working on it,” Bahorel told him, smirking proudly, one hand wrapped around a beer, the other resting on his shirt. Yeah, it had blood splatters on it. They matched the waistcoat he was wearing.

“You have ‘guys up there’?” Eponine echoed, leaning forwards and eyes wide and hugely incredulous.

Rightly so, going by Enjolras’ glower at Bahorel. Bahorel just grinned back innocently, which Grantaire was learning to take with a pinch of suspicion. “We don’t have ‘guys’, “ Enjolras gritted out. “There are people up there working on it, but they’re not ‘our’ guys, just guys that Bahorel knows.”

“He seems to know everyone who’s willing to throw a punch for a vaguely decent cause,” Bossuet explained to Grantaire in a not-so-hushed whisper. Grantaire’s eyes widened in dramatic understanding, still grinning, still wishing he wasn’t.

At the bar, Eponine was buying Jehan another drink, and trying to get him to laugh. When Bossuet got to his feet – Joly holding out a hand, just in case – and went to go chat to the two as he bought a drink, Grantaire was silently grateful. Jehan could be the most sociable person Grantaire knew, but if something made him hurt, he could curl into himself and not come out for days. When he did, he came out kicking – but he shouldn’t have to go through those days in the first place.

“Forget Leeds,” Enjolras said, in a tone that left no room for questions.

And that was a tone Grantaire could never resist.

“There’s something else I think we could start working on,” Enjolras continued. “Some time this year, immigration of Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants is going to rise dramatically. The tabloids have taken this, and shat all over it. I don’t know who they possibly think they’re helping, but the public have reached the stage where they hear the word ‘immigration’ and start boarding up their windows. The media has concocted this illusion that immigration will somehow lead to the collapse of British society. I mean, hell, it’s true, it wouldn’t take much, the Tories have put us right on the edge of collapse, but immigration won’t be the thing that breaks us. Immigration, contrary to urban myths, will help our economy.

“Now, in truth, it doesn’t matter what the public think. This is all sorted, the government is letting the immigrants in and it’ll be beneficial, no matter what your social classes think. The important people, those who could change it know it’s right, so that’s not at risk. However, the media’s stirring of fear is stirring up issues that should have been set to rest a long time ago. They’re rebuilding pack mentality – us and them. And the ‘us’ they speak of is the hard-working British populace. Namely, anyone who has a nice house, nice job, and is white.

“With the immigration will come racism. That is inevitable, it always happens. We just have to try and stop it before it does. Protests won’t work, you can’t protest about a state of mind, but I want this to get out there.”
“Role reversal,” Bossuet suggested. “Like – what were those posters we did when the whole equal pay for women thing went wild again, those ironic posters, the pop-art style ones? With the men in the dresses and stuff?”

“We could have more pop-art posters, colour changes, half and half,” Joly added, taking the idea and continuing it. “I mean, the posters don’t have to be all that poignant – just get them out there, the internet’ll pick them up and develop the idea for us.”

“A resurgence in popularity of *Noughts and Crosses* couldn’t go amiss,” Combeferre added quietly. “Spread a few rumours they’re starting a movie and everyone will be re-reading it.”

Everyone was deep in thought, considering this, considering how to start a war on racism, as if it hadn’t already been going for decades! “Wow,” Grantaire laughed, looking around at them all, stunned, “when you said you wanted to target the ‘issues of how the world is’, you really weren’t joking, were you?”

With that, he was once against the focus of everyone’s attention – even Enjolras’. “Problem?” he asked, in that same tone that was so close to going from warning to challenging.

“Well, not a *problem*,” Grantaire explained, slouching as far he could whilst still able to easily pour whiskey into his mouth. “I mean, just the slight difficulty of you trying to cure racism. Bit of a big challenge on your hands, but hey, I’m sure you can deal with that, right?”

The only sound after he’d finished speaking was Bahorel letting out a low whistle.

And Enjolras wasn’t looking like someone in trouble anymore. He’d got to his feet as he’d made his speech, and was now looking down on Grantaire with disdain, pity, amusement, with none of the lost desperation and fury he’d had before, “Racism can’t be cured. There are 7 billion people on this earth, a number growing every year. Anyone who thinks they can erase every drop of hate from 7 billion minds is a fool. Everyone cannot be nice, or we would have achieved Utopia. As long as there is greed, jealousy, wrath, sloth, and the rest, people will need scapegoats and will be choosing the easy way to find them. To ‘cure’ racism is unrealistic. But what *can* be done is remind society that it is a vice, an abhorrent side to human nature, and *not* an easy option.”

“And yet,” Grantaire said, raising a finger, “you claim to be able to be able to fight misogyny in the workplace, yes? Was that not what you were doing, when I first ran into you and your merry gang?” - *And was that really two nights ago?* – “So why’s racism so different? It’s a learnt behaviour, is it not? Developed from observing role models, watching them getting rewarded by squashing the easily targeted beneath them as they rise to the top. What’s stopping you from fixing it, if it’s learnt? After all, all learnt behaviour can be unlearnt, right?”

“Use the sex example!” Courfeyrac suddenly yelled, grinning, causing Grantaire to blink in shock.

If Enjolras was going to be talking at length about sex, he didn’t think he’d be able to stop his self-control flying out the window.

He wasn’t the only one who looked uncomfortable. Enjolras was fiddling with his jacket cuffs as he said, “You get people who will find sexual activities embarrassing. They won’t talk about them – will enjoy them – but would never consider talking about them. They like it vanilla. On the other end of the spectrum you will find BDSM. They do not like vanilla. They like sex, and take it to extreme lengths. Both of these sexual types exist in the world, complete contrasts, and whilst one is accepted by society, and other only spoken of is hushed tones, both always *will* exist in the world. I mean, the analogy works just as well with food – there will always be people who like Brussel sprouts, no matter how much bad press you get, but you *can* get Brussel sprouts removed from
most menus. I just find the sexual analogy sticks in people’s minds more,” Enjolras concluded with a wry grin.

The letters BDSM had come out of Enjolras’ mouth. He was never going to forget this.

But to the argument, Grantaire raised his bottle in salute. “Ah, good,” he said, setting the bottle down and pushing himself to his feet. “So you agree, racism will never be gone from our little blue and green world. So answer me this, Apollo – why do you think you can remove other faults from it?”

He could almost hear Enjolras grinding his teeth. “Excuse me?”

“You said it yourself, as long as there’s sin, people will need a scapegoat,” Grantaire reminded him, chewing on his lips and waving a finger about in mock confusion. “And yet, you think you can stop misogyny – I bet you think you can stop homophobia, too?”

“Homophobia is born from confusion and misconceptions,” Enjolras said, fists clenched and everyone could tell he’d be yelling if he could, that he wants to be exchanging fists, not words. All that does is make Grantaire step closer. “The older generation being brought up to believe it was a disease that had to be treated with electric shocks, but those misconceptions are being destroyed, one lie at a time! And when all those lies are gone – and they will be – people will realise there is nothing to be confused about, no reason to fear and their anger will grow out of the generations. You can already see it, the younger generations are so much less homophobic than the older ones! Over time, homophobia will die out, will be, will be looked down upon as much as premarital sex is frowned upon nowadays. Not that long ago it was illegal to marry a person of colour, and look at the world now. Homophobia is a dying disease!”

Grantaire couldn’t think of a better response to that, than laughter. “‘Leaving the younger generations’?!” he repeated, completely incredulous, “Are you kidding? Have you seen the bullying that goes in school? Sure, you’ll find the odd ‘Will and Grace’, and the drama guys never give a shit but that doesn’t mean it’s easy! If they think you’re gay, they will rip you to shreds! The younger generation is pissed, and they’re channelling that anger into all the wrong places. If you think they are what’re going to come to your rescue, rise and create this perfect, hate-free world you’re lusting after, then you’re wrong.” Enjolras was shaking with fury, face tight and lined and Grantaire could do nothing but shake his head and smile wryly. “They’re not going to rise up and help you. You’re fighting a war you can’t win.”

He didn’t know what he expected after that. A punch, most likely. Gods, he even found himself tilting his head up, waiting for the blow to land.

“Get out,” Enjolras breathed through his teeth.

It wasn’t a blow, but the breath left Grantaire’s body all the same. “What?” he asked, stunned.

“We’re done. Your views disgust me, and you don’t belong here. Get out. Now.”

Each word was perfectly enunciated, leaving Grantaire in no doubt. But then, of course. What else would have happened. As if Enjolras would want such a cynic around. “Sure,” Grantaire said, eventually, reluctantly. “Yeah, I’ll be right out of your hair.”

He didn’t move.

Jesus, he couldn’t. His heart wasn’t beating but shaking, and he could barely breathe. He felt as if he moved from where he was, he’d fall, collapse, disintegrate.
It didn’t matter, though. Enjolras would shove him, probably. Deck him like he’d wanted to most of the evening.

But he didn’t. Enjolras didn’t move either, just stood there, within reaching distance, fuming and breathing heavily and glaring at him. Grantaire almost wanted to apologise – sorry, I don’t mean to stay here and have my face offend you, but I can’t seem to leave your presence...

Then, with a low hiss of rage, Enjolras turned away. Within seconds, he was at the far end of the bar, alone.

And a hand was on his back pushing him forwards and as he moved he could breathe again, and other people were talking in low voices. “C’mon, let’s go,” Jehan was muttering into his ear.

“Drinking, been drinking – car-”

“I’ve already called Feuilly,” Jehan told him, voice still low and words being spoken straight into his ear as he was being steered towards the door. “I called him when it started to look like I’d be carrying your bloody body from the room... Eponine’s saying the polite goodbyes. I’ll go see if Feuilly’s here yet, don’t want to wait outside, it’s cold...”

And he was gone, and Grantaire was drifting again, until Courfeyrac set a hand on his shoulder. “Thanks,” he said, and if that didn’t make it all the worse.

“No problem,” Grantaire muttered. But what are you thanking me for?

“He needed something to fight for,” Combeferre explained, quietly, his lips curved into a sad smile. “He’s... We got some bad news.”

“Oh.” He still didn’t understand. He couldn’t understand anything... but that he needed to get drunk. Very, very drunk.

*

It turned out, Feuilly was outside. Seconds – or minutes, or whatever later, Eponine, Feuilly, Jehan, himself, they were all in the car and getting further and further from those fucking revolutionaries...

“We’re going out,” Grantaire said, less of an option, more of an announcement of a group decision. “We’re going to go out, and get plastered.”

Eponine whooped. Feuilly, of course, asked if he was sure.

“I,” Grantaire drawled, letting his head fall back against the headrest, “just got told I disgust the man who’s quite swiftly becoming a focus of my worship. Jehan got spurned by his new true love, who chose to pamper his best friend instead, and Eponine is slowly coming to the realisation that her crush is hopelessly in love with a petite curvaceous blonde and will never be hers.”

Feuilly took a few minutes to consider this, before saying, quite contentedly, “Fuck it,” and doing a U turn in the middle of the road.

Within ten minutes, they were walking into a nightclub.

And the next thing Grantaire knew, he was waking up in a bed he didn’t know, next to a girl he didn’t recognise to a view he’d never seen before, with his phone buzzing and head throbbing with a combination of pain and regret that was achingly familiar.
krav maga is a thing. Really. Youtube it. Scary as fuck.
Also, I'm trying to use genuine issues that are around at the moment. But I'm a
philosophy and psychology student, not a politician! So anything I argue will have a
lot more Kant and a lot less Cameron.
There is an issue with the teachers, but really, the teachers' unions are definitely on
that shit. The donor list thing was a while ago, and the NHS threw a fit and got that
fixed. The more power to the GPs thing IS happening, as is the closing of the
pediatric's ward or some such in Leeds. They're in the news at the moments.
However, I don't think that anything's being done to fix the NHS' timing issues. Sadly.
I shall try and be quicker with the next update. But gods know how many more scenes
will try and fit their way into that, so we'll see!

If you have any tips, any pointers, any LOVE, please leave it in a comment! I
TH 盛ive off comments!
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I know I've made any readers that I've still got left wait a LONG while, and I'm sorry. I can make excuses like exams etc, but... it kinda got out of hand, in length. First, I cut down where I was going to end this chapter, THEN it was recommended by my beta that I cut what I HAD written in half, which I have...

So THANK YOU, any people who are still reading this! This does mean that the next chapter is already written, will be up in probably two weeks to make the waiting for chapter 5 even shorter...

I'm just really sorry for how long this has gone on for... really, the amount of rambling I do when writing this, I swear my all-suffering beta wrote 'unecessary' on it more times than I wrote all the characters' names put together. It's ridiculous. And I'd definitely say that I'm writing this for myself, so it's not so tightly written as it'd be as if I were writing it for publication or anything.

Basically, all the love to my beta, LucentPetrichor, without whom this whole thing would be shite, and all the love to YOU, for continuing to read this, even though it's been forever.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes skill, falling out of a bed you don’t know without waking the person who is also in it and who you also don’t know. Thankfully, this was a skill which Grantaire had had occasion to master over the years.

He spared one glance over his shoulder as he scooped up clothing – shoving his legs into his boxers quickly and damned near silently – looking due to curiosity more than anything else. All he could make out was a tangled mess of blonde hair.

Of fucking course.

Leaving her room with boxers, one half of his jeans on and t-shirt on quite possibly back to front, Grantaire found himself in quite a decent open-plan living spaced, all white and clean and shiny and not at all like the paint and sharpie covered mess that was the shoebox apartment he and Jehan shared.

None of this was worrying. The worrying thing was how Eponine was scooping the contents of her handbag up from the kitchen counter, hair piled in a messy knot on top of her head and bra casually hanging over one arm.

Starting to panic, Grantaire stopped in his tracks and gaped at her.

“Oh shut your mouth,” Eponine hissed, “she had a flatmate.”

Relief flooded through him. “Oh thank fuck”, Grantaire breathed, shoving his other foot into his jeans as he hopped forwards. “Had me thinking-”
“No matter how drunk you get, I am never letting that happen again,” Eponine said sharply, finally chucking her bra into the depthless handbag and with her free hand shoving two white pills into his hand. Mumbling his eternal love for her, he shoved them into his mouth and swallowed them dry.

“Feuilly and Jehan aren’t hiding away with other flatmates, by any chance?” Grantaire hissed, looking around and seeing his jacket draped over the back of the sofa. He stumbled over to it.

Eponine shook her head. “Nope. Not a clue where either of them are.”

“We should probably get on that.”

“Yeah, we probably should. Get out first, though?”

“Yep.” Walking speedily but silently, Grantaire and Eponine vacated the flat – Grantaire grabbing Eponine’s heels from the floor and chucking them at her whilst shoving his feet into his well-abused Vans, and both of them wincing as they shut the door that bit too loudly.

“Please please please don’t be on the wrong side of London—”

“Please be near a tube station—”

“I’m not going on the fucking tube!”

“Why not?”

“I’m not wearing a bra!”

“Neither am I!”

“Yes, but that doesn’t matter so much for you, really, does it—”

Their hissing match stopped when they got down the stairs and out into a too fucking cold London morning.

And there, in all its battered glory, was Feuilly’s Honda. Eponine almost started crying, yelling a glorious “halle-fucking-luiah,” to high heaven. Grantaire, fingers and toes crossed, made his way cautiously to the driver’s door. Slowly, as if moving slowly would give the god he didn’t believe in more time to change things in his favour, he opened the car door. It was open. Then, hardly daring to believe his luck, he reached down and pulled the keys out from the ignition, holding them up for Eponine to see.

Her mouth fell open. “They were in the ignition?”

Grantaire nodded.

“Let’s never tell Feuilly that little fact.”

“Yeah, no, let’s not do that.” Almost laughing with hysteria, Grantaire slid into the driver’s seat, slotting the keys back into the ignition. The sound of the car purring into life was more beautiful than it had ever been before. “Ohhhh you beauty—”

Eponine seemed determined to think of worse things. “If this is Feuilly’s car,” she said, speaking and quite possibly thinking slowly – and oh gods, the dash was reading half seven a.m. – “Then... where’s Feuilly?”

This was a worrying thought. “If he’s in a dumpster again we’re going to get creamed,” Grantaire
muttered, yelping as he almost pulled out in front of a particularly vicious looking white van. “Text him. Text him, now.”

He focused on the road – or tried too, as the painkillers hadn’t quite kicked in yet and the marching band in his head was claiming a fair amount of attention – as Eponine frantically typed away on her phone.

A few roads down, vaguely starting to figure out where the hell he was and proud of himself for not crashing yet, Grantaire felt something vaguely disconcerting in his pants. “Uhm,” he said carefully, “Either I’ve stolen a pet hamster, or my phone’s vibrating.”

“Let’s hope for the latter,” Eponine muttered. “He’s not texting back...”

“He never texts back, now check my phone, it might be Jehan-”

“Your phone is in your jeans pocket-”

“And?”

With a heavily reluctant and grossed-out moan, Eponine slid two fingers into Grantaire’s pocket to lever out his phone. “Yep, Jehan,” she confirmed.

“So we at least know he’s alive. What’s he said?”

“I dunno, he left a voicemail.”

“So what’s he said?”

Eponine was squawking, waving around his phone as she protested, “I hardly know how to get to the voicemail on my phone, let alone yours!”

She was going to let go of his phone and it was going to go flying into the back, or the front window, and smash something vital, Grantaire could just tell. “Look, can you – just – put my fucking phone down! Look, I’ll drop you off – I think – think we’re near yours, and then you can hunt for Feuilly, and I’ll deal with Jehan. Okay?”

“Okay!” Eponine yelled.

That sorted, they both breathed out deeply. “Did you at least call up the boyfriend and dump him?” Grantaire asked, eyes flicking from the road momentarily to gauge Eponine’s reaction. Bad move. Almost ran a red light.

Eponine’s eyes widened comically, and she was suddenly frantically digging at her bag for her phone again. A few desperate swipes of the screen later, and she breathed out. “Yes. Technically.”

“Technically?”

“Well I sent the message but it’s not necessarily legible.”

A few moments consideration, and Grantaire eventually declared, “That counts.”

“Thank fuck.”

They were, in fact, near Eponine’s. Grantaire pulled right up to the front of her block of flats, waiting and watching as she dashed the few meters to get to the front door. And, as much as it was tempting to follow her just to hear what would surely be perfect comments on her apparel by
Gavroche, Grantaire instead elected to pick up his phone and dialled his voicemail. Sure enough, Jehan’s voice started whispering to him.

“Hey, um, so I guess you’re not awake yet – or are awake, and just not near your phone or don’t know where your phone is – or you could be somewhere without cell reception, I guess? Well, never-mind, I’ll try home phone as well, but anyway, call me if you get this. As soon as you get this. Help. I think I need rescuing. Oh no no, not like that – from my own stupidity, I mean. I’ve been an idiot again…”

Groaning, Grantaire slammed his head onto the steering wheel, jumping and swearing when it triggered the horn. The fuck had Jehan done, the fuck, the fuck... He kept muttering a furious mantra under his breath as he dialled Jehan’s number from memory, changing to tapping a half-panicked, half-furious beat onto his knee as the phone rang, and rang...

And Jehan finally picked up. “Grantaire, oh thank god…”

“What have you done?” Grantaire asked. The pause before Jehan answered wasn’t promising.

“Um. Well nothing. I don’t think, I mean, I can’t remember.”

“...you don’t know where you are, do you?”

“No, no, that, that I do know…”

Grantaire could see the punch line coming. He could see it, but he asked anyway. “Go on, then. Tell me where you are.”

“I’m... at Courfeyrac’s?”

* 

Twenty minutes later and he was pulling up by a decent looking block of flats not far from Blackfriars’ station, a dejected Jehan waiting for him on the corner a little way down, looking terribly like a flower-patterned lost puppy.

As his best mate was looking like he couldn’t operate so much as a door handle, Grantaire leaned over to open the car door for him, packet of Ibuprofen already waiting on the passenger seat. “Tell me everything whilst we run for it,” Grantaire ordered as Jehan slid into place.

“I can’t remember,” Jehan moaned, the words slurred around the two pills he was trying to swallow dry. “Oh, gods, why do I ever think going drinking with you and fucking Eponine is a good idea…”

“I don’t know, ask Feuilly,” Grantaire muttered, looking around to check for traffic.

“Where’d he end up?”

“We don’t know yet. I think Eponine’s working on it.”

“We’re did you end up?”

“In some blonde chick’s bed. No, I don’t know if she had blue eyes. Quite possibly.” Jehan almost laughed, but Grantaire cut him off sharply with, “Shut up, you woke up in Courfeyrac’s flat. In his... bed?”

“No,” Jehan moaned, and it was really hard to tell if that was a lament or just a general expression of pain and embarrassment. “His sofa.”
“Fully clothed?”

“Except for shoes and jacket.”

“Could be worse,” Grantaire mused, giving up on coming up with a coherent argument for why Jehan shouldn’t worry. Thinking and driving seemed too complicated right then. Bits of the world were still spinning. “Could be worse.”

“I ran out before he woke up.”

“Could... still be much worse,” Grantaire said. “Worse has happened.” Jehan groaned, and whacked his head against the dashboard. “Fuck,” Grantaire said suddenly, eyes falling wide, and suddenly swinging the car into a parking space, probably about six cars down from where he’d picked his roommate up from.

Jehan’s back snapped straight, staring at Grantaire with sheer terror. “What? What?”

“We ran out of coffee. I forgot to buy coffee.”

Grantaire got a few second’s peace as Jehan continued to hyperventilate, before Jehan started attacking him with the shoes he, for some incomprehensible reason, wasn’t wearing. “I thought something was seriously wrong, you complete tosser-”

“Something is seriously wrong, we don’t have coffee,” Grantaire pointed out, using vehement hand gestures to get his point across. “And did you seriously run out of the flat before you’d even put your shoes on?”

Lips pursed defiantly, but still blushing in deep, deep shame, Jehan said, “So?”

Why did this even surprise him. Shaking his head, Grantaire said, “So nothing. Look, there was a damn Costa just back there, let’s, just, go get coffee ‘cause fuck but I need coffee right now-”

“But home, safe, away from here-”

“Right the fuck now – or you will not have a driver, I will be asleep in the back seat and you will not have anyone to drive you and you’ll have to walk across London on your own.” And with a definite air of ‘so there’, Grantaire stopped talking, and crossed his arms.

One last deathly groan, one last head-slam against the dashboard – and it was a damn good job none of the airbags worked in the wreck of a car – and Jehan finally conceded. “Fine, fine. let’s get some fucking coffee. But I am going to get a gingerbread latte and lemon and poppy seed muffin and you are not going to mock me for it.”

“Fine, fine.”

“In fact, you’re going to pay for it.”

“Don’t push your fucking luck.”

It still took a few more minutes before Jehan would get back out of the car. And still carrying his shoes, for some reason.

“You might as well put them on,” Grantaire pointed out, amused, as he locked the car. Manually. That was how old the thing was. Bless it, their own little miracle wagon.

Jehan looked confused for a second, before looking down at first his bare feet on the pavement,
then the flowery plimsolls hanging from his fingers. “Oh – um, I’ll do it when we get sat down.”

“'Get sat down'?” Grantaire repeated, leading the way across the road to the Costa. “What even is with that phrasing, it’s not like it’s a passive action, we choose to sit down, we move ourselves – the idea of ‘getting’ sat down gives this image of little waiters coming forwards and bending our limbs for us.”

“Are you still drunk?”

Grantaire gave the question some consideration, reaching the door to the cafe as he did so. “I don’t think so,” he mused, opening said door and grinning back at Jehan.

Who was standing stock-still, staring past Grantaire.

“What?” Grantaire asked, frowning but continuing to move into the cafe, and in doing so turning to come face to face with Enjolras and Courfeyrac, who were leaving the cafe. “What?” Grantaire repeated, voice a little higher, eyes a little wider.

Enjolras and Courfeyrac were blocking his front exist. Jehan was still standing behind him, shaking, and blocking his back exit. All Grantaire could do was stand, in that doorway, waiting, as Enjolras’ eyes slid down from his Vans (neither of them on properly yet) up to his hair (and if the state of the rest of his clothing wasn’t enough, the thoroughly fucked-over mess of his normal pretty manic hair would have been enough to confirm how Grantaire had spent his night).

Grantaire gulped. “Um.”

Thankfully, some godsend of a group of bleached-blonde girls in Uggs came pushing up to the doorway, causing Grantaire, Jehan, Enjolras and Courfeyrac, all by default, to shuffle and apologise and get out of the way by heading inside. Together. As one unified clump. All four of them, now standing together, by the window.

“Um,” Grantaire said again, one hand rising to attempt to flatten his hair.

“I got called in to comfort a friend who thought he’d lost a one-night tenant,” Enjolras finally explained, breaking the silence.

Grantaire mouthed a silent ‘oh’, before realising that if he didn’t speak next, no one would. Courfeyrac and Jehan certainly didn’t seem capable of doing anything but gawping. “I got called in to rescue a friend who thought he’d been an unwanted one-night tenant,” Grantaire said. “Apparently... unwanted was not the case?”

“Apparently,” Enjolras echoed wryly, with a short, sharp smile. “Now,” he said, turning to look at Courfeyrac with a stern expression, “If I’m not needed…”

Silently and like a ninja, Courfeyrac’s hand shot out and wrapped around Enjolras’ wrist. Grantaire could tell from the whiteness of the knuckles that that was a grip Enjolras wasn’t getting out of quickly.

He watched with some amusement as Enjolras turned his gaze to high heaven, before gritting teeth and looking back to Courfeyrac. “I don’t like playing wingman,” he hissed.

And yet, Courfeyrac just shook his head sharply.

And so, with a weary sigh, Enjolras was looking back at Grantaire and Jehan with something akin to murder in his eyes.
Grantaire couldn’t seem to stop himself smiling. He’d found something this revolutionary Apollo was bad at. He, however, had been in this position before. Or well, near enough. “Hey Jehan,” he said, in what would in normal situations be an outside voice, “why don’t you go and buy us coffees? I’ll stay here... yes... off you go,” Grantaire ordered, slapping away Jehan’s attempts to grab hold of his top, and pushing him firmly towards the till.

When Jehan was stumbling backwards towards the counter, casting panicked looks over his shoulder, Grantaire turned and grinned to Enjolras and Courfeyrac. “You want coffee too, don’t you, sure you do, you’re in a coffee shop,” he babbled at Courfeyrac as he reached forwards to grab the collar of the pretentious blazer Courfeyrac was wearing and using it to throw him forwards towards the counter and after Jehan, “There you go.”

He stepped back happily, dusting off his hands, as Courfeyrac almost tripped over his own feet and Jehan, having to grab Jehan’s shoulders to stop himself falling. “Stupid fuckers,” Grantaire muttered affectionately. Even towards Courfeyrac.

“Upon occasion,” Enjolras muttered in agreement.

Grantaire’s back jerked straight upon remembering that, yes, he may have sorted out Jehan and Courfeyrac but Enjolras was still standing behind him.

Trying desperately to come up with something vaguely intelligent – and perhaps, for once, not offensive or arrogant – to say, Grantaire turned around, only to have Enjolras speak before he could open his mouth.

“You’ve not got other lost friends you’ve got to run and collect, and leave me to deal with those two, have you?” Enjolras asked, the words actually coming across more like an order than a question. Even out of his meetings he was standing like a general ready for war, hands in his jeans pockets in what would have been a casual stance if it wasn’t for his rigidity and perfectly straight back.

“No,” Grantaire said, before he remembered Feuilly. “Well – yes, technically, but I’m pretty sure Eponine’s dealing with it...” he trailed off when he saw Enjolras’ raised eyebrows. “I’m sure he’s not... that... lost...” he tried, in an attempt to make the situation a bit better. At Enjolras’ disbelieving stare, he figured that hadn’t worked. Fuck. “Look, I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were here, I’ll go... hide in a corner, stop being...” he tugged at his shirt awkwardly, finding it was the one that he didn’t actually remember ever owning but still fit quite well, and had ‘awesome’ blazoned across his chest. “Not awesome,” Grantaire concluded lamely.

He was expecting Enjolras to make some kind of bored, ‘yes, do that’ statement. Not for the powerful leader of the angry student majority to make an awkward coughing sound. “Um.”

Grantaire looked up, blinking. “Um?” he echoed, kind of uncertain as to what that ‘um’ meant. Enjolras wasn’t looking embarrassed – no, that embarrassed feeling would be entirely Grantaire, it seemed – just slightly not comfortable, eyes darting a bit.

“I have been told,” Enjolras said, and oh there was some definite fury at whoever told him whatever he’d been told. “It was recommended to me,” Enjolras rephrased.

Grantaire tried – he did – but that rephrasing definitely deserved a snort. And the glare Enjolras levelled at him was definitely worth it.

“It was recommended that I apologise to you,” Enjolras said, quickly and firmly, not allowing for another interruption. But that was fine. Grantaire didn’t want to interrupt anymore. He was a bit too
stunned for that. “I was... rude, last night. And I didn’t need Combeferre berating me to know that, I was a dick, and yes, I’m sorry for it,” Enjolras finished, and there was a wryness in his tone – barely audible, but there, and a smile barely visible, that stopped his mini-speech from being arrogant. “But last night wasn’t a particularly good night, for me.”

“Yeah, I know, Combeferre said you’d got some bad news,” Grantaire said hurriedly. And then he thought perhaps he shouldn’t have said that and perhaps he’d got Combeferre into trouble. To cover his awkwardness – was 7AM too early for a drink for his nerves? – he tugged at his shirt again.

It seemed, however, that Combeferre was in the clear. Enjolras’ lips twitched again. “I should have guessed he would have explained,” Enjolras said, rolling his eyes, but still doing that thing that seemed to be a smile. “So yes. I did not mean what I said last night.” He frowned, and reconsidered. “Well... not as strongly as I said it last night.”

Grantaire grinned at that. “So... my opinions are perhaps deplorable, rather than disgusting.”

“Yes,” Enjolras said, nodding, “That seems an apt description.”

His eyes were open, lips weren’t pressed together, and somehow this seemed to invite Grantaire to keep grinning.

“Um, I guess I could come to the meeting tonight and let you try and change my mind again?” Grantaire suggested, crossing his toes in his shoes and the fingers on the hand that wasn’t playing with the hem of his shirt.

In spite of Grantaire’s hopes, and his willingness to sell both his soul and firstborn for Enjolras to say ‘yes’, Enjolras frowned. “There isn’t a meeting tonight.”

Oh.

Well, that wasn’t a ‘you can’t come’, was it? And he doubted Enjolras was the type to shy away from admitting to a person’s face that he didn’t want them there. “Why not? You’ll stay up on a Thursday night, but a Friday’s too wild for you?” Grantaire asked, trying to keep grinning.

“No, because we’re going to be breaking into the office of the Director of the NHS,” Enjolras told him, flat out.


“Because we want to make sure we’ve got our facts straight, before we start spreading them,” Enjolras said simply, head tilting, as if waiting for Grantaire to make an accusation.

For once, Grantaire wasn’t going to give it to him. “I should come with you,” he said, before his thought-to-tongue interceptor had kicked in.


“I have experience in being in places I shouldn’t be,” Grantaire pointed out, pausing to mime shaking and spraying an aerosol can. “And not getting caught doing so.”

“And we’re not exactly novices,” Enjolras countered. “This isn’t our first-”

“If you say ‘rodeo’ I’m going to laugh in your face, I’m warning you,” Grantaire told him, grinning
widely again. And he was rewarded – what a reward – with an expression flickering across Enjolras face that showed him to be uncertain whether to deck Grantaire, or smile. “I’m asking to help,” Grantaire said, even going to the length of putting his hands together as if in prayer. “C’mon.”

Enjolras didn’t even consider it, or look at Grantaire’s clasped hands. “No,” he repeated. “I don’t trust you.”

“Don’t”

“You don’t believe in the cause, I have no reason to trust you in a situation like this,” Enjolras said, like it was the simplest thing in the world. And perhaps it was, to him. “You want to help, do those damned poster designs Courfeyrac was thinking of. If they’re good enough, I’ll consider using them.”

The first question going through Grantaire’s mind was, what posters? But he didn’t want to look like the drunk, can’t-remember-a-thing-about-last-night-except-possibly-singing-The-Proclaimers idiot that he, well yes, that he was, so he didn’t ask. He’d ask Jehan later.

Thankfully, he was saved from making a response by a woman almost barging into the two of them. He’d forgotten they were still loitering by the door. Muttering apologies under his breath, Grantaire slipped further out of the way, until he was almost pressed against the wall. Where he had the perfect view as Enjolras said a clear, audible, polite apology to the woman, and upon seeing the seven cups of coffees balanced precariously on and amidst her arms, said, “Here, allow me,” and opened the door for her, calm, smooth, and easy; as if it was the simplest and most casual thing in the world. Then she smiled and thanked him, he told her it was no trouble, and they both went on their merry way without either trying to get a phone number out of it.

It was without doubt the least British, but most adorably old-fashioned and chivalric thing Grantaire had seen happen since Gavroche had climbed into that tree to fetch a stranded cat.

“Aw, you’re actually, secretly adorable when you’re not trying to save the world, aren’t you?” Grantaire laughed.

Enjolras turned back to face him, face clearly reading, are you aware you said that out loud?

Grantaire’s brain started to flash warning bells. I did not mean to say that out loud “Um,” he said, because of course, ‘um’ got him out of every situation. “You realise it’s not the Middle Ages anymore?” he tried.

Enjolras smirked. “I think you’ll find men were opening for doors for women no less than a century ago,” he said.

“Aha! So you admit that it’s not still done in the present day, then?” Grantaire brandished a finger and beaming as he spoke.

Seemingly unamused – though Grantaire was starting to get that Enjolras’ features didn’t always reveal his every emotion – Enjolras just rolled his eyes. “I’m not starting a debate over etiquette with you,” he stated, “and certainly not in Costa.” He looked over to where Courfeyrac and Jehan had now gone past the till, and were standing, chatting, quite happily, by the high stools. “And I’m not going to wait around for him, either,” Enjolras muttered. He started to pull his jacket tighter around himself, having clearly decided to leave.

“I’ll tell him you’ve gone,” Grantaire offered hurriedly, not quite ready for them to stop talking yet.
“Uh, if I dare to... deal with that,” he finished, wafting a hand towards the sickeningly sweet couple.

“If you do dare,” Enjolras said, and he was starting to step back, now, he was definitely going to leave, “Tell him to get a different bloody wingman.”

Grantaire nodded wordlessly. Did he say bye? Was that the right thing to do? And perhaps if he stayed silent in an internal debate over the topic long enough Enjolras might leave before he could come to a conclusion and therefore solve the whole issue?

He shouldn’t have worried. He should have known Enjolras would be determined to have the last word. “Oh, and I’m not adorable,” Enjolras told him firmly, looking over as he pulled the door open. “I’m manly as fuck.”

And that, that, was definitely a smile.

Grantaire was still laughing when the old, slow door finally clicked shut, a full minute later.

Finally coming back to himself, but entirely unable to stop grinning, Grantaire looked back over to the happy couple. Yeah, Enjolras had had the right idea. But then, Grantaire could never be silent or secretive.

“Hey, Brontë!” he yelled. As ever, Jehan knew when he was being called, and turned to look at Grantaire with an upraised finger and a growing blush. “You gonna be wanting a lift, or can I go?” Grantaire asked, yes, still yelling across the cafe. He was starting to get glares, but he didn’t care.

Jehan shook his head, and now offered Grantaire two raised fingers. Grinning, and giving Jehan a little salute back, Grantaire turned and left.

He was meant to be in the Art Department today, at uni, clocking in some hours, but you know what? He was going to go home, grab himself a nice little croissant from Feuilly’s apartment, and then go and paint.

* Combeferre didn’t look up from his notes as the door swung open. “Is Courfeyrac still alive?” he asked, pausing writing to chew on the end of his pen.

The door swung shut and Enjolras strode past, grabbing his satchel from where it was hanging off a chair. “I’ll admit his personality’s not too bad, when he’s not hugging a bottle,” Enjolras said, slinging the strap over his shoulder and absently flicking through the contents to check he had everything. “But his views are still complete shit.”

It was clear he wasn’t talking about Courfeyrac.

Enjolras, now equipped with textbooks, laptop and notepad, left the flat for University without sparing Combeferre a second glance.

Combeferre waited until Enjolras had been gone for a few moments, before calmly pulling his phone out of his pocket, setting it on the table, and texting out a message to Bahorel.

*I’m going to win.*

*
Feuilly bought his train ticket, and with a calm that had been tried and tested many times over the years, he ignored the strange looks he was getting, adjusted the feathers and took his seat on the platform, holding firmly onto whatever dignity he had left.

* 

Grantaire had taken it upon himself to man the shop, as someone probably should in his boss’s absence. He’d spared a few minutes to make a rough sandwich from a hastily grabbed bun from his and Jehan’s place, and liberate Pringles from Feuilly’s, but was now back downstairs. The chair was tilted back, feet up on the desk and absently tapping along with Vaccines’ Norgaard – he couldn’t find his iPod, probably in his room somewhere, so he’d settled on Jehan’s instead.

He still couldn’t stop Combeferre’s silhouette looking like a modern day Jack the Ripper.

He’d long given up, now just surrounding the creepy figure in his sketchpad with whatever came to mind. Which happened to include a plain flag, snowdrop, an ear, a Celtic cross...

Now, he was starting on the tin of Pringles before him, before he finally realised someone had actually entered the shop. He flicked a headphone out with the end of his pencil, and tilted his head to get a better look of them. Random guy, not really rich looking, and carrying a cardboard box. “Um, can I help you with anything?” Grantaire called over.

The man’s hesitation concerned him slightly. People don’t tend to hesitate in art shops. “Um,” the guy said, frowning down into the cardboard box. “Yes,” he said, with an air of a man making a decision with relief. Three steps and he was at the counter, which Grantaire slid his feet off with reluctance. The cardboard box was set on the counter. “I’m looking for this little dude—”

And suddenly, it all made sense. “Gavroche, yeah?” Grantaire sighed, sitting up and peering into the box. “...did he get a fucking cat?” he asked, bemused, because that box was definitely filled with pet stuff.

“No,” the man said shortly. “Can I...”

“You leave this here, I’ll make sure it gets to him,” Grantaire sighed, sliding back down in his seat and fumbling for the fallen headphone. The guy nodded and left the shop.

Well that was weird.

Grantaire played with the pencil for a bit, flipping it around his fingers, before setting it down firmly and pulling out his phone. He dialled Eponine’s number.

“What?”

“Your brother scares me sometimes.”

“Tell me about it. What’s he done now?”

“Become a smuggler for animal toys, apparently,” Grantaire said, leaning forwards again to peer into the box. Yep, there were food bowls, a small mat thing, a tiny football and more... “What’s that about?”

“I still have no fucking clue what you’re talking about.”

“This shady guy dropped off a box of pet stuff.”
“Oh, that’ll be for Soup.”

Grantaire blinked, and licked his lips thoughtfully before he answered that. “Um. Now I’m aware I’m not Delia Smith, but I’m pretty sure you’re not meant to eat plastic toys—”

“Look, I’ve got a lecture in five, you got anything else to ask or...?”

“Yeah, any news of our dear ginger?”

“Nope. He’ll show.”

“Yeah, on the news, at this rate,” Grantaire muttered.

“Scotland Yard’s most wanted.”

It should probably be worrying, how she said that with very little sarcasm.

“Right, I gotta run. See you.”

“See you,” Grantaire echoed, setting his phone back on the counter.

He looked back down at the random drawings covering his page. One burst of decisiveness, and he flipped it over to reveal a blank page, then stopped again, chewing the inside of his cheeks as he tried to think of something to draw.

It didn’t take him long to give up. Telling himself this was not him caving, this was still him being a strong, independent black woman, he picked up his mobile and sent the message that had been waiting at the edge of his thoughts all morning, since Costa.

Jehan – what’s this ‘posters’ idea?

*

“Oh man, that looks so cool!” Bossuet all but squealed, “Aw, you gonna show me how to use that?”

“No,” Bahorel and Joly said, not just in time, but in matching deep, warning voices, without even having to look at the particularly complex, big, chunky, heavy piece of gym equipment that Bossuet was striding towards.

“Just... get back here,” Bahorel hissed through gritted teeth.

“Aw but-”

“No-”

“But it’s shiny-”

“You touch anything with heavy moving parts and I will tell ‘Chetta what you said about her brownies,” Joly said sternly, wiping the back of a bench down with the edge of his sleeve before sitting down on it, dropping his satchel down next to him with a thunk.

Finally, Bossuet turned away from the shiny heavy machine. “Hey, now, that’s a bit cruel,” he said, pouting.

Joly paused from pulling out medical textbooks to share a look with Bahorel. “Um, that’s kind of
the point,” Joly said, his grin growing. “It’s a threat.”

“Now, get your arse into the ring, or so help me I will carry it there,” Bahorel sighed, ignoring the two of them to climb nimbly into the half-sized boxing ring, which he had probably spilt a bit too much blood in over the years. He flexed and stretched a bit – though he’d been working out for a good while before Tweedledum and Tweedledee had arrived – and kept looking the other way as Bossuet stumbled into his ring. He winced when a heavy thud and muted ‘ow’ announced that Bossuet had finally made his way through the ropes.

“Ah, they play really cool music here-”

“Shut up,” Bahorel said plainly, turning back to face him. “Can you focus? For a few seconds?”

Bossuet worried at his lips. “Um. I guess so. I mean, anything’s possible, right?”


Looking slightly bemused – as ever, really – Bossuet raised a fist, waving it around a bit as if unsure what Bahorel wanted him to do with it. Before someone could be punched accidentally – and Bossuet would probably be the one getting hurt, even if it was his own fist – Bahorel wrapped a hand around Bossuet’s wrist and held his clenched hand firmly in place.

He’d tucked his thumb was inside his fist.

“You fucking idiot,” Bahorel tutted, pulling each finger straight and then grabbing the thumb, leaving the rest of Bossuet’s hand hanging. “Do you want to break your fucking thumb?”

In the background, a textbook thudded to the floor. “Break his thumb?” Joly echoed, furious and stunned. “Bahorel, you said that he wouldn’t get hurt, that was the whole point of this!”

He needed to be paid more for this. No, screw that, he needed to be paid for this. Full stop. “Look at this kid,” Bahorel said, tugging Bossuet around to face Joly, still just holding his thumb. “You think I can turn this kid into Muhammad Ali in one sitting, without bruising him up a bit?”

Bossuet whimpered. And when Joly just shrugged and returned to his books, Bossuet whimpered again. “You know, I think it might be better to wait until Enjolras gets here,” he said, with a bit of nervous laughter. “I mean, he won’t be long-”

“You’re scared.”

“Yes, yes I am, quite frankly,” Bossuet declared with some clarity and an unashamed nod. “I thought this would be a good idea but I’m now standing here, and I can see you, and I don’t know what you’re planning on doing to me-”

“You’re scared of me?”

The incredulous burst of laughter Bossuet let out boosted Bahorel’s ego beautifully. “Are you seri-Yes! Yes, I am scared of you, I mean, seriously dude-” Bossuet laughed with a terrified exasperation, hands flapping in Bahorel’s general direction. “Just – your arms, and your knuckles have got cuts on them, and – dude, your fucking top is fucking blood fucking red, and you’ve ripped the sleeves of! And I know you’ve ripped the sleeves off because I’ve seen you do it! Yes. Yes, even though I’m pretty sure I’m going to regret this in the not too far distant future, yes, yes, I am terrified of you.”
This was all very enjoyable, but is also not getting them anywhere fast. “You’re more scared of me than Enjolras?” Bahorel asked, eyebrows raised and arms crossed, a stance that did show off his biceps, but Bossuet’s eyes were drifting off and remembering more painful things.

Then, with a shiver, Bossuet nodded agreement. “No, you’re right, okay let’s get this done before Enjolras finishes his lecture.”

Joly let out a sharp laugh, and when he looked up to meet Bahorel’s gaze with a grin, Bahorel winked back. Don’t break him too hard, Joly had made him promise on the way in.

But then again, a silent nod was so far from being a legally binding contract.

“Oh-kay,” Bahorel said, grinning, and flexing his hands as he turned back to Bossuet, who had the facial expression of someone giving themselves an internal pep-talk. “Lesson number one – do not tuck your thumb inside the fist. That is how a idiot makes a fist. You are not a idiot. Is that understood?”

“That is understood!” Bossuet repeated dutifully, but really not sounding like he believed it. He’d be believing it by the time Bahorel was done with him.

“Second lesson – what to do when someone’s throwing a punch at you,” Bahorel started in what people had lovingly compared to a Drill Sergeant voice. “Now, I kind of dread asking this, but what do you think you should do if someone’s fist is coming on a neat collision course with your face?”

Bossuet flinched – or rather, flinched continuously, body seeming to fold in on itself slowly, before he let out in a rushed confession, “I’m going to take a guess that the answer isn’t ‘run motherfucker run’?”

Bahorel glared at him. It was much more fun to watch Bossuet berate himself. “Nope, that’s what a wuss does. Got it,” Bossuet muttered, reluctantly straightening back up again. “What do us hard-ass mofos do, Master Commander?”

Bahorel knew what was coming. He could see it. “Let me finish before you do your skinny white boy freak out,” Bahorel tried to say in a calm, understanding voice.

Bossuet spun to look at Joly quizzically over his shoulder. “Is that racist?”

Rolling his eyes, Bahorel grabbed Bossuet by the shoulder and spun him back around, ignoring Bossuet’s squeak. “You step into the punch.”

If life was the cartoon Bossuet apparently believed it to be, Bossuet’s jaw would have hit the floor. “Please gods tell me you’re joking.”

“Nope,” Bahorel said, powering through. “You step forwards, with your hand on the back of your neck and raise your elbow, and you lean forwards, so the fist lands on the protective triangle your arm makes, and doesn’t make pâté of your nose.” He demonstrated quickly, then continued, “From there, you can bring your other hand up, and use the base of your palm – not a fist, the base of your palm, it’s stronger – to break their nose. Try. Go on.”

Hesitantly, Bossuet moved as instructed, taking a full ten seconds to get his hand from by his side to the back of his neck. Then, with a lot of showy swing but what would be very little force, he swung up his hand, palm first. Bit too close to being a slap than a hit, but still.

“You got that?”
“Yeah... Yeah! I think I got that!” Bossuet answered, grinning. “All right! Cool! So what’s next?”

Bahorel snorted. “No. First, we’ve got to practise that.” He lifted his right arm, pulling it back and curling his hand into a fist. “Ready?”

And with that Bossuet was flat against the far side of the ring. “Oh hell no!” he yelled, palm stuck out in a very clear ‘stop’. “I am not getting you punch me, Jesus!”

“What, but – hey, you’d get to punch me straight after!” Bahorel yelled back. Seriously, where was the issue here?

“HA, yes, well, I think we both know who’d come out worse out of that... whole... situation!”

Bossuet yelled right back again, stuttering and hands flapping. “No punching! No punching!”

“It’s a fucking self defence lesson, what the fuck do you want me to do-”

“Theory! Theory, no practicals! None! Nada! Zilch!”

“Hey, you’ve got a text.”

In unison, Bossuet and Bahorel spun to look at Joly. “Say what?” Bossuet asked, stunned.

Joly looked up from the mobile to laugh at Bossuet. “Not you,” he said kind-of snidely, but they lived together and had been friends for far too long, so that made it okay. “You don’t even have a bloody phone.”

“I am aware,” Bossuet replied just as snidely, crossing his arms defensively.

“So, my phone, then, yeah?” Bahorel asked, rolling his eyes at all the drama going on in what was usually a very manly getaway. “Probably work. Just ignore it.”

Bossuet was staring at him incredulously. “How the fuck do you afford your apartment when you never go to work?” Bahorel flicked two fingers up at him, but when did that ever work. “No seriously, is it weed? Do you sell weed, is that it? Scratch that, it’s blackmail, you definitely blackmail your bosses.”

“My secret,” Bahorel drawled, “is that I’m just that fucking awesome.”

“So awesome that apparently your bosses don’t care how you spend Friday afternoons,” Joly continued, fingers flicking at buttons. “It’s not from work.” Being the only other member of the group to possess a Blackberry, he was the only one whom Bahorel would risk letting use it. That, and knowing that if anyone but Joly – and well, perhaps Enjolras – got their hands on Bahorel’s phone, lots of messages and lots of emails would be sent with very questionable content. Not even Combeferre was safe. Joly had learnt that the hard way.

“Not from work?” Bahorel echoed, letting Bossuet off for a moment, instead walking to lean on the ropes, frowning. “Who is it?”

“Enjolras.”

“If he’s blagging his way out of coming-”

“Nah, he wouldn’t,” Bahorel mutters, waving a hand at Bossuet to get him to shut up. “He loves punching people in the ring until they cry, if he said he’d come box, he’ll come box. What is it?”

“A job,” Joly said. He was frowning, reaching into his pocket and pulling out his own phone.
Bahorel raised an eyebrow. When Joly didn’t look up, he clicked his fingers to get the guy’s attention. “Well?”

“Sorry,” Joly muttered, frown deepening as he peered down at his own phone. “Jesus, he wants me!”

What was it with these idiots. “If I don’t get a straight answer within a minute, you’re gonna be the next to having boxing lessons,” Bahorel threatened.

“Sorry sorry,” Joly repeated, complete confusion covering his features as he looked between the two phones. “Um, it’s just – he wants to break into the office of the fucking Director General or whatever of the NHS. Tonight.”

The fuck? Arms shifting against the rope, Bahorel turned to look at Bossuet. He shrugged, walking forwards to stand next to Bahorel, hands resting on his hips. “What? What’s he doing?”

“Hell, I don’t know,” Joly muttered, sending a text – presumably to Combeferre, Courfeyrac, to find out what the fuck was going on.

“We don’t do this,” Bahorel said, slamming a hand on the rope to make his point. “This isn’t a big thing, this is a little, raise-awareness thing – sorry, Joly, but it is-” Joly shrugged the comment off, too intent on what he was doing, “- so what does he want fucking proof for? And besides, this was a thing from last night – what’s he rushing into this for?”

“Perhaps you’re rubbing off on him?” Bossuet suggested.

“Nah, if Bahorel was rubbing off on him he’d be going after this fucking stupid protest idea,” Joly muttered. And then he laughed darkly, lifting up and waving the screen of his phone at them. “And this is the first Courfeyrac’s heard of it!”

“First off,” Bahorel said, lifting a finger, “the protest isn’t stupid, nor is it, legally, a protest-”

“-that’s what makes it so fucking stupid-”

Bahorel raised a finger at Joly. “And second, is anyone else getting scared? I mean, you see Enjolras last night? Hate the guy or not, that, acting like that – that’s not normal, for him. I mean, he wanted to deck the guy the first time, but that was a bit off.”

“The last people Enjolras slagged off so viciously were those cunts who were marching against London Pride,” Bossuet murmured in agreement.

“Well, wipe that concern off your faces,” Joly instructed, clicking off both the Blackberries and setting them back down on the bench. “Our great leader also added on the bottom of your text that he’d be here at half past, and if he gets so much as a whiff of pity-”

“Yeah, yeah, Bossuet pâté,” Bossuet muttered, rolling his head around and groaning with exasperation. “I know the drill. C’mon then, King Kong, teach me how to roll with the punches!”

His enthusiasm fooled no-one, but it was easier to change topic. Good friend though he was, worrying about Enjolras just felt... weird. It wasn’t something you did. It wasn’t something that should need doing.

Bahorel managed to get a few light punches in before Bossuet finally figured out how to cover himself properly, and even after that it took a few more practises before Bahorel was confident that Bossuet had got it done well enough that he could incapacitate an attacker long enough to have run
far off enough to be of a safe distance.

They paused, before moving onto the next defensive move, Bossuet diving for the bottle of water and packet of Starbursts Joly had left in the corner of the ring and slumping next to it in relief. Bahorel crouched next to him, picking up his water-bottle and taking a swig.

“So,” Bossuet muttered, turning a starburst over in his hands. “You think you’ll go tonight, rushed and unnecessary as it is?”

Bahorel didn’t even have to consider the question. “’Course,” he said, taking another sip of water. “It’s Enjolras, and it’s a cause. How could I not?”

*

Gavroche appeared, around 2pm, wearing his tweed jacket and tipping his pork-pie hat at a lady he passed crossing the street to the Corinthe. What a smooth little criminal.

“Shouldn’t you be in school?” Grantaire asked in a very good mock voice of authority, he thought.

Gavroche grinned at him. “Very funny. Look, see how I laugh. Ha, ha!” The kid ran a finger over the shelves he passed as he made his way to the counter. “Where’s the gov’nner?”

“Timbuktu,” Grantaire informed him.

“Nice for some.” Gavroche leant back against the counter, and pushed himself onto it. “Apparently you’ve got something for me?”

The kid was unnerving. Unnerving. Sometimes, you had to physically remind yourself he was twelve. “Yeah,” Grantaire said, slowly, reaching down and pulling the cardboard box out from beneath the desk. “So this shady guy dropped this stuff off, and then Eponine said you wanted to make soup from it?”

Though apparently Eponine’s information had been incorrect, because he got scoffed at for that comment. “Nah, that’s ridiculous. It’s for Soup.”

Grantaire waited with a blank face, hoping further explanations were forthcoming.

Gavroche rolled his eyes. “Soup’s a tortoise,” he sighed, taking the box and peering through the contents.

And of course. Obviously. Not... ridiculous, in any shape... Grantaire shook his head, as if that would somehow take his life off the top of the Faraway Tree and back in the normal world. “Right,” Grantaire declared, pushing himself off the chair. “I have stuff to do. You can spare an hour or two ‘til your sister’s shift starts, right?”

“What stuff?” Gavroche asked, narrowing his eyes at Grantaire and snatching up the nearly empty Pringles tube.

Grantaire shrugged, taking his jacket off the back of the chair and slipping his arms into it. Checking it wasn’t inside out, first. He’d done that before. “Just... stuff.”

“Just stuff”s my line,” Gavroche grumbled, but he was seemingly happy as he spun around on the countertop, and slid down the other side, setting himself up in the chair like it was a throne. “Can’t I do something? I’m really helpful, you know.”
“I know,” Grantaire agreed, shoving his sketchbook under his arm, “But... no!” He flashed the kid a grin, who stuck out his tongue in return before turning – the lift of the end of his nose showing it to be purposeful ignoring of Grantaire – to play with the till.

Confident the shop was in safe hands, Grantaire left it, pulling out his phone as he went.

*Hey, so, where do you live?*

The gym was meant to be the place where Enjolras could be entirely antisocial, and just turn Bahorel into pulp, or vice versa, depending on who’d had the worse day. Yet he had a feeling, what with Bossuet and Joly both being there (and whose idea had it been to try and teach Bossuet boxing, if the guy tried to throw a punch he’d knock himself out at best) it wouldn’t quite be the silent, physical afternoon he was hoping for.

Even so, he was planning on turning his phone off in the *pretence* of having a silent, physical afternoon.

He didn’t expect to pull it out of his satchel as he left his lecture to find he had five missed messages. Responses from Bahorel and Joly he expected, but he hadn’t been expecting the two questioning texts from Courfeyrac, let alone the vaguely stalkerish text from an unknown number.

*Where did he live?*

Ignoring the other texts like he should have been ignoring that one, Enjolras sent back a quick, *Who are you and why do you need to know* as he climbed on a bus, swiping his Oyster card quickly.

The reply was almost instant.

*An interested party.*

Enjolras had been told many times that insulting or glaring at inanimate objects had no practical benefits, but he sent the text a withering glare all the same.

Thankfully, a second text came seconds later.

*Nah, just fucking w/ you. Grantaire, with poster ideas. As I can’t show them to you tonight as you are too busy ‘purloining’, thought I’d show them today?*

Of course, who else would it be. He sighed and rolled his eyes, before texting back. The middle-aged dude he was sat next to shifted uncomfortably, probably due to Enjolras’ obvious signs of annoyance. The British weren’t meant to display emotions on public transport.

*Done, already?*

He closed his phone again, frantically tapping it against his palm.

The reply, again, came within a minute. Did this guy have nothing *better* to do?

*What, not impressed by my speedy skills? Yes, Apollo, your mortal slave has already finished his allotted task.*

And then a second text, immediately following that one;
Also, if you approve of them today, can probably use Feuilly’s equipment to get a few A3 sized posters printed off by tomorrow afternoon.

And a third;

Feuilly owns the art shop I live above. He loves me really.

He meant to sigh again – well, the sane part of his brain didn’t want to make any noise at all – but instead, a low growl, of all things, issued from his mouth, probably not helping his situation with the man sat next to him. His thumbs hovered over the screen as if he wanted to punch them through it, but he could see that would have more costs than benefits.

He wanted to text back Your actions make no logical sense next to your views on society and your personality why why WHY, but the perceived costs of that action outweighed the benefits, too.

Eventually, he settled for That sounds good. If there’s a cost, we can cover it. But I won’t be at home until 4pm, you can check the designs with me then if you wish.

He hit send, then cursed himself for being absent-minded (audibly, which was probably a mistake, the man beside him was now edging closer to the window) sent out a second text with his address.

Think I know where that is. And four it is. Don’t worry about cost, I can get that dealt with. Also, the smells coming from Borough Market are really dubious how can you live near here and still have a normal nose

“You complete-” Enjolras muttered furiously, not quite sure what he was going to finish with and that was probably a good job, as, apparently, he’d already pushed the guy beside him to his limit.

“Jesus, dude,” the man groaned, “if you’re getting this damn annoyed, why text back? Do us all a favour and put away the phone!”

And that, was a particularly good question. Enjolras muttered an apology, and clicked out of his messages.

Seconds later, he re-opened it to send a message to Courfeyrac.

If we get stuck with them, I am blaming you entirely.

There. Done.

Except... he then opened his messages one last time, and sent another message.

Borough Market does not smell ‘dubious’. The cheesecakes and burgers from there are unparalleled.

Then he turned off his phone, shoving it into the deepest, darkest depths of his gym bag.

* 

This was why Jehan liked London. The sky was clear blue, the grass was thick and freshly cut, so smelted wonderful, and the air was warm and unstirred by wind, so, of course, the green was overflowing with human life. Kids and teenagers and old people, all chatting and enjoying the last few days of nice weather, before Mother Nature finally realised it was meant to be winter soon.

And it was all made twice as good by how someone was lying there, enjoying the day with him, the sides of their heads just about touching. Brown curls were brushing against Jehan’s ear, and
Jehan’s braid was still resting on Courfeyrac’s shoulder from where he’d been playing with it earlier.

Courfeyrac snorted, and Jehan turned his head to the side, smiling, waiting, listening.

“My friends are dumbbells,” Courfeyrac explained, mobile being held above his head as he read a text.

Jehan rolled onto his front, grinning as he looked down at Courfeyrac. “My friends are dumbbells, too,” he said, whispering as if it was a secret.

A gasp, and then Courfeyrac flipped himself over, dislodging curls and sending them cascading over his brown eyes. “We have something in common!” he exclaimed in a very excited hushed voice, mouth open and eyes wide. His mouth quickly slipped back into a grin. “If we have something in common,” Courfeyrac continued seriously, leaning in, and Jehan leant forwards a bit too because this was clearly a very important secret, “then we must be made for each other.”

It was joking, teasing, but so honest at the same time. “Because we have friends who are dumbbells?” Jehan checked, grinning.

“Especially because we have friends who are dumbbells,” Courfeyrac confirmed, nodding. Their foreheads brushed as his head bobbed forwards.

They could kiss now. Jehan thought, grinning back. They could kiss and it wouldn’t be weird, even though they hadn’t talked about it. He’d spent the night drunk to the point of amnesia and Courfeyrac had come looking for him when he’d left in the morning. They’d first met two days ago. They could kiss, here and now, and it wouldn’t be weird.

But kissing when lying on your fronts was awkward, having to shuffle forwards.

Not only that, but Jehan didn’t need to. Because he knew it was going to happen. And seeing Courfeyrac grin at him was good enough, then.

But... one day. Some day. Within the week, perhaps, they would. They’d kiss, curl together on sofas, hold hands, share tubs of ice cream as they watched movies. Lazy mornings in bed, Jehan writing his poetry on Courfeyrac’s skin rather than his pillowcase. It was...

It was a sure thing.

When the music of the ice cream van rang out across the green, Jehan’s mouth fell open, still grinning, and eyes widening. “Ice cream!” he breathed, well aware he sounded like an over-excited five year old and not caring.

Courfeyrac laughed. “You want me to buy you a rocket lolly?” he asked, only half mocking as he reached to check his pocket, see what cash he had on him.

Jehan tutted, shaking his head. “Don’t be silly,” he said, flicking his braid over his shoulder and climbing to his feet. He grabbed Courfeyrac’s wrist, and dragged him to his feet before he could protest. “It’s all about the screwball!”

Courfeyrac just laughed even harder. “The what?”

“C’mon, we gotta beat the kids!” Jehan protested, laughing just as much and tugging Courfeyrac across the green to where the ice cream van had pulled in.
“You probably shouldn’t say that so loudly!” Courfeyrac chuckled, put he sped up anyway, pulling level with Jehan and twisting his hand so that their fingers were interlocked. “And I don’t think you should be ordering screwballs from strange men, either…”

And yet, at the van and waiting in a queue predominantly filled with kids below the age of fifteen, Jehan bought two screwballs with every sauce, a flake, and handed one to Courfeyrac, determined to show him the joy to be found in digging through the Mister Whippy to get to the sweet at the bottom.

* 

People were laughing at him.

Feuilly bought a beer off the trolley person, and stared fixedly at the laugher until he stopped. Now, he couldn’t claim total credit for said person getting off at the next station, but even so, he gave himself a pat on the back and bought a celebratory bar of Snickers.

* 

The bastard had been completely right. Again. The cheesecake to be found at Borough Market was unparalleled. Grantaire was unashamed that he had bought four whole slices. And ate them all.

There had also been a very fancy wine store, at which Grantaire had probably spent a bit too much money, and as a means of chastising himself had decided to save all the bottles until he got back to the flat.

And now, gods help him, he was standing outside what was, hopefully, the door to Enjolras’ flat. With a bag full of wine and a stomach about to explode from cheesecake. Oh, and that one kangaroo burger.

He could really use some of that wine to steel some nerves about then...

But he’d made a promise. And so he was completely sober and completely terrified when he raised a fist and knocked on the door, the excessive cheery rhythm making him wince. Oh gods, he was definitely trying too hard.

The door swung open, and revealing a man in glasses with ruffled-up mouse-brown hair, wearing a baby-blue jumper with the sleeves covering his arms, worn but well-fitting jeans and, of all things, fluffy bunny slippers. He’d look almost posh, if it wasn’t for the unfortunate footwear.

Grantaire paused, before raising a finger, and eventually deciding on, “You’re not Enjolras.”


Figuring it was best to follow orders until he understood completely, Grantaire shuffled inside, letting the door fall shut behind him. “Um, and it’s possible that I was drunker than I thought, the past few evenings, but I could have sworn you don’t wear glasses.”

“Contacts,” Combeferre explained, “the glory of the modern age. Means I can go for runs and actually see where I’m running, without having to hang onto my glasses. And it’s easier, in lectures, to take notes without having to pause every three words to shove my glasses back up my nose. But today, I have been home, ergo glasses,” he rounded off, turning to face Grantaire and doing an Eric Morcambe-esque glasses waggle.
Feeling he was meant to give some kind of response, Grantaire nodded and gave him thumbs up. “Good logic.”

Combeferre smirked, and tugged his jumper to adjust it slightly, before sliding into the chair he had, presumably, been sat in before Grantaire had disturbed him. The table he was sat at was covered in various open textbooks, open notepads and vaguely organised piles of notes. He looked so focused and motivated that Grantaire was even getting vague flickers of guilt. “You can help yourself to something to drink, if you want,” Combeferre told him, picking up a pen with one hand and gesturing to a door behind him with the other.

A flat, with a separate room for a kitchen? For second year students? Such things were unheard of. And, looking around, there wasn’t even a serious visible issue that’d make it actually affordable, either. There were two nice sofas angled at a decent sized TV – not a pokey little thing like what he and Jehan had, actually, won in a bet – with a dining table behind them that would probably be able to seat at least eight without trouble. It was all vaguely... stylish, too. Nice and clean, chrome furnishings, even matching colour tones – which was far more than Grantaire could say about his and Jehan’s flat, even though he was, technically, an art student.

“Rich parents,” Combeferre said, and Grantaire’s head jerked across to him. He had clearly been watching Grantaire’s examination of the flat, and was now wearing an amused expression. “Neither I nor Enjolras come from families which are exactly poor. We get a yearly allowance. Which, I’m sure you’ll be glad to hear, we mostly donate straight to charities, and we’re trying to pave our own way, too – I proof-read for magazines and the like, occasionally. But forgive us our creature comforts.”

Grantaire chuckled, now openly turning and checking out the flat. A coat rack was behind the door, covered in various woollen trench coats, a leather jacket or two, and many colourful scarves. Beneath was littered a pile of brogues and worn leather army boots. “No, I get it,” Grantaire said, nodding. “If I could afford a place like this, I’d spend the money without a second thought.”

“Ah, I forgot you were a cynic,” Combeferre said, looking back down to his notes, but not as a dismissal, as he continued, “I’d take the guess that you think charities don’t do much benefit? Wasting time and money which should be going into the economy, where it could do some good?”

“Actually,” Grantaire said with a small grin, “Jehan and I volunteer at the local youth club, when we can.”

That got Combeferre’s attention. His pen stopped mid-word as he looked up at Grantaire, over his glasses, with very wide eyes. “Do you, now?” he asked, tone either respectful, or amused. Quite possibly, Grantaire thought, a combination of both. “What about the flaws of society? Futility of trying to improve the system?”

Grantaire shrugged. “Doesn’t mean I can’t help a kid out with his art. And they are good kids, down there. Eponine was one of them, once. If you can’t fix the system, there’s no harm helping the odd kid beat it.”

Combeferre chuckled. “Careful,” he said, pointing his pen at Grantaire, still peering at him over the top of his glasses and very much resembling a teacher. “You’re starting to sound like one of us revolutionary types.”

Taking a vague risk, Grantaire just grinned and raised a middle finger. Combeferre tutted and shook his head, but Grantaire wasn’t too worried. “I’m cynical, not cold-hearted,” Grantaire told him defensively. “I’m not going to give up on everything. I just know when some things are broken past fixing.”
This time, it was Combeferre who raised the middle finger. Not missing a beat, Grantaire tutted. Combeferre grinned. “Seriously,” he said, “get a drink, take a seat.”

“No, I shouldn’t really impose on you,” Grantaire said, almost reluctantly – Combeferre was actually quite fun to talk to, “I was actually looking for Enjolras, but if he’s-”

“You stun me,” Combeferre drawled, copying something out from the nearest textbook. “Take a damn seat. Enjolras won’t be much longer, probably, unless Bahorel’s sent him to the hospital again and I’m relatively certain I would have got a text if that had happened. So be seated.”

Grantaire hesitated, chewing his lip and considering his (escape) options. Then, he headed towards the nearest sofa. “You know,” he said, flopping back against a cushion with a monochrome London cityscape on it, “it’s really hard to take instructions from someone wearing bunny slippers.”

“I thought you said you wouldn’t begrudge me my creature comforts.”

“That’s definitely taking creature comforts too far, and too literally.”

“One, they’re comfortable,” Combeferre said, calmly, writing something in what would surely be the most neat and precise writing Grantaire would ever see, “and two, screw you.”

Grantaire couldn’t not laugh outright at that.

A laughter that died in his throat seconds later when the front door opened and Enjolras walked in, wearing a sleeveless vest, beautiful golden hair completely ruffled, red cheeked, and shining with sweat.

Basically, looking very, very illegal, for someone who was walking around before the watershed.

Grantaire cleaned his throat awkwardly and shuffled on the sofa.

“When’s Bossuet’s birthday?” Enjolras called out, turning and shutting the door, and clearly utterly unaware that Grantaire was there.

“Not until next month,” Combeferre answered absently, not looking up from his notes. “Why? You planning on buying him his own pair of boxing gloves?”

“Actually, I was thinking of buying him a few rolls of bubble-wrap,” Enjolras muttered, kicking off his trainers. Combeferre snorted. “I don’t think he’s going to be stepping into another boxing ring any time soon. Don’t think Joly will let him.”

“That bad?” Combeferre muttered, clearly not too interested as his pen continued to scratch away.

“Two ice packs,” Enjolras explained, now dropping his keys into a bowl on the coffee table and emptying cash from his pockets into it. “Mind, that was at Joly’s orders, so a more accurate description would be to say he got two bruises.”

Combeferre hummed in agreement.

Grantaire continued to sit there awkwardly and try very hard not to ogle Enjolras as he leant down. Especially not memorise how his hair fell forwards across his eyes in order to paint it later.

So of course, Grantaire was staring with a slightly open jaw when Enjolras finally looked over and noticed him.
For the most fleeting moment, Enjolras looked shocked. Then, he blinked, and blandly said, “Oh, it’s you. I thought Courfeyrac had come to claim our sofa again.”

“Weren’t you wondering why I was so silent, if you thought I was Courfeyrac?” Grantaire asked, trying for a grin. He hadn’t known his roommate’s prospective soul mate long, but then, he wasn’t a guy it took long to figure out.

Enjolras didn’t smile, but his lips twitched slightly. But Combeferre did snort, so Grantaire counted a small win in that. “There was that,” Enjolras conceded. He seemed to – if it had been anyone else, Grantaire might have called it ‘dithering’, but with Enjolras, even that action seemed almost regal. “Um,” Enjolras muttered, so quite Grantaire would have missed it if he wasn’t looking at Enjolras’ lips, “I’ve just come from the gym, so I’m going to take a quick shower – unless you’ve got somewhere to be?”

Shower? Shower. “No!” Grantaire exclaimed, probably a bit loud and a bit fast, but nothing in Enjolras’ expression showed he’d noticed. “No, nah, I’ve got... absolutely nothing to do, actually. Don’t worry, I can wait out here and distract Combeferre some more,” he finished with a grin.

There was yet another snort from Combeferre’s table. “Good luck with that,” he said, with, yes, his pen still going.

“Combeferre’s been friends with Courfeyrac for six years,” Enjolras said, pushing his gym bag back up onto his shoulder and walking towards a door at the back of the flat. “That’s six years of practise. If you can distract him, you’re probably owed a Nobel of some kind.”

“Just a congratulatory drink would suit well enough,” Grantaire tried suggesting, but Enjolras had vanished into what was, presumably, his room, before the sentence had been finished.

Grantaire had a moment of staring at the closed door, mentally promising to go to church every single Sunday until he died if Enjolras came back out shirtless and wet and rubbing his hair dry with a towel.

When he looked back around to Combeferre, the man was looking at him with a soft smirk and raised eyebrows. “Does it count as distracting you, if I did absolutely nothing?”

“Depends what you count as doing ‘absolutely nothing’,” Combeferre mused, turning back to his work. “And I’m assuming you didn’t just come here with the intention of sitting on our sofa and failing to distract me?”

“Ha, ha,” Grantaire drawled, shuffling. There was a high chance he was sat on something. “And I didn’t ask to sit on the sofa, you made me sit here.”

Combeferre just hummed, which really wasn’t an answer at all. He started to chew his lip as he frowned at a textbook.

Yeah, he was definitely sat on something, Grantaire realised after wincing and wiggling a bit. After reaching down the gap between the two cushions, he pulled out a piece of Jenga. Giving it a weird look, he set it on the table. “Um, I had a few concept sketches for posters for the NHS deal, and the racial thing,” he said eventually, actually edging away from where the Jenga had been found. He appalled himself sometimes, he really did. And moving meant his foot knocked against the bag and the multiple bottles of wine.

Combeferre had told him to get a drink.

Yes, but he’d promised Jehan he’d cut back.
The bottles went unopened.

“You could have just brought them tonight,” Combeferre suggested, dragging Grantaire’s attention back to the art book, rather than the bottles between his feet.

Oh. “I thought – Enjolras said there wasn’t going to be a meeting tonight,” Grantaire muttered. But of course there was, of course it’d be stupid to have him there after the chaos he’d caused the night before.

Combeferre looked up, at that. “What?” he asked, frowning. “Why would he tell you that?”

It didn’t seem, really, like he was actually asking Grantaire, but Grantaire answered anyway. “He said he was breaking into somewhere, to get facts about the NHS thing?” he tried, hesitantly.

Combeferre frowned, a hand reaching up adjust his glasses, an action that seemed more of habit than necessity. “Right,” he muttered, before turning back to his studies. “And I gather you ran into each other this morning?” he asked, once again entirely focused on the sheets in front of him.

He didn’t question how Combeferre had heard – it was a pretty amusing and gossip-worthy story which Grantaire himself would be spilling to Eponine and Feuilly at the soonest opportunity – well, if Feuilly surfaced at all – so he quite cheerfully related the events, relaxing into the sofa with fears of Jenga blocks vanishing and Combeferre chipping in with comments every now and then, Grantaire’s favourite by far being, “How many fairies do you think will pop into existence when they finally fuck?” when Courfeyrac and Jehan were mentioned.

And so, the time was passed until Enjolras re-emerged. Unfortunately, no bare, wet chest, no tussle-dried hair. Though that red shirt did fit really well.

“Any luck?” Enjolras asked, looking pointedly at Combeferre.

“None,” Grantaire told him with a disappointed sigh. “I swear he’s written at least five pages of notes, whilst managing to maintain a decent and relevant stream of small talk. It’s magic.”

“It’s getting four A* A-levels with Courfeyrac as your ever-present friend,” Combeferre corrected with a smirk, and nimbly wielding a highlighter on a textbook.

Grantaire let out a whistle. Damn. “That’s a bit impressive,” he admitted. “I’d ask you where you were whilst this was going on,” Grantaire asked, turning to look at Enjolras, “But-”

“I’d found a secret hideout,” Enjolras said, smiling smugly, and pausing to look over Combeferre’s shoulder before heading towards Grantaire. “Courfeyrac still doesn’t know where I spent my days. And yes, before you ask,” he continued, sitting beside Grantaire on the sofa as if it was the easiest thing in the world, “I got four A*s too. Now, what do you have for me?”

My body. “Uh,” Grantaire said, brain short-circuiting momentarily. Why was he here again? “Posters! I have a few sketches to run by you...” he reached down into the plastic bag, shoving aside the bottles of wine – not looking up to meet anyone’s eyes as they clinked against each other loudly – and eventually extracted his A3 sketchpad.

“Oh that’s what you’re doing here,” Combeferre muttered, pen lid between his teeth as he viciously circled something. “I thought you just missed our company.”

“Yes, because your sarcasm just draws people to us magnetically,” Enjolras drawled, not looking over to his best friend but eyes seemingly fixed on Grantaire’s sketchpad expectantly.
“You know it,” Combeferre answered, quite smugly.

“Nope, just the sketches, m’afraid,” Grantaire said, actually feeling quite cheerful. He flipped past the pages of aimless doodles too fast to let Enjolras get a look at them, and landed on the posters he’d mocked up. “There’s a few there,” he muttered, turning them so Enjolras could see, “they’re for the NHS thing... and here, I took what you all were saying about half/half posters for the racism thing, so...”

Enjolras had taken the notebook into his hands by that point, so Grantaire shut up and let him look, chewing his lips nervously.

“Which one did you like most?” Enjolras asked, not looking up.

Without hesitation, Grantaire jabbed a finger on the sketch of a faceless man in a suit playing with a puppet of a surgeon, and sick man. “Though I will admit to stealing the design of the puppets’... uh, frame thing? But yeah, I stole that from the Godfather posters.”

Enjolras snorted. “Of course you’d like that one.”

Confused, Grantaire raised an eyebrow.

“It’s the most akin to your graffiti,” Enjolras explained, eyes meeting Grantaire’s for a split second, before darting back down to the sketches on his lap. “Good,” he said eventually, closing the sketchpad and handing it back to Grantaire. “How many copies of each can you make?”

“How many do you want?” Grantaire asked, grinning. Enjolras wanted some of all of them? He’d expected Enjolras to pick one! If he’d liked any! And if he used more than a few of Feuilly’s supplies then technically he should pay, but then, Feuilly would have to know of it to charge it and nothing could pull Feuilly from his rooms after he’d closed the Corinthe at midnight and before he opened it again at 7AM. And Grantaire had a spare key.

“Make four of each,” Enjolras said. “But not the racism ones, we need to talk a bit more about that before we set it into effect, let’s focus on the NHS issue right now.”

“Yes, speaking of that,” Combeferre interjected suddenly, setting his pen down and turning to face them.

Enjolras looked at him over his shoulder, then turned back to look at Grantaire, one half of his lips threatening to curl into a smile. “Somehow, one of us managed to get his attention,” he said, with a dry sarcasm Grantaire was starting to understand as teasing.

“I’m not if that’s something to be proud of, or scared about,” Grantaire admitted, grinning.

At the table, Combeferre was waiting patiently for their attention, and it was getting a lot easier to see why he was a natural-born teacher. That patience wasn’t one you could talk over, but silently demanded attention, even from two who could – proudly, in Enjolras’ case, and tentatively for Grantaire – call themselves his equal. “I’ve gathered,” Combeferre said, eventually, looking at Enjolras with a hard questioning gaze, “that Grantaire couldn’t show you the designs tonight because you’re too busy breaking the law?”

“Yes,” Enjolras confirmed without a pause. “And?”

“What and why?”

“Nick Chapman’s office, I was thinking,” Enjolras said, back straightening and chin rising in what
even a slightly baffled Grantaire could tell was defensive body language. And yet, neither man’s tone ever rose above civil. “And the usual drill. We should get facts straight before we start accusing people.”

“I thought we were just going to raise the issue, and let *other* people do the accusing?” Combeferre asked, head tilting slightly and both eyebrows rising in question. There was no sign of a smile across his lips or eyes.

Grantaire could almost *hear* Enjolras’ teeth grinding. He’d never wanted to hide behind the sofa more, but some quite possibly dangerous curiosity – and concern, to be quite frank – was keeping him fixed, listening, trying to figure out what, exactly, had gone wrong here. “I will not spread false information,” Enjolras said, putting on a good pretence of calm. “And it’s not as if we’ll be risking anything, we’ve done worse before.”

For a few seconds, Combeferre kept a level gaze at Enjolras, before nodding once. “Am I going to be breaking-and-entering tonight?” he asked, picking his pen back up and turning his attention back to his books.

Enjolras hesitated, shoulders relaxing. “No,” he said simply, “I’m going to take Joly, because he’ll actually know what he’s looking for, and Bahorel, for, well,” he paused to smile briefly, “for obvious reasons.”

“Take Courfeyrac as a lookout,” Combeferre instructed. “This isn’t some simple office block you’re going to be breaking into, if you get caught-”

“Yes, yes-”

“And you should take one other with you,” Combeferre muttered. “If you need to split, with just the four of you you’re left with two pairs, that’s not good odds.”

“Who else would you have me take?” Enjolras asked. “I’m left with you, Bossuet and Marius. Bossuet would break something, trip over his own feet, or god help us sit on his phone and call the police. He would *definitely* leave fingerprints everywhere. Marius? No. And you’re the only one with enough intelligence and calm enough temper to talk the police round into releasing us without charge.”

“Take Grantaire,” Combeferre suggested.

Grantaire snorted at the exact same time that Enjolras almost yelled, “No.” Grantaire tried to take no offence at the yelling part.

“Too late, Combeferre,” Grantaire sighed with exaggerated regret. “I already offered my services, but they were declined.”

“I’m not risking this by having someone like *him*,” Enjolras added, looking at Combeferre and brandishing at Grantaire with Grantaire’s own sketchpad.

“Yeah, people like *me*,” Grantaire echoed sagely. “Can’t be trusted, people like me. I mean, me, doing illegal things in illegal places? Unheard of! I’d of *course* tip off the police immediately.”

And there was the rare sound of Enjolras grinding his teeth again. “People like *you*,” he said, turning back to Grantaire, “Can’t be trusted to take it *seriously.*”

Okay, yeah, perhaps that was a fair point. “That’s because I can hardly believe it *is* serious,” Grantaire pointed out, grinning, and just *waiting* for the onslaught.
Unfortunately, however, Enjolras had hardly got his jaw clenched before Combeferre called out, “All right, settle down, children, or I’ll put you both on the naughty step.”

Enjolras blinked, relaxed his jaw, and sighed out.

With a quiet sense of regret, Grantaire smiled slightly. It would probably have been more accurate to direct the question at Combeferre, but Grantaire wasn’t even going to pretend that he could look anywhere but at Enjolras. “You have a naughty step?” he asked, slipping into a grin.

“You have to be prepared, when Courfeyrac or Bossuet could be round any moment,” Enjolras replied wryly. “Speaking of,” he continued with a sigh and rising to his feet – Grantaire’s eyes followed him up, still unable to look away, gods, he just couldn’t understand why he should look anywhere else. “I should probably go call Courfeyrac, tell him – oh,” Enjolras said, spinning back and lifting up the sketchpad, clearly having only just remembered he was holding it. “Yours.”

“Yes, mine,” Grantaire admitted, reaching to take it back – only to have Enjolras not let go. “You realise I kinda need that if I’m to-”

“Why did you do them?” Enjolras demanded.

Grantaire could only blink up at him.

“It is abundantly clear you have no belief in the cause,” Enjolras explained, frowning down at him. “So why waste time helping us?”

Technically, Grantaire could tell the truth, here.


But then, lying had been easier. Or at the very most, part-truths.

“I got bored,” Grantaire said with a shrug. As Enjolras only continued to frown at him, a slightly worrying, terrifying and yet breathtaking thought wormed its way into Grantaire’s head. Frowning himself, he said in a low voice, before he could stop his tongue, “I’m not a cause, Enjolras. Don’t think I’m someone you can convert.”

“I don’t want you to be,” Enjolras said quickly, in a voice just a low and frown not budging.

“Good,” Grantaire muttered. “Now, can I have my damn book back?”

Enjolras’ frown deepened, but a few seconds later did release the sketchbook. “I left my phone in my room,” he said, turning from Grantaire sharply and addressing Combeferre instead. “I’ll go call him, tell him what we’re planning. Joly and Bahorel already know.” Combeferre didn’t reply, just hummed as he highlighted another line.

If Grantaire waited until Enjolras had shut his bedroom door and vanished from sight, then only Combeferre would judge him for it, and he got the feeling Combeferre was already judging him, so no change there. He ignored Combeferre’s small smirk as he put the sketchpad back into the bag and got to his feet.

“Hold up a second, would you?” Combeferre asked. Feeling a familiar combination of confused and slightly concerned, Grantaire paused, hovering where he’d only got halfway to standing up off the sofa.

“Yes?” he asked, looking across to Combeferre.
The man had stood up from where he was ensconced by work, discarded his pen and picked up a nearby empty glass, and was casually walking closer to Grantaire. “You will be going tonight, yes?” he asked, making it come across as a request. He was also keeping his voice low, too low to be heard by Enjolras in the other room.

Not quite believing it, Grantaire stood up fully and half-laughed under his breath. “Did you not hear?” he asked, making sure to also keep his voice down. “I’m not wanted.”

Combeferre cocked an eyebrow. “If you think Enjolras owns the streets of London,” he drawled, “then Stockholm Syndrome sets in faster than I thought.”

Grantaire couldn’t help but laugh at the accuracy of that.

“Yes, Enjolras does have a rather concerning amount of charisma,” Combeferre continued, as if he knew – and chances are he did know exactly what Grantaire was thinking. “Joly’s still trying to get everyone to sign a petition to get Enjolras dissected, because he swears on all his medical experience that such levels of charisma are not normal.”

“How many people have signed?” Grantaire asked, both amused and rather concerned.

“Only those whom Enjolras doesn’t have blackmail material over,” Combeferre said. “So... not even Joly.” Combeferre paused, smiling, and Grantaire laughed. “Unfortunately, his charisma doesn’t seem to extend to the police, so the more people with him tonight the better. He can’t save the world whilst in prison.”

Combeferre had said that last sentence with humour, but not sarcasm. “You truly believe in him, don’t you?” Grantaire asked, kind of stunned. “You’re not just being a good best friend, you actually believe in him.”

“Believe in him?” Combeferre echoed, smile being replaced by the slightest grimace as he spoke the words as if they tasted bad. “No, I don’t believe ‘in’ him. ‘Belief-in’ is a fideist’s pathetic argument for claiming rational faith in something for which they have no evidence – no, I don’t have belief in Enjolras. I’ve been his friend since we were ten, unlike fideists I have my evidence. What I have is an evidentialist’s rational, evidence-based belief that he will succeed.”

“Succeed in what?” Grantaire asked.

Combeferre smiled, not without pride. “Well, in whatever it is he does.”

And Grantaire couldn’t find fault with that.

“So, will you go, tonight?” Combeferre asked.

It’s not like Grantaire wanted to say no, but – “What, you expect me to just rock up?” Grantaire asked sceptically.

“God, no,” Combeferre tutted. “Enjolras would rip your head off for that, and get distracted, rather than do what he must and get out of there. Would probably be better if you could come up with a reason.” He smiled benevolently at Grantaire, and it was like the guy was telepathic or something, because suddenly Grantaire had an idea.

“I’d... better get going,” Grantaire said, starting to grin. “I’ve got artwork to do.”

Combeferre nodded, but opened his mouth, hesitating, and Grantaire dutifully waited until Combeferre finally said, with his now familiar slight smile, “Speaking of, I’ve got to ask – why did
you design posters for something you don’t care about?”

Disbelieving, Grantaire narrowed his eyes and scrutinised Combeferre’s face for the slightest sign of humour. He snorted when he found it. “As if you don’t know,” he said accusingly.

Combeferre’s smile spread, and he tilted his head and the empty cup at Grantaire as if to say ‘you caught me’. “See you soon,” Combeferre called, as he turned and headed into what was presumably the kitchen. “But not tonight, hopefully, because that would probably mean you were in prison.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Grantaire called back, grinning.

He let himself out of the flat, all but skipping.

*

Jehan sat on the bench and chewed the straw of his frappe absently, watching Courfeyrac talk to Enjolras on his mobile.

Almost ten minutes ago, a little old lady – one of that lovely breed of old lady who seem to be grandmother to the whole world, and of whom there aren’t enough of – had walked past the park bench Jehan and Courfeyrac were sat on, only to stop, smile at them, compliment Jehan’s hair, Courfeyrac’s smile, and say they made a lovely couple. Courfeyrac had laughed, burying his face against Jehan’s shoulder. Jehan had grinned, thanked her, and given her one of the wild daisies from his braid, and made her promise to take care of herself.

“You too, young man,” she’d said with a grin that showed her many, many laughter lines beautifully.

“Has she gone?” Courfeyrac had hissed into Jehan’s shoulder, still shaking slightly with laughter.

“She’s gone,” Jehan had promised with a laugh, setting a hand lightly on the back of Courfeyrac’s head to get him to look up again. When he had raised his head, grinning, the blush lighting up his cheeks had only pushed Jehan to laugh even more. “You’re blushing!”

Scowling playfully, Courfeyrac had jabbed Jehan in the ribs and muttered behind a smile, “So? An adorable old lady just complimented me. How am I meant to deal with that!”

And Jehan had laughed again, and Courfeyrac had buried himself back against Jehan’s shoulder until he could look up without blushing, or fall about in laughter once more.

Now, however, he was talking to Enjolras, hands flying and voice jumping between octaves as he went from sheer exasperation to concern every few seconds. It was, quite frankly, adorable and hilarious. When Courfeyrac finally closed his phone, holding it up, glaring at it and muttering abuse through gritted teeth, Jehan didn’t bother to hide his grin.

“What’re you laughing at,” Courfeyrac asked glumly, returning to his seat at Jehan’s side.

“You,” Jehan replied unashamedly.

Courfeyrac groaned, head falling back and rolling until it was resting on Jehan’s shoulder. “I think I’ve got to go,” he confessed, wincing at his own words.

“Enjolras need you?” Jehan asked.
Courfeyrac nodded, and with a sigh, lifted his head from Jehan’s shoulder and sat up straight. “He... well, we, I guess, um... we lost someone, the other day. I barely knew him, but he was really close to Enjolras,” Courfeyrac explained in a low voice. “And as you may have seen, Enjolras doesn’t deal with emotions well.”

“And you need to be there for him,” Jehan finished for him, smiling. Without hesitating, he reached out and took Courfeyrac’s hand, squeezing it comfortingly. Courfeyrac smiled, and squeezed back.

“Quite frankly, I think I actually need to be there for damage control,” he admitted with a wry laugh. “Sorry. I’d thought to-”

“It’s fine,” Jehan assured him with a grin. To show just how fine this was, he stood up from the bench and pulled Courfeyrac with him.

Smirking slightly, Courfeyrac narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “You’re not trying to get rid of me, are you?”

Smiling, Jehan shook his head, then crossed his heart. “Promise,” he said.

Courfeyrac didn’t grin at that – he beamed. “You,” he said, sincerity unmissable in his tone as he held Jehan’s gaze, “You are wonderful.”

There was a whole anthology that Jehan wanted to say. Poems upon poems, essays on adoration, but he couldn’t say a sentence from a single one because all he could do was smile. His hand was still holding Courfeyrac’s. He let his thumb brush over the back of Courfeyrac’s hand, and had the pleasure of watching Courfeyrac start, then smile even brighter.

“I’ll see you soon?” Courfeyrac asked, desperately. “Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow,” Jehan promised, nodding and grinning.

Courfeyrac paused, chewing his bottom lip, before saying quickly, “Look, I’m really sorry-”

So Jehan did the only thing a true romantic knows to do when their... their boyfriend won’t shut up. He leant forwards, and pecked Courfeyrac on the lips.

And then he remembered he was a coward as far as Courfeyrac was concerned, and turned and ran, right out of the park, right down the road, before he realised his phone was buzzing.

Who said you could run off?

He couldn’t stop grinning.

You clearly didn’t realise there was nothing to apologise for, so I had to show you.

He didn’t breathe until the reply came seconds later.

Did you have to be so dramatic in how you showed me?

He outright laughed.

Yes!

He started to walk towards the Corinthe, to his flat, the chocolate and recorded episodes of Bluestone 42 that were waiting for him as he waited for the next reply, but he only made it a few
steps.

Good.
P.S don’t run away next time.

Without needing to think for a second, Jehan texted back,

I won’t.

His fingers still tingled from where Courfeyrac hadn’t wanted to let him go.

* 

Grantaire got into the flat and instantly grabbed the craft knife from where it was lying on the side, next to slithers of cardboard he’d cut from the last stencil. Not even bothering to take off his shoes or jacket he dumped the bag of wine on the floor and strode to where the canvas of the painting of Combeferre – the malign-looking silhouette – was resting against the wall, and crouched beside it. He stabbed the knife through the paint and material, and started to hack at it.

When the silhouette had been cut out, he grabbed one of the huge boards of cardboard he saved for making graffiti stencils, set the two side by side on the floor, grabbed a pen and, checking against the silhouette outline every few seconds, started to sketch a larger, more life-sized model onto the cardboard.

* 

“Be careful tonight.”

Enjolras glanced up from his laptop, confused. Combeferre had set down his book – never a good sign – and was looking at him from the other sofa with a worried expression. “When aren’t I?” Enjolras asked with a small grin, trying to lighten the mood, because he had an idea of where it would go if he didn’t.

“When you’ve just suffered a hard loss,” Combeferre answered sharply, not even easing into the topic. “Enjolras, doing something rash won’t make yourself feel better.”

“You think I care?” Enjolras replied, just as sharply. “The others have agreed to it, it’s a good precaution to take.”

He turned back to his laptop, trying to remember what point he’d reached in his essay, fiercely not meeting Combeferre’s gaze. “Enjolras,” Combeferre said warningly, “You know, adrenaline is just as addictive as nicotine.”

If anyone – anyone other than Combeferre had said that, Enjolras would have hit them. As his hands clenched on the edge of the keyboard, he realised he was finding it hard not to hit even Combeferre for that comment. “I didn’t get addicted to nicotine,” Enjolras hissed through gritted teeth. “I won’t get addicted to adrenaline.”

“You didn’t.”

“If you’re going to keep talking, could you at least talk about something else?” Enjolras demanded, barely able to stop himself yelling. He looked back to Combeferre, and started to relax when he saw Combeferre nodding calmly, no longer looking concerned, not looking ready to fight his corner.
Enjolras would only worry when Combeferre started to worry.

“Grantaire’s a damn good artist,” Combeferre said instead. “His posters will look a lot better than anything we made without him.”

That, Enjolras would cede. “It’d be better if he wasn’t doing them out of boredom,” he muttered, typing something he hoped wouldn’t be too openly left-wing to make his essay seem biased.

“Mm, I’m not sure he was entirely telling the truth about that,” Combeferre mused. “But you weren’t lying when you said you didn’t want to change him.”

Enjolras’ fingers hovered over the keys. “No, I wasn’t,” he muttered.

“Why not?”

He’d done all he could on the essay for that day. He slammed the lid shut, and got to his feet. “I don’t know,” he said shortly, before leaving for his room to find something else to do.

* 

He’d got on the wrong fucking train.

He’d got on the wrong fucking train.

He wasn’t drunk enough for this shit.

Could you get whiskey on the Great Western?

* 

Tuesday was Dominoes evening, Friday was Indian or Chinese depending on the mood (and bank balance), and Sunday was fish and chips.

And yet, Friday though it was, Grantaire and Jehan’s flat was littered with Dominoes boxes and uneaten crusts. Neither of them had felt up for taking the time to plate up a decent meal and sit around their small TV and watch *Bluestone 42*, or reruns of *Spooks*, when there was better stuff to be done. Easy-to-eat finger food it was.

Jehan had claimed the floor by the sofa, Grantaire the small space between the seating area and the poky kitchen, and both of them were sprawled out on the floor. Grantaire was still wielding a biro and his craft knife on a piece of cardboard, whilst Jehan was surrounded by open notebooks, scraps of paper and even a pillowcase or two, flicking through the various poems, picking one occasionally and copying it into a much neater, lot newer looking moleskin.

And when the door opened, neither of them looked up.

“Right, that’s it, he’s yours for the next five hours,” Eponine said, shoving her little brother into the flat, but not actually entering herself, just swinging from the doorframe as she peered in. “I cannot deal with him.”

“He’s your brother,” Jehan pointed out absently, scribbling away. Gavroche set a cardboard box on the coffee table, then threw himself face-first onto the sofa behind Jehan. “Isn’t dealing with him kind of your point in life?”

“I fucking hope not,” Eponine muttered. She paused, listening, then asked incredulously, “Are you listening to Bruno fucking Mars?”
“Don’t use bad language in front of the minors,” Gavroche yelled out, voice muffled by the cushion he was currently faceplanted in.

“Kid, I’m pretty sure you taught her that word,” Grantaire called back, chuckling.

“No, really, you’re actually listening to Bruno Mars?” Eponine echoed, sagging against the doorframe and raising a sceptical eyebrow.

Grantaire set down the craft knife and rolled his head to look at her. He raised an eyebrow. “Bruno,” he said slowly, clearly, and carefully, “is the man.”

Eponine rolled her eyes, and pushed herself upright. “You’re all dorks.”

“Thank you,” Jehan replied absently, frowning as he chewed on the end of his fountain pen.

“See you, ‘Ponine,” Grantaire called, picking the craft knife back up. When she gave him the finger, he grinned innocently back. She slammed the door shut as she left to go back downstairs.

When he realised he could hear her humming the chorus to *Locked out of Heaven* as she made her way through the corridor, he laughed. What a filthy hypocrite. “I’m kinda scared to ask,” he said, cutting a quick slice perfectly along a biro curve on the cardboard, “But Gav – what’s in the box?”

“Soup,” Gavroche answered, rolling onto his back and snuggling further down into the probably excessive amount of cushions covering Jehan’s sofa.

It’d become Jehan’s after a bet that Grantaire sorely regretted. And he didn’t even remember where half the cushions had come from. “The tortoise?”

That made Jehan look up. “You have a tortoise?” he asked, sounding, as he always did when he got over-excited about something really not that exciting, like a five year old who’d just been told Christmas was tomorrow. Or, perhaps more accurately for Jehan, like a seven year old who’d been told there was a *Faraway Tree* story he hadn’t read yet.

“Yeah, got him the other day,” Gavroche said. “You want to see him?”

Grantaire smiled affectionately – and yes, with a touch of exasperation – as Jehan squeaked and jumped to his feet, letting Gavroche drag him over to the cardboard box. The excited nattering stayed pretty high-pitched as the tortoise was lifted out and carefully placed in Jehan’s hands. “Are you not slightly scared that he’s called it ‘Soup’?” Grantaire called across.

Jehan just shushed him furiously, a hand resting over Soup’s head carefully as if to try and cover his ears from Grantaire’s offensive language. “Don’t make implication like that in front of Soup!” Jehan hissed, before resuming stroking the shell.

“Yeah, Grantaire,” Gavroche echoed smugly.

“Shut up, you.”

“What’s in it for me?”

“The last of my pizza.”

With a whoop, Gavroche abandoned his newly found pet with Jehan, and hopped over to where Grantaire’s box of pizza lay, unsuspecting.

“Hey, Grantaire?” Jehan asked, now lifting pieces of lettuce out from the box and feeding them to
the tortoise balanced on his left hand.

Grantaire hummed, switching from the craft knife to the biro as he started to sketch the outline of the street sign. “Yup?”

“Do you think we should have mentioned to Eponine that we’re leaving in a few hours?”

Responsibilities. Who needed them. “Nah,” Grantaire sighed. “You’ll be fine on your own, won’t you, Gav?”

Gavroche considered the question carefully before answering, slowly and deliberately chewing and swallowing a piece of pizza. “You got more food in the fridge?”

“Yep.”

“Can I use the TV?”

“Of course!”

“How ’bout the wifi?”

“Feuilly pays for the wifi in the building. Knock yourself out.”

Gavroche bit off a bit more meatfeast pizza, chewed a bit more, before shrugging. “Yeah, I’m cool.”

Grantaire looked back to Jehan, and grinned. “See? We’re fine.”

Jehan was trying to look all serious and disappointed, but he’d always been dreadful at stopping himself from grinning. “We’re such shit babysitters,” Jehan said eventually, grin splitting his face in half.

“Oh, so very shit.”

*

Living only ten minutes walk from your friends had some truly wonderful benefits some times. For example, giving Courfeyrac a few more precious minutes to work on the essay he’d meant to have spent that day doing before he had to leave and not incur Enjolras’ wrath.

Having barely got halfway through it, he groaned as he closed the laptop, resigning himself to no sleep that night – that was, if they weren’t caught, arrested, and made to spend the night in a police cell. Then he might get some sleep. Otherwise, guilt would force him to stay up until dawn broke finishing this damn thing.

To be fair, he’d had a week to get it done, a week in which he’d thought he’d have countless free hours in which to do it. But then, that had changed, and those free hours had passed very quickly, and very unproductively, as far as academia was concerned.

Watching the screen power down, he found himself smiling. He didn’t regret it.

So, Enjolras had asked them to be there at nine. Which meant he should leave in... ten minutes ago. Probably should run. Or at least, walk quickly.

He waited until the laptop was shut down entirely before slamming the lid down, swinging out of
his chair and grabbing his keys, yelling a hurried, “Tootles!” to Marius where he was sprawled across one of the two sofas and obliviously watching *While You Were Sleeping* on their TV, and grabbed his dark denim jacket from the back of the other sofa before, eventually, diving from the flat.

He wasn’t wearing his usual skinnies for once, but older and ergo baggier black jeans, because when he’d left the flat earlier to Combeferre’s parting words of ‘be careful, and watch out for him’ he’d got this strange feeling that he’d be running a lot that night, and running in skinnies was never fun. Hence the addition of fingerless black climbing gloves, too, because he’d made the mistake of trying to free run over fire escapes with bare hands before and he was *not* doing that again. Joly had been close to imploding with fears about tetanus. So yes, gloves.

Bahorel wouldn’t have brought any, Courfeyrac knew. He never did. But then, Courfeyrac pitted any infection that dared to try its luck fighting against Bahorel’s immune system. In the few years Courfeyrac had known the guy, he hadn’t seen him so much as sneeze. Apparently his white blood cells were as good as knocking stuff out as Bahorel himself was.

He did end up running, in the end – it was cold, there was no one around, and he *really* didn’t want to be late because he knew they’d just take it as a chance to mock him – and reached Enjolras and Combeferre’s street just in time to see Joly and Bahorel pulling Bossuet up to his feet. The knees of the unlucky fellow’s jeans were torn and slowly being stained red.

“You’re not coming, are you?” Courfeyrac asked with mock fear as he approached, face splitting into a grin as Bossuet laughed and swore at him.

“Nah, my ninja skills are being saved for another day,” he said cheerfully. “But ‘Chetta’s out with the gals and Joly decided it’d be better to leave me under Combeferre’s watchful eye than in our apartment, alone.”

Courfeyrac gave Joly a thumbs up for good logic. Joly nodded sagely in return. “Not making that mistake again.”

“I think having to fetch us from prison and our dear Bossuet from the hospital would be too much, even for Combeferre,” Courfeyrac chuckled, reaching out to set a hand on Bossuet’s shoulder as a quick and silent ‘you okay?’ Bossuet grinned and flicked Courfeyrac’s hand off his shoulder.

Yeah, he was fine.

Bahorel, however, was grimacing, and apparently more concerned with other topics than Bossuet’s superpower of turning even the cooking of fish fingers into an explosive disaster. “Tell me he’s not gone all kamikaze since Lamarque’s death,” he half groaned, half begged, sagging back against the wall, crossing his arms, and clearly not talking about Combeferre. And, nope, no gloves.

Courfeyrac wafted a hand and made a noise like a steam engine, which he hoped came across like a noise of dismissal and not *just* a noise like a steam engine. “Nah, he’s *fine*. Just needs to blow off steam in the only way his cute little revolutionary ass knows.”

“By breaking into somewhere,” Bossuet added, nodding wisely. “Of course. Logical.”

“Enjolras,” Joly explained with exasperation, before nudging Bossuet’s shoulder forwards with his own. “C’mon, let’s get up to the flat, get those jeans off you.”

“Ooohh, Mr Joly!” Bossuet gasped, stepping back with wide eyes and fanning himself with his hand.
“To clean your grazes, oh my god-

“Yeah, I’m just fucking with you,” Bossuet said with a wide grin, before skipping forwards and into the apartment building.

“Our beloved Marius and I were actually thinking of ways to cheer up The Great One,” Courfeyrac said to Bahorel, trailing after a hyperactive Bossuet and attempting-to-be-serious Joly and heading up the stairs. “I suggested tickets to the Frank Turner tour. Belov’d Marius just looked up at me with wide innocent eyes and went, ‘Oh, does he like Frank Turner?’”

Bahorel snorted, stamping his feet cheerfully on every step. “Are you shitting me?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Does he seriously not know-”

“Apparently not.”

“But, like, we were giving Enjolras shit for quoting Love Ire and War in a speech for fucking months.”

“Ah, but those were the months when the light of Marius’ life was waiting on our tables. He didn’t notice a thing except her perfectly formed arse and bosoms.”

“...Bosoms?”

“Yeah, no, calling them that felt wrong. No but really though, in sex, don’t they just get in the way, all... bouncing, and everything?”

“Doesn’t the second cock get in the way?”

“Touché, touché...”

The landing of the third floor revealed Bossuet showing off his fine, ruby-red knees to an exasperated Combeferre. “Any more wounded to drop in my lap?” he asked of Courfeyrac and Bahorel.

“Not yet,” Courfeyrac told him cheerfully, waiting until Bossuet and Joly had passed and were safely in the flat before pulling his friend into a quick hug. “How’s living, my friend?”

“So-so,” Combeferre sighed, kicking Courfeyrac’s shins to get him inside and pulling the door shut behind them. “Though living in the same rooms as a stressed Enjolras is never going to be a bundle of laughs...”

“I have tea and episodes of Miranda ready and waiting,” Courfeyrac said seriously, keeping his arm looped around Combeferre’s waist, Combeferre’s arm around his shoulders. Bossuet was wriggling and making a lot of noise on the sofa as Bahorel furiously tugged his jeans off, Joly presumably vanished to fetch a first aid kit.

“You’re a godsend.”

Courfeyrac grinned, and pinched Combeferre’s waist, immediately getting a slap round the back of his head in return. “No but really, you can escape to ours whenever,” Courfeyrac said seriously, leaning into Combeferre slightly. “I think we might even have – no, wait, Marius was watching a Sandra Bullock rom-com as I left, all the ice-cream will be eaten by the time the movie’s over.
Sorry.”

Combeferre shrugged. “Don’t worry about it. And probably an unnecessary invitation. I’ve survived through worse moodswings.”

Now that was true. Enjolras had never been the most stable of them, too much pent up passion, determination, and quite truthfully, determination to do better. Surviving sixth form with him had been no joke. “Perhaps Grantaire can help him relax a bit,” Courfeyrac suggested with a wink and a grin.

As predicted, Combeferre rolled his eyes and moved to step away, but making sure to shove Courfeyrac’s head to the side before he was entirely out of reach. “We don’t even know he’s gay,” Combeferre pointed out, voice dropping several decibels as Enjolras finally emerged from his bedroom.

“Yes, we do,” Courfeyrac sang cheerfully. “Just call me Morse!” he said, quoting somewhere he couldn’t quite remember. “He is, actually, bi, and doesn’t care who knows it apparently.”

Combeferre gave him a questioning and intrigued look, and Courfeyrac nodded. “He’s got a good sense of humour,” Combeferre continued, folding his arms casually and leaning against the wall. “He was round this afternoon, with sketches for poster ideas. He’s good company.”

“He’s hilarious,” Courfeyrac agreed. “And he fed me waffles, so I’m morally obliged to platonically love him. Or non-platonically, depending how many more waffles he gives me.”

“And he’s not a bad soul, either,” Combeferre added. “I mean, a cynic through and through... but a good debater, fierce-”

“You shouldn’t say fierce it sounds wrong, coming from your mouth-”

“Can’t pull that off?”

“Definitely not.”

“Strong debater, then – and will push and exercise Enjolras more than we ever could. He told me,” Combeferre said, straightening suddenly and sounding almost excited, “that he volunteers at the local youth centre, helping kids with their art. And if Enjolras finds out when I’m not there to see his reaction, there will be a reckoning.”

“Actually, I knew that,” Courfeyrac mused. “Jehan told me. He helps some with creative writing, gets them into slam poetry and rap, can you believe that he helps under-privileged kids with their rap.”

“Yes, that’s the other benefit of our dear cynic,” Combeferre said, amused starting to slip into his voice and Courfeyrac realised his mistake just that bit too late. “He does come hand in hand with a certain poet... tell me, Courfeyrac, how is lovely Jehan?”

And, of course, that was the cue.

“Oh Jehan, I love you!” Bossuet started singing, with his legs swung over Joly’s lap and battered knees getting a full cleansing treatment. “Oh Jehan, I do!”

“When we’re apart my heart beats only for you!” Bahorel joined in, arms swinging raucously in what he presumably thought was normal behaviour for the love struck. Joly was laughing so hard he was finding it hard to dab at Bossuet’s wounds with cotton wool. Even Combeferre was
laughing, the bastard.

Courfeyrac had started thinking his only true friend in the room was Enjolras, until he heard him, as he was tying the laces on his trainers, sing, in surprisingly dulcet tones, “Sweet Jean Provaire, the good times never seemed so good…”

As everyone else burst out laughing again, Courfeyrac pouted and crossed his arms. “Fuck you all!”

“In your dreams,” Bossuet said sweetly, before sticking his tongue out at Courfeyrac’s scowl.

“You’re all just jealous,” Courfeyrac began, an unstoppable grin feeling like it was splitting his face in half, “because I got kissed today, and you didn’t.”

In unison, everyone in the room made very girly ‘oooooooh!’ noises, save Bossuet, who raised a hand and said with a grin, “Actually I got laid this morning, soooo…”

“Yes but we have a live-in girlfriend,” Joly pointed out with the careful application of a square plaster to Bossuet’s knee, “So shut up and applaud Courfeyrac for getting a peck from the boy he’s been mooning over.”

Obediently, Bossuet raised his hands and gave Courfeyrac a round of applause. Now pretty sure he was blushing, Courfeyrac curtsied, cheeks starting to hurt from the grin.

“Finish up with Bossuet, Joly,” Enjolras said, rising to his feet. “We’re going to have to mock on the move, I’m afraid.”

“But then Combeferre and I can’t mock him if you leave now!” Bossuet protested, his legs being lifted up by Joly and swung onto the floor.

“I’m sure Courfeyrac has his phone on him,” Enjolras said – and yeah, Courfeyrac did indeed have his phone in his back pocket – “But I’m afraid I can’t give you permission to text him unless the text is particularly embarrassing.”

Bahorel cheered his approval.

As much as he was enjoying this, Courfeyrac decided to get the show on the road. Besides, the quicker they got back, the more work he could do on his essay and the more time he could spend with Jehan tomorrow. “Right, stop that,” Courfeyrac declared, waving a finger at all of them. “It’s silly.”

He turned and strode from the flat, followed by Enjolras, Bahorel, Joly, and Bossuet’s echoing cries of “Squaaaaad! Camp it up!”

*

It was near ten, with Jehan still sorting out the aerosol cans in the flat and Grantaire shoving the stencils into the back of Feuilly’s car, when a familiar face finally showed up.

Well, vaguely familiar, as Grantaire had never seen it with that much smudged makeup on before. Nor surrounded by so many sequins and feathers.

The shock was so much that those sparkly platform heels were mere meters away before Grantaire had recovered his wits enough to actually greet him. “If it isn’t Lady Marmalade!” he said with sheer glee, grinning and leering as he leant on the roof of the car. “I’m afraid there’s no business
around here for, you foxy lady, we’re all firmly spoken for, and even your suave charm and buxom figure couldn’t-”

There was a threat inherent in how Feuilly flicked his purple feather boa over his shoulder, but it was a threat Grantaire was perfectly happy to ignore.

“-or I could give you a lift – which strip club do you work at, Madonna?”

“Shut your fat gob, Grantaire,” Feuilly ordered sharply.

Grantaire pursed his lips, bit them, *sucked his cheeks in* but a snort still managed to get through. And then it was just *too hard* to stop. Laughing so hard he thought his lungs were going to be thrown out of his chest, he bent double, one hand holding his internal organs in and the other clinging to the roof of the car so he didn’t fall all the way to the floor. “Oh,” he breathed when he could, chest hurting, “Oh my god – Feuilly – Feuilly!”

Feuilly growled under his breath, rolling his eyes, crossing his arms over the – Jesus fuck was that a sequined *corset?* Oh, oh gods Grantaire needed more time laughing – and tapping his foot. Which *really* didn’t make him look *at all* more macho.

“Are you quite finished?” Feuilly asked eventually, and just *his voice* coming from something that looked like that –

Grantaire bit his lips again in an attempt to turn serious, and flopped a hand in Feuilly’s direction. “The corset suits you,” he said barely managing to keep his voice steady. “Brings out your hourglass figure.”

“Fuck you.”

Grantaire couldn’t help but laugh again. “Oh my god, man, what happened to you?”

“Birmingham,” was all Feuilly said, and there was a glint in his steel gaze that just *dared* Grantaire to ask for more details.

“How the fuck did you get there?” Grantaire asked, astonishment overriding self-preservation instincts. “No, screw that – how did you get back?”

“Train.”

“Birmingham’s only an hour or two out-”

“Wrong train.”

Grantaire automatically bit his lips again. He had the feeling that if he laughed any more, Feuilly would deck him. “You... you went on the train... dressed like *that*?” he asked, bursts of laughter slipping out when he couldn’t hold them back between pursed lips.

His response this time was a raised middle finger. “So if you don’t mind,” Feuilly declared, turning and walking into the shop, “I’d like to go and get changed-”

“Get changed into something dark,” Grantaire told him, and when Feuilly stopped and sent a quizzical look at him over his shoulder – which *really* made his blue eyeshadow *shine* – Grantaire explained, “New piece. We’re just getting ready to go.”

Feuilly grinned at that – which really looked quite scary. “Wonderful. Give me a few minutes,
yeah?"

“Sure,” Grantaire called after him as Feuilly hurried in through the shop. “Oh – and give Jehan the feather boa!”

“Of course!”

“But tell him he can’t wear it tonight!” It would break Jehan’s heart, but Grantaire as much as he loved Jehan, he was not having the exuberant poet leaving a trail of fluorescent purple feathers behind him that night. “I have a feeling this night’s going to be enough of a circus without it...”

Chapter End Notes

You're all wonderful human beings. Bonus points to anyone who gets all the external references in this (mainly Monty Python).

PS Borough Market - I wasn't lying. Delicious cheesecake, delicious wine, smells like a potion of all the bad cheeses in the world.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

this is more of a chapter 3 part 2, than a chapter in its own right, not much is happening in this chapter but it's FUN STUFF! Also, porn. Finally. So, enjoy, all those who are still reading this uber-long, time-taking fic! (I swear I did not intend for it to become this long)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When they reached the NHS office block, the first thing Grantaire did was look up. And apparently his logic was sound, because he saw two legs dangling over the edge of the opposite building. That they were gone when he looked back the next second didn’t fool him at all. He grinned and waved his whole arm anyway.

“Are you going to tell me what’s going on?” Feuilly grumbled, shrugging the rucksack with the cans off his shoulder with a huff of relief. If Feuilly was determined to park his car a ‘safe distance’ away, Grantaire had said, then he could be the one to carry the heavy equipment. “You weren’t even working on anything, last I heard, and suddenly this?!”

“He wasn’t working on anything last you saw, because he only started it this afternoon,” Jehan explained, voice muffled due to his face being buried in about five different wool scarves, only one of which had pompoms on it.

“Call it a sudden flash of inspiration,” Grantaire said, purposefully vague, as he took the rucksack from Feuilly and pulled out the folded stencils. “Um... how about there?”

Feuilly groaned, but obediently leant against a wall and started keeping an eye out as Grantaire fussed over positioning. He was wearing the most macho outfit he had – leather jacket over monochrome Led Zeppelin Swan Song top, and tattered jeans tucked into his old worker’s boots from the good old days when he had been a carpenter on construction sites. He was even wearing fingerless leather gloves, bless him. As if any of that would make Grantaire forget that he was wearing drag not half an hour ago.

“I don’t know,” Jehan mused, examining the wall Grantaire was gesturing at, “Because I don’t know what the design is.”

Grantaire grinned. “Trust me, this patch of wall will do just fine.” A meter or so above where Grantaire was pointing was the nice big logo of the NHS. Forcing himself to focus – to not think of what might be happening inside the building, or more accurately, who was inside – Grantaire set down the bundle he was holding, unfolded the first piece of cardboard, pulled the masking tape from his pocket and starting to stick the pattern to the wall.

*  

“I just heard a car. I swear to god I just heard a car.”

And this was why they never brought Joly. “Look,” Enjolras said, again, still trying to keep his voice low and measured, “if it was anything to worry about, Courfeyrac would have texted or
called to tell us to get out. He can see a cars coming from streets away. There’s nothing to worry about. Okay?”

“You worried we’ll get arrested?” Bahorel asked, grinning, slamming his hand onto Joly’s shoulder in what Enjolras knew was a friendly gesture and hoped wouldn’t cause any permanent damage. “You got no faith in my fists, man? They ain’t gonna get a hand on you, trust me.”

“That’s... both comforting and terrifying, at the same time.”

Enjolras rolled his eyes as he crouched down, but he smirked all the same. “Can you two possibly be quiet so I can focus?” he asked, pulling his lock-picks out of his breast pocket, and focusing on the lock before him.

His two friends replied in unison, and with exactly the same word.

“No.”

* 

Feuilly whistled low. “If that doesn’t get attention...”

Combeferre’s silhouette had come across perfectly. Though, thankfully, it was no longer recognisable as Combeferre. Grantaire had turned the philosophy student into a doctor, the black coat into a long white lab coat, with a clipboard in one hand and scalpel in the other, stethoscope around his neck... though the glasses had come across more like goggles, but that just added to the affect. And behind the silhouette, as if the surgeon was standing before it, was a street sign, reading ‘Fleet Street’.

“And if the gang do get out that message about the NHS...” Jehan added, also trailing off, and grinning broadly.

Grantaire was grinning, too. “Feuilly, got your phone?”

“You still asking stupid questions?” Feuilly drawled, raising an eyebrow. When Grantaire raised the obligatory finger, Feuilly snorted at him.

“Mind taking a photo of it?” Grantaire asked, and yeah, Feuilly could do that.

“Hold up,” Jehan cut in, holding out the final aerosol can. Red. Affecting patience, Feuilly waited as Grantaire took it, threw it into the air a few times, and with a proud flourish sprayed his signature.

“What NHS thing?” Feuilly asked lazily, pulling his phone from his pocket.

Grantaire chuckled, and Jehan answered. “You’ve really got to come to one of these meetings,” he said, as he helped Grantaire shove the aerosol cans back in the rucksack, the remaining scraps of the cardboard stencils covering them. “There’s this super huge black guy who’s terrifying and brilliant. I’m actually scared about how well you two would get on.”

“You just want to make jokes about my pasty white skin looking worse when I’m next to a black dude,” Feuilly muttered mutinously. But he’d come to a meeting eventually, he knew. His curiosity wouldn’t let him rest. And if he didn’t go in a within a week, Grantaire would just pull out the Poland card.

The next second, Grantaire was spinning to look at the two of them with a shit-eating grin. “So,
you guys still want to know why we’re here?’”

There was something else? Feuilly started to fume. He liked sleeping, god damn it, and, thinking on it, he didn’t have the foggiest idea who was looking after his shop right that moment. “Are you fucking—”

Yet apparently Grantaire was a busy busy man who didn’t have time for Feuilly’s logical concerns. “C’mon!” he said with a terrifying good cheer, striding over to the front door of the office block, apparently confident that the other two would follow.

Feuilly shared an eye roll with Jehan. Because, dammit, Grantaire was right. When Grantaire entered the building (which they really shouldn’t be going into), he and Jehan were right behind.

He took the opportunity to show off the insults that only someone with Scottish blood could conjure up, but soon strayed back to his favourite topic. “Now, using my car to get away from some slightly not legal art is one thing – using it to run from a building we’ve broken and entered—”

“How can it be breaking and entering when the door was already open?” Grantaire asked innocently. “We’re just... entering. Nothing says we can’t do that.”

But Feuilly was, by now, and old hat at this. And Feuilly was not fooled. “Yet I have this feeling the police would say something different.”

Grantaire was disappearing in the long black depths of the unlit corridors, and besides, he was facing away from Feuilly, but Feuilly could still sense his damn smirk. “Are you even going to tell us what we’re here for before we trip over it?” he called.

It was a few seconds before Grantaire replied, and Feuilly was already pretty sure he knew what Grantaire was going to say from the way his head was turning and looking around without any apparent sense of direction. “Actually,” Grantaire started, and yep, there it was, “I don’t know where... just look around, yeah?”

“For what?” Feuilly asked, wishing for either some good whiskey or paracetamol. Next to him, Jehan was starting to giggle, which was not a good sign.

“You’ll know,” Grantaire said, utterly unhelpfully. He then turned to the nearest door and tried the handle. When it opened, he stuck his head inside, said, “Nope,” and moved on to the next door.

Feuilly turned to share a look with Jehan, who was grinning – so he clearly had suspicions, if not actually in-the-know – and sighed, prompting Jehan to chuckle and shove his shoulder before they both, obediently, turned and tried the doors nearest them.

This went on for a substantial amount of time, enough so that Feuilly had come up with a detailed plan of how to firmly incapacitate Grantaire using the available office supplies. The Post-It notes were the fundamental aspect of the plan he was going to put into effect in T-minus ten minutes.

But then his plan was ruined when he opened his something-billionth door, and saw three blokes blinking up at him. One of them was blonde, another looked like he was about to either cry or shit himself, and another was a super huge black guy. Feuilly, too tired to give a shit about the deer-in-the-headlights look they were all giving him, or the way blondie and super huge were curling fists, he dozily lifted a hand and pointed at super huge black guy. “You’re the super huge black guy who’s terrifying yet brilliant, aren’t you?” he asked. When the super huge black guy – and those were some really cool dreadlocks – just narrowed his eyes at him, and yep that was definitely a fist, Feuilly just turned his finger towards blondie and went, “And you’re Apollo, right?” Though,
looking at the third guy he was left frowning. “You I don’t know,” he confessed, not really apologetically.

As the super huge one started rising to his feet, Feuilly sighed, and leant back out into the corridor. “I think I found the thing,” he yelled at the butts of Grantaire and Jehan that were sticking out of other rooms.

He then turned back to face the three guys. He crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes. “You don’t look at all like what I expected,” he said, eventually.

He was starting to think he was going to get punched pretty soon, but then the dreadlocks guys rolled back onto his heels, and smirked. “You’re the ginger cunt, aren’t you?”

Feuilly chewed the inside of his lip before answering that. “Now, I probably am, but I don’t think they would have described me as cunt. Asshole, dickhead, bastard, yes, but I don’t think cunt’s in their vocabulary. Their preferences definitely lean more to-”

The ferocity with which Grantaire jabbed the small of Feuilly’s back was probably no coincidence when one considered what Feuilly had been about to say. “Well now!” Grantaire cried cheerfully, sliding into the room – and Feuilly quite happily walked away from him to give him more space because ow, that bastard – “Fancy running into you lot here!”

Feuilly was quite certain that the glare blondie was giving Grantaire was the upper classes’ version of a raised middle finger. “Why are you here?” Blondie asked through gritted teeth and, wow, he wasn’t even pretending not to be rude.

“Stuff to do,” Grantaire said absently, as, behind him, Jehan sidled into the room. Feuilly watched as the flower power kid scanned the occupants, and whilst he got a nice wave and grin from Guy Unknown, Jehan still couldn’t hide the disappointment. When he managed to catch his eye, Feuilly shrugged. No loverboy, commiserations, and all that. “But what are you doing here?” Grantaire asked with ultimate levels of sass, and with an additional raised eyebrow as he leant against the doorframe. “Nothing illegal, I hope? Wearing all that black clothing, people could think you were acting suspiciously.”

“You can’t possibly have an excuse,” Blondie was continuing, and his jaw was probably going to get some permanent damage if he didn’t unclench it some point soon. “You seriously ask me why I didn’t invite you along when you’re pulling shit like this?”

He was impressive. Feuilly was almost getting scared. If the whole situation wasn’t so hilarious, that was. Most people hoped to run into their crush at the local shops. Grantaire stalked them to the NHS head offices. “Yes, because my superb ability to break the law, which I am currently demonstrating, was... not what you’re needing? Obviously that’s why Mr Muscles is there flexing his fists and Spiderman is on surveillance duty on the roof of the other building and... hey, Joly, why are you here?”

“I’m the brains of the operation,” mystery man – Joly, apparently – said, nodding sagely.

“I have everyone I need, I don’t need any unnecessary hands,” Blondie spat back. “What could you give me that trusted friends couldn’t?”

Feuilly felt more let down than he’d ever felt before when Grantaire didn’t reply to that question with the dirtiest piece of innuendo available to mankind. You could see he wanted to, could see it on the tip of his tongue, but no, he was boring and replied, “So you think, what, I’d intentionally sabotage this because I’m not passionate? You’re flicking through some dude’s notes, how could I
mess that up! In fact, it’d probably be safer to have a pair of ‘hands’ floating around who aren’t drooling over your cause the entire time – no offence, Joly, Bahorel, we’re bros, s’all cool.” He got a bro nod from the other two, but Blondie now looked ready to through a hissy fit, “- and who can keep an eye out for things other than the NHS’s stocks points, or whatever.”

“You think you’re here to make us safe?” he asked, furious, and rising to his feet. “Because of that over-protective bullshit Combeferre said this afternoon?”

“What? No-”

“Then why are you here? You’re a cynic, you couldn’t give a shit about any of this!”

The guy said more, but Feuilly was starting to tune out. He’d abandoned his shop to go on some artistic jaunt for the second time in a week, he’d slept probably a grand total of two hours in the last two days and his car was on some backstreet where youths might stumble across it and think it worth their time, and concerns like that made it hard to pay attention to the angry battle of wits going on before him. Feuilly let himself tune out and leant back against the wall, grinning when a silently laughing Jehan caught his eye.

When the topic of heated conversation turned to the benefits and costs of saving the NHS – and really, how had they got from Grantaire’s give-a-fuck attitude to that – Feuilly’s attention drifted to where Bahorel and Joly were now standing by the desk, muttering in low voices and taking photos of files with their mobiles. Jehan had, at some point, edged his way over there, and offered to help Joly tidy everything away when the vigilantes had finished.

As that was going on in one corner, and the argument getting even more intense in the centre of the room – and Feuilly didn’t like the cold edge to Grantaire’s smile – Feuilly was free to socialise with the big guy who’d circled around the edge of the room to where Feuilly was still leaning against the wall. The guy casually proffered his hand absently, with most of his amused attention still going to their arguing friends. “Bahorel,” he said.

Feuilly grasped the hand and shook it. Damn that was a strong grip. “Feuilly,” he said. “Please, pull up some wall. It’s comfortable, I promise you.”

The guy, Bahorel, laughed once, and did just that, slouching against the wall with his arms crossed. “What a pretentious dick,” he muttered, chuckling, and shaking his head at the scene before them.

Feuilly let his eyes widen in shock. “Yours is a dick? So is mine!”

“What a happy fucking coincidence.”

“Amen.”

On reflex, Feuilly held out a clenched fist. Without a word, Bahorel pumped his knuckles against Feuilly’s.

And thus a beautiful friendship was formed.

“You got something,” Bahorel muttered, eyes barely flicking to Feuilly before flicking away again to stare with impassive hatred at Blondie.

“Huh?”

Bahorel waved a finger at Feuilly’s collar.
Frowning, Feuilly stuck a few fingers down the collar of his leather jacket, and wriggled them a bit until they brushed against something... feathery. When he pulled out the offending purple feather, he scowled at it. Bahorel snorted.

“The fuck, dude?” Bahorel asked, condescending mocking dripping from his tone.

“Birmingham,” Feuilly said, voice completely monotone. He shoved it into his pocket to give to Jehan later. “Don’t ask.”

The chuckle Bahorel gave was anything but reassuring.

The two in the centre of the room were now barely a meter apart, and it was looking less and less like unresolved sexual tension and more like it was going to come to blows. Grantaire was opening and closing his fists, fast, and Feuilly had seen him in enough brawls to see the warning signs, and he might not know Blondie but the way he was clenching and unclenching his jaw with less and less rhythm couldn’t be a good sign. Curling his own hands into careful fists, Feuilly pushed himself off the wall warily, and looked across to Bahorel. It was no comfort to see that he’d taken the same precautionary measures.

If he had to pull them apart, Feuilly would. If he had to knock either of them out, he’d do that too. And then he’d have to talk to Grantaire because – he knew the guy never made the healthiest life choices, fuck, he’d been the one to bring him home from hospital more than once – but he’d managed to keep away from guys like Montparnasse. Physical abuse, Grantaire could fight back. If he didn’t care, he was fine. Feuilly had seen that. But this... this wasn’t a Grantaire who didn’t care. This wasn’t anything Feuilly had seen before, and he was starting to get scared...

“It’s astonishing,” the blonde one bit out, almost spitting out the words, “that you can even think. How many brain cells have you drowned in alcohol? How many do you have left? Being clever with a can of paint doesn’t make you any better than the drunkard you’re trying too hard to pretend not to be!”

Feuilly was stepping forwards before he’d even registered the comment.

“Hold up!” Bahorel said suddenly, the urgency in his voice causing everyone to stop, and turn. He had his phone in his hand, and it was lit up, vibrating just audibly. “It’s Courf.”

Joly paled, and Grantaire’s opposition swore under his breath. In a clear mad panic, Joly started to scramble with the folders, shoving what was left back into draws and piles. Grantaire, breathing out, took a step back, in what Feuilly recognised as a silent step down. Apparently, the other man had the power now.

Bahorel clicked on his phone, and another man’s voice filled the room. “Jesus fuck, what took you so long to answer? And why the fuck isn’t Enjolras answering his fucking phone?”

Eyes turned to Enjolras, who, cursing himself under his breath, pulled his phone from his pocket. Sure enough, a light was flashing, signifying several missed calls.

“Look, a few roads down, police, and I can’t tell if they’re coming your way or not but do you want to risk it?”

Enjolras looked around at everyone and tilted his head towards the door. Jehan was the first out, Grantaire, Joly, Feuilly, Bahorel, Enjolras making sure everyone was clear before leaving himself. “Front or rear?” he asked.

“Meet me out the front,” Courfeyrac said, and the sound of metal clanking echoed through the
phone line. Without any further signal, the group started to run down the corridor to the front door. “Then we’re gonna have to move.”

“My car’s a few roads down,” Feuilly suggested, starting to wish he’d worn easier shoes to run in that untied workman boots. He almost stumbled over a loose piece of carpet, but Grantaire and Bahorel seamlessly grabbed an arm each and kept him on his feet and running forwards.

“Yeah, I saw it, it’s too close to where the police are coming down,” Courfeyrac said, and there was a muffled cursing and a metallic crash.

“You okay?” Jehan asked quickly.

“Yeah, just – it’s hard to see rust when it’s midnight,” Courfeyrac muttered. “Doesn’t matter, I’m down now, where are you?”

“Almost out,” Grantaire said, at the same time Enjolras said, “We’re almost there.”

Under a minute later, they were stumbling out onto the street, and Feuilly set eyes on Courfeyrac for the first time. He looked not much older than Jehan, and was pacing back and forth, running a hand nervously through brown curls and chewing his lip but, for some reason, even with the imminent danger, the thing Feuilly noticed and took stock of the most was how he was wearing double denim, of all things, black jeans with black denim jacket.

Courfeyrac looked up and sighed visibly with relief as the two groups spilled out on the street. “They’re not that far out, only a few streets and with no siren, but lights on – that’s how I could see them, thankfully – but c’mon, we gotta head off now-”

“We’re out of the building,” Bahorel said, shrugging. “Why would they think we robbed it, why not just be walking-”

Impatiently, Courfeyrac cried out wordlessly and gestured at Grantaire’s latest crowning glory, the paint still not quite dry on the wall. Enjolras’ groan of fury made Feuilly wince. He opened his mouth, protesting that they couldn’t link that to them, either, before remembering how his and Grantaire’s clothing – as always – was covered in paint.

“Not to mention, seven guys, all in black, lingering outside an important building and nowhere near residential areas, sure, not suspicious at all, so let’s go,” Courfeyrac rushed, darting forwards to tug Enjolras’ shoulder forwards and grab Jehan’s hand, “Let’s move!”

He started to pull Jehan off down the street, Enjolras and Joly following, but Grantaire, it seemed, had another and better idea. “No, not that way,” he hissed, walking back towards the other end of the road. “This way, we’ve gotta go this way.”

Feuilly headed his way without a second thought, and could hear Jehan muttering to Courfeyrac and pulling him to Grantaire, too. But Joly and Bahorel weren’t walking, and Enjolras certainly didn’t seem convinced. “Why?”

Grantaire groaned, now leaning against a building corner by an alley, dithering, and frantically looking around. “Look, we don’t have time, just – you’ll see why, just trust me, and for fuck’s sake do it quickly!”

Feuilly considered, almost absently, that there was no reason why they couldn’t split up. But the same idea hadn’t occurred to Enjolras, it seemed, as he gritted his teeth and said, “Stop arguing, and come-”
Courfeyrac cut into Enjolras’ orders with a groan and a muttered, “Too late.”

The road lit up suddenly as the police car rounded the corner, catching each of them in its headlights.

“Wait for it,” Enjolras muttered, moving onto the pavement and making the others follow him. “They might keep going...”

“They won’t,” Bahorel muttered. “Look at them.”

Bahorel was right. The police car was slowing, pulling up a few meters down.

“Courfeyrac, Bahorel,” Enjolras started, but the two men were nodding before he’d even finished.

“You take the alleys, we can lead them off,” Courfeyrac muttered, removing his hands from Jehan’s and massaging his gloved palms. “Like this area. Lots of nice old fashioned fire escapes.”

“Which I’m likely to cut myself on,” Bahorel muttered.

“Your fault for not wearing gloves.”

The engine of the police car turned off abruptly. “Wait for it,” Enjolras muttered, shifting his weight onto the other foot, getting ready. Feuilly copied, tensing his muscles, preparing to push off. “Wait for them both to get out... wait...”

The next order wasn’t verbal. No one made a sound when the doors of the police car had been shut, when the police officers were stepping forwards. The signal came when Enjolras turned, and started to run. And without a second’s hesitation, the other six followed.

Feuilly wanted to laugh when he heard the police swearing at them, barely audible over the thuds of their feet on the tarmac. Poor bastards, had probably been expecting a few drunk and disorderly at the most. Not this band of misfits.

And the band of misfits started to spread out when they turned the corner, Jehan out front, as he always was – a fucking Usain Bolt, that kid – Feuilly a good second with Joly, Grantaire and Enjolras not far back. And Courfeyrac and Bahorel had pulled to the side slightly, slightly back, not looking like they were even trying.

“Turn left, then next alley,” Courfeyrac called, barely panting at all. “You lot all take it!”

“There’s a nice multi-storey up ahead,” Bahorel added, his grin so very audible. “Us two can take them for a nice jog around that.”

Feuilly risked a glance over his shoulder. The police officers weren’t too far behind, but just far enough so that when they all turned the next corner of the road, they’d get a nice few minutes before they were back in sight again.

That gap was gonna get shorter, however, if they didn’t get out soon, because, boy, Feuilly really needed to focus more on cardio than just weights and kicking Grantaire’s arse with kickboxing.

But the corner was reached, with Feuilly grabbing a lamppost to swing himself round, catching his hand on a bit of metal, Joly almost tripping into him and giving him an apologetic pat on the back as he sprinted past with long legs, Grantaire slamming two hands on the back of his back to push him on, Enjolras catching up and Jehan ahead of them turning around and running backwards a bit to check on them, before grinning and diving sideways into an alley.
Feuilly was pushed, pulled, and stumbled into the alley last, just in time to hear a call of “Good luck!” from Bahorel and Courfeyrac wooping, as they ran straight past.

He almost stopped, wanting to collapse against the wall, but Enjolras was hissing, “Come on!” and Jehan was almost nearing the street at the end of the alley, so with Grantaire’s hand entangled in his jacket Feuilly was dragged onwards.

“Head left,” Grantaire yelled ahead, and Feuilly could only just make out Jehan nodding, far ahead and in shadow as he was.

“Why?” Enjolras demanded between deep, panting breaths, but, this time, when Grantaire ordered Enjolras to trust him, Enjolras didn’t argue back.

So when Jehan reached the end of the alley, he turned left, and the rest followed. Grantaire yelled out a few more directions, everyone slowing down slightly as they realised they no longer had police close on their tail – if at all.

And then, suddenly, one final right turn and the group was running head-first into a crowd of very noisy, very drunk people, pouring in and out of clubs and bars at a steady pace.

Jehan skidded to a stop before he crashed into a hen party, causing Joly to stumble and grab Jehan’s shoulders to stay upright, panting and giggling. Enjolras came to halt by Joly’s side, Grantaire skipped to a stop, grinning, and Feuilly started to laugh.

“Last Friday of the month!” he yelled, getting himself heard above the chaos that was flowing around them. “Half the city’s out spending their money right now!”

Grantaire didn’t answer him, though. His eyes were fixed on Enjolras, even though Feuilly – and therefore probably anyone else – could have told him that his chances of getting a ‘well done’ were so minimal, it wasn’t worth his time.

But Grantaire must have seen something, a twitch of the lips, eyebrow raising, finger flicking, **something** in Enjolras’ movement and behaviour that Feuilly missed, because the next second he was laughing, grinning, and collapsing on Feuilly’s shoulder. Grinning himself, Feuilly patted his head absently as his body struggled to remember what oxygen was and how to use it to get energy.

And so the five of them were very content and happy and relaxed and no longer on edge, when the crowd around them changed from giggling women and horny men to guys with bloody shirts and noses and wide, drugged up eyes who were being ushered out of a club by a detective inspector who looked very familiar.

His mind repeating *shitshitshitshit* in a desperate little loop, Feuilly tried to subtly shake Grantaire and grab Jehan, pulling the poet and subsequently the other two closer to him in the hope they could get out of the bad, bad mob, and out of view, but no.

That familiar detective inspector set his hands on the scene, surveying his prey, and managed to set his eyes on them.

“Fuck.”

There went his chance of a nice sleep.

* 

“Trust you.”
“Look, it was a good plan, how was I to know-”

“Trust you!”

“It’s not like I asked Javert to be there-”

“Oh, and of course you have a police inspector who has a personal vendetta against you,” Enjolras bit out, not even struggling as a chuckling police officer gently nudged him into the cell, because for fuck’s sake. “Why am I even fucking surprised.”

“He’s a bit of a dick, to be quite honest,” the ginger one said, sighing and pulling a face as he almost tripped over the ledge of the doorframe, as he was pushed in next. “He’s got a vendetta against everyone he’s ever set eyes on more than once.”

*Picked up a lot of guys tonight,* the police officers at the station had said. *Pretty successful drugs bust,* they’d said. *So you five don’t mind sharing a cell, right?* they’d said.

Yes, yes Enjolras fucking did mind.

“What, Javert?” one of the local friendly policemen said, nudging Grantaire into the cell last, and leaning on the doorframe to apparently chat a little bit. “You got caught by him? Sucks to be you.”

The other officer let out a low whistle. “I mean, I’m pretty sure the guy hates me, and I’m technically on the same side as him.”

Enjolras stared at him. He found if he stared long enough, people would eventually edge away awkwardly.

“Only because you hit his car that one time, Sam,” Grantaire sighed, sliding onto the concrete ledge that served as a bench. “You couldn’t get me my mobile, Sam, Nick, could you? It’s in the front pocket of that rucksack you took from me.”

But the policemen shook their heads. “No can do, R. You know the rules.”

Grantaire nodded wearily, and Enjolras’ stare turned from annoyed to stunned. Though, minding his manners, he waited until Grantaire had said a weary goodbye to his friends before unleashing sarcastic wrath.

“You couldn’t have asked your friends for a nice cup of tea?” he asked, crossing his arms and raising an eyebrow. “I mean, you’re clearly an old time friend of this establishment.”

To his left, already sat on the floor with his legs stretched out, the ginger snorted. “You could say that,” he drawled. “Put it this way – Jehan baked them up some cookies at Christmas, and Grantaire sent a homemade card.”

Oh *god.* Enjolras pressed a hand over his eyes, and took deep breaths. When he opened them again, Grantaire was shrugging, Joly was pressing the sleeve of his coat over his mouth to stop himself laughing, and Jehan was genially explaining, “Well the topic of using lavender as a flavour came up once...”

“Just, casually discussing baking through the cell door?” Enjolras asked, wearily. Jehan grinned at him, and, though it was easy enough to dislike the artist, the concept of hating the poet was becoming more unthinkable each day. Sighing, Enjolras gave up, and stepped forwards, sliding into the space on the bench beside Joly, the other side of the bench than Grantaire, with Jehan sat by his legs. The poet seemed rather comfortable, where he was curled up with his knees by his chin.
and back to the wall. He didn’t have the chance to stretch out, much, though; the ginger’s sprawled legs were taking up most of the concrete floor of the small, and now rather cramped cell.

Joly was frowning at the cut on his palm. “I think I’m turning into Bossuet,” he muttered, waving the cut in Enjolras’ face.

Enjolras didn’t flinch. “I left Bossuet behind to stop shit like this,” he muttered, taking the hand and peering close at it, pretending to examine it with his near non-existent medical knowledge. “You had to go and make it look like you’d been in a fight.”

“Hey, ginger dude did it as well!”

“Feuilly,” ginger dude said, waving a hand to get attention. “Ginger dude usually goes by the name of Feuilly. And I have never liked lampposts. Sneaky buggers. Though I’ve never been cut by one before.”

“For most people, running away stops injury,” Enjolras muttered, peering a bit longer at the cut. “You’ve definitely been hanging around Bossuet for too long,” he said, dropping the only a little bit bleeding hand back into Joly’s lap, “But otherwise, you’re fine. Not going to bleed out, and looks clean enough to me.”

Seemingly unconvinced by Enjolras’ inspection – and fair enough, he was the medical student, not Enjolras – Joly lifted the cut until it was a whole centimetre from his eyes. “I’d still feel better if I could wash it, though.”

“You got your tetanus shots, you can go get it checked out in the morning, you’ll be fine,” Enjolras said in what he hoped was close enough to Bossuet’s comforting tone. When Joly pursed his lips, but lowered his hand, Enjolras let himself close his eyes and rest his head against the wall.

Jehan was the next to break the silence. “Where did Courfeyrac go?” he asked, tentatively, almost as if he thought he couldn’t ask the question. “And Bahorel? Do you think they’ll have been caught?”

Enjolras was unable to stop himself snorting, opening an eye to smirk down at Jehan. “Don’t worry,” he said carelessly, shuffling himself in a pointless attempt to get comfortable. He might not know their captors’ names, but this wasn’t exactly his first time in one of these cells. Yet, he couldn’t give up the hope that he might actually get comfortable in it. “They’ve done this a couple of dozen times, and haven’t been caught yet.”

“Parkour,” Joly explained absently. Enjolras looked across to him, and when he saw the medical student hypochondriac poking at his cut palm, he slapped Joly’s shoulder. “Sorry,” Joly muttered, sitting on his unhurt hand to stop himself fiddling with the cut nervously.

“Parkour?” Feuilly echoed, sounding impressed. And Jehan’s eyes had just doubled in size.

“Yes,” Enjolras said. “You saw him on the ledge the other day, Jehan. He’s good at what he does. And what Bahorel lacks in finesse, he makes up for in brute strength. Chances of some cops catching them... pretty slim, I’d say.”

“If magic wasn’t impossible, I’d swear they could levitate,” Joly added. He was still fidgeting, eyes flicking over to his palm, and his breathing had sped up.

If it got to the stage where Joly looked like he was having a panic attack, Enjolras would beat on that door until the police officers let Joly go clean, stitch, whatever he needed to do to that hand to calm down. Bahorel was a good enough lawyer, he’d probably be able to brush away any fuss it

“Iodine and some laughing gas,” Joly suggested, but not entirely seriously. “Don’t worry – I can deal.”

Joly hadn’t had a full-on panic attack for four months, Enjolras knew. Bossuet would buy a Joly a celebratory jagerbomb every month anniversary, and each shot was well deserved.

“We could have a sing-song session, if that’d make you feel better?” Grantaire suggested with a grin from Joly’s other side, looking far too relaxed for someone sat on a bench in a prison cell. “‘Bright Side of Life’ good for you?”

Joly laughed a little, and Enjolras couldn’t deny the flash of gratitude he felt. “Is that what you usually do?” Joly asked, amused.

“Nah,” Grantaire sighed, shuffling and leaning against the corner, resting one foot on the edge bench so his leg was bent up, and resting his chin on his knee. That could definitely not be comfortable. “Usually we have this whole Steve McQueen thing going on, but, dammit, would you look at that, I left the baseballs in my other pocket.”

As the rest of the group laughed, Enjolras smiled, head falling down. “Balled up socks often make decent spherical projectiles,” he said wryly, making a contribution to the conversation. When, from the corner of his eye, he saw Grantaire start and lean forwards around Joly slightly to get a look at Enjolras, Enjolras met his eyes and smirked.

“Ah, for incapacitating roommates, yes,” Grantaire agreed as he grinned back, and Jehan made a vaguely disgruntled noise. “However, for throwing at walls, I find laundry doesn’t have quite the same bounciness.”

Enjolras smiled, shaking his head and leaning back.

One day, he might figure out why this guy’s personality was so at odds with his views. And how, somehow, he could hate the guy one second, and the next –

“You know,” Feuilly mused, head falling to the side as he thought, “I swear you have travel scrabble in that rucksack. Trip to Brighton-”

“On the pier, with about three coats on each and Gavroche steamrollered all of us with ‘xylophone’ and a triple word score,” Grantaire finished. “Yeah, I remember.”

“Shame we didn’t have the forethought to put it in a pocket,” Jehan sighed, eyes falling closed and tucking his head against his shoulder, his braid falling down over his chest. If Enjolras still had his phone on him, he’d have snapped a picture of the sight to bribe Courfeyrac with later on.

Feuilly slid down the wall even more until he was all but lying on the floor and stretched a leg out until he could slam a foot against the door. “Hey, can we have our scrabble game please!” he yelled out. “It’s in the rucksack somewhere!”

A few seconds later and some police officer yelled back, “Oh my god, will you please shut up!”

Grumbling near inaudibly under his breath, Feuilly, if anything, sunk further down, crossing his arms, looking more disgruntled than Enjolras had ever seen anyone look before. “I’m not feeling the love,” Feuilly muttered eventually, shooting evil glares at the cell door.
“They’re takin’ yoor freedum, Feuilly!” Grantaire cackled in what was, quite frankly, an appalling Scottish accent.

Feuilly rolled his eyes. “I’m aware. Just, for god’s sake, don’t tell my mother.”

Jehan seemed to be getting in on it, shaking his head disappointedly. “Your poor Glaswegian heritage, Feuilly. It’s going to waste.”

“Look, it’s only my heritage on one side of the family—”

“Not to mention what Poland would say—”

Highly amused at the interaction going on before him, Enjolras bit back a grin and looked across to Joly, gauging his reaction. The medic was laughing with careless abandon, his cut hand completely forgotten as he listened to Grantaire’s teasings. Times like this, it was easy to forget that this joker was the same guy who’d made Enjolras go back to his flat the previous night and, in rage, throw the radio across the room, causing it to hit the door to Combeferre’s room and shatter.

With a long-suffering sigh, Feuilly raised his hands in surrender. “Fine! Fine.” He rolled his head around, until he was glaring at the cell door. “Help, help!” he yelled, “I’m being repressed!” Someone slammed on the other side of the door, and, as Grantaire laughed, Feuilly continued, waving an accusatory finger at the door, “Ah! Now we see the violence inherent in the system!”

Jehan was laughing so hard he’d fallen sideways. Joly’s shoulders were shaking up and down in a way reminiscent of a laughing cartoon character. Enjolras managed to keep his laughter in check before Grantaire bellowed, “COME SEE THE VIOLENCE INHERENT IN THE SYSTEM!”

A snort of laughter escaped before Enjolras could hold it back. When he caught Grantaire’s victorious grin, he just smiled and shook his head. “Monty Python,” Enjolras said. Grantaire winked dramatically.

“Amen, Monty Python,” Feuilly said, raising an imaginary cup. “And amen, Dennis the repressed peasant.”

“Nah, the Black Knight was where it was at,” Grantaire corrected.

“The Knights who said Ni, and later said... something else,” Joly added.

“The French soldiers, who fart in our general direction,” Jehan mused.

It had been a while since Combeferre and Courfeyrac had sat Enjolras down and made him watch the movie, but some things stick with you. “Actually, I quite liked the rabbit,” he admitted. Grantaire let out a burst of laughter, and Enjolras met his gaze again, smiling, again.

“Do you have a plan of how we can not spend the entire evening in here?” Enjolras asked Grantaire eventually, before the smiling went on for too long.

Grantaire broke eye contact, wincing as he looked towards the door. “Uh – well – hopefully, they’ll have called the Corinthe and hopefully Eponine will be there and be able to—”

Amateurs. Enjolras pushed himself to his feet, strode across to door and slammed his fist onto the door, twice. “I have the right to notify people as to my location!” he called, then waited.

Sure enough, a second later the little hatch slid to the side, and a police officer narrowed his eyes at him. “Who’s this?” he asked, a finger poking through the gap to point at Enjolras.
“He’s new,” Grantaire said apologetically. “And a bit keen.” Enjolras rolled his eyes.

“I am right, though,” Enjolras pointed out, trying to keep on topic here. “If I ask it, you have to notify people where I am.”

His efforts were rewarded. A surrendering groan, and a mobile was shoved through the gap. Not Enjolras’, but he’d take what he could get. “Thank you,” Enjolras muttered, already sliding the phone open, revealing a qwerty keyboard and a locked screen. “It’s locked-”

“That’s ‘cause it’s mine,” Grantaire said, holding out a hand. Enjolras glanced back at the slot, seeing it shut, before turning back and walking back to the bench, having to step over the tangle of Feuilly’s legs. He handed the phone to Grantaire before sinking back into his previous slot at Joly’s side.

“He’s probably not allowed to do that, just give us a mobile,” Enjolras muttered, frowning at the door. “In fact, I’m pretty sure he’s not.”

“Eh, it’s Sam,” Grantaire muttered, typing in his password. “He was in my English class for about five years, he’s knows me well enough to know I’m not some criminal mastermind. Though we should probably keep talk of your nefarious, government-overthrowing hobbies on a down-low, though,” Grantaire mocked, throwing his phone over Joly’s head without warning, making Enjolras have a flash of panic before his hands moved to catch in on reflex. He still ducked, though. “I mean, if he finds out your big bad plans to overthrow the government-” Grantaire let out a low whistle. “We will never get out of here...”

He was teasing, Enjolras knew. And it didn’t seem so annoying; he was starting to get that was just how Grantaire was.

Which just made it ten times worse. He was funny, teasing, talented, and yet he was the biggest lost cause Enjolras had ever seen in his life. And Enjolras didn’t know how to act around that. Didn’t know how Grantaire could fit into his life.

He just hoped he figured out, soon, because it was starting to give him a damned migraine.

It took him a second to figure out how to type in a number, but when he did it only took a few seconds to type in Combeferre’s. His mobile number hadn’t changed in six years, and the motion had been long ingrained into Enjolras’ muscle memory.

Combeferre picked up before the first ring had even finished. “Grantaire? What’s-”

“Sorry to disappoint,” Enjolras drawled, already feeling relieved, now he’d managed to get a hold of what would undoubtedly be his ride out of there, “But I’m not Grantaire.”

“En – Enjolras? What’re you – do I want to know what you’re doing calling me from Grantaire’s phone?”


There was a pause.

Then, “You’re in prison, aren’t you?”

“Just a bit,” Enjolras admitted. This time, Feuilly snorted.

A sound echoed through the phone that was just about recognisable as Bahorel cursing
“Motherfuckers.”

“Bahorel got out safely, then?”

“Yeah, Bahorel’s here. He’s given us a nice, long, heavily detailed description of the route he lead the police officers down.”

“And Courfeyrac?”

“And Courfeyrac, yes. He’s currently in the kitchen, trying to find a suitable accompaniment for the bottle of white he found.”

A sense of fear settled itself into Enjolras’ stomach. “We don’t have any white in the fridge,” he said apprehensively.

“He didn’t get it from the fridge. He got it straight from the storage cupboard. By which I mean the cardboard box that you were meant to have unpacked.”

The fear changed to horror. “He’s drinking it warm?”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

Enjolras tried not to gag. “Heathen!”

“I know. It’s the Chenin Blanc, too.”

“What a bastard.”

“Mm. I tried to discourage him, but to no avail.”

Another voice sounded over the line. “Is that Enjo?”

It had been four years, and he still hadn’t managed to lose that nickname. “Bahorel, if you could possibly hit Courfeyrac for me?” There was a chuckle, a thump, and a pleasing yelp. “Many thanks. Now, do you think you could come collect?”

Combeferre sighed wearily. “If I must. Why did they lock you up?”

“We were running from cops who saw us loitering outside the office block which Grantaire had handily decorate for us,” Enjolras drawled, raising an eyebrow at Grantaire who just smirked, and Enjolras did notice how Combeferre showed no indication as to questioning Grantaire’s appearance. “And when Grantaire then proceeded to direct us towards a crowd in escape-”

“Clever!” Bahorel muttered in approval.

“Shut up, he’ll hear you,” Enjolras said, and Grantaire threw his head back and laughed. “And not that clever, because the crowd soon turned into the soon-to-be-arrested remains of a drugs bust in a club, or something, and we would have got away if it hadn’t been that the inspector in charge of the drugs bust happened to be old friends with our latest recruits.” He made no attempt to not say those last two words scathingly.

“...right. Do they have any probably cause? You cannot have looked high.”

“Well, no,” Enjolras said, trying not to roll his eyes again. “But two of us somehow managed to get cut on the run there. The inspector claimed this as evidence we’d been part of the fight in the club. It’s all bullshit, really.”
“Two of you?”

“Joly and Feuilly, one of Grantaire’s.”

“I resent that, I am my own man,” Feuilly cut in, raising a finger importantly.

“Joly and Feuilly, who is his own man,” Enjolras corrected with an apologetic nod to Feuilly, who accepted the apology with a nod of his own. “Think you can get us home?”

“You’re doubting me?”

“Only a little.”

“I’m offended. But, I shall come fetch you, if only because I believe you’re the only one who can save our wine store from Courfeyrac’s pilfering hands.”

“Hey, now, I’m not gonna drink my way through all of it, have you seen how much wine you have? Where do you get all that from I mean neither of you even drink that much-”

“So I’m gonna hang up now,” Combeferre muttered, and Enjolras would bet good money that his friend’s fingers were twitching, most probably in the direction of Courfeyrac’s neck.

“Fine by me. Speak later.”

And, true enough, Combeferre hung up on him without another word.

Wordlessly, Enjolras handed Grantaire’s phone back, and there was a few more minutes’ silence before Grantaire said, sounding more matter-of-fact than smug, “Told you it was a good idea.”

Enjolras snorted before he could stop himself. Then Feuilly started a deep chuckle. Then Jehan started to giggle, with Joly falling into laughter next... and within seconds, all five of them were laughing with a combination of hysteria, and relief.

*

It was near twenty minutes before the cell door finally swung open and a rucksack was thrown at a distracted Grantaire, who barely caught it before it landed on his face.

“Duck,” Enjolras suggested wryly, then smirked as Grantaire stuck a finger up at him from behind his rucksack.

“Right,” said Police Man Sam said, leaning back against the open door, “You lot have been rescued. Of you trot.”

But Feuilly’s finger was raised once more. “Actually,” he said, brandishing said finger at Sam, “We’ve decided that we’re not moving.”

“The revolution starts tonight!” Grantaire cried seriously, lowering the rucksack carefully to his lap. “In the name of laziness, we shall remain on our asses, right here, until kingdom come!”

Enjolras almost took pity on the desperation and exasperation on Police Man Sam’s face. Almost, but not quite. When Sam’s gaze landed on him, pleading, he shrugged and said, “The People have spoken.”

Feuilly and Grantaire seemed a second away from starting a rendition of ‘We Shall Not Be Moved’, with clapping accompaniment from Jehan and Joly, but thankfully for everyone’s ears,
female voice Enjolras vaguely recognised called from the corridor, “I left Gavroche in charge of the shop and with keys to Feuilly’s flat so he had access to snacks... that was okay, right?”

Sudden change of tactic. Feuilly scrambled to his feet, wrapping a hand in the material of Grantaire’s jacket and pulling him to his feet. “Right, c’mon, time to go, time to go-”

Jehan pushed himself to his feet before Feuilly manhandled him, too, chuckling under his breath. “Aw, Eponine’s a brilliant little evil genius,” he said, quite happily.

Enjolras smiled back at him. “Well, enjoy your freedom-” he began, but a loud sigh by Feuilly stopped his sentence before it ever really got going.

“Oh, I’m sure we can fit you in the boot or something,” the ginger said, pushing Grantaire towards the door, and spinning to Sam to ask, “You don’t mind if we check him out with us, right?”

“With you? Yes, quite frankly,” Sam said, quite bluntly. “But doesn’t matter, anyway – his folks have come to collect him. They’re waiting in reception.”

Joly gave a whoop, jumping to his feet and pushed the scrum that was Jehan, Feuilly and Grantaire forwards even faster in his desperation to get out. When Feuilly swore blue murder as the shove made him trip over what was apparently his own feet, Joly didn’t even apologise, just yelled at him to keep going, which set Jehan off laughing and the whole tangled knot of not-quite-criminals stumbling, swearing and giggling out into the corridor. Amused, and quite happy to be watching rather than partaking, Enjolras waited until the majority of the hustle and bustle had managed to escape into the corridor before rising to his feet. “Thank you,” he said politely to the policeman who’d managed to avoid the crush of hyperactive bodies, and rolled his shoulders to stretch his muscles. It was never really all that cramped in the cells, but somehow, even in the thinner corridors, it just felt like there was more space.

With a shudder, Sam muttered, “Don’t mention it. Just – tell your pals to tone it down a bit, yeah? I don’t need the bloody mafia jumping down my throat this bloody early on a Saturday morning, okay, I’m quite willing to let you lot get home.”

Enjolras smirked to himself, once again feeling pride at his friends, and only just turned back to look where he was going in time to stop himself crashing into Grantaire, who, above all reason, had stopped walking.

“Look, you can’t actually stay-”

“Oh, hush you,” Grantaire muttered, and drawing level with him Enjolras saw he had his rucksack resting on a lifted knee, with his hands and head almost buried in it as he checked the contents. “I’ll leave, I’m just checking that the Friendly Neighbourhood Law Enforcement haven’t been playing with my stuff.”

But Sam just laughed, and started pushing Grantaire forwards without even slowing down. “I don’t think any of us would dare touch your stuff, not after that incident with the tarantula-”

“Look, I still maintain I don’t know where that came from-”

“And we especially don’t listen to see if it makes those great metallic clunking noises when it gets knocked around a bit,” Sam said with a far too casual voice.

Entirely unable to be surprised anymore, Enjolras looked across to Grantaire. He was grinning widely, tilting his head so far it was almost upside down, so he could direct that (upside down) grin at Sam as he said, actually sounding quite sincere, “And I’m so very grateful for it. Extra cookies
for you this Christmas!”

The policeman groaned, and shoved a hand against the middle of Grantaire’s back again. “Just follow Ms Thernadier off the premises, sir, there’s a good chap.”

“Sir yes sir!”

Enjolras had to bite the inside of his cheek to stop his amusement showing. But apparently, that wasn’t enough, as Grantaire poked him with his elbow anyway.

“Shut up, you,” Grantaire said, semi-seriously, as he slung his rucksack onto his shoulder.

“I said nothing.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Enjolras smiled. Finally, the tight corridor opened out into the building’s foyer, and for the second after Grantaire left his side to follow Feuilly and Jehan in properly greeting and thanking Eponine, Enjolras frowned. He guessed that he’d got used to having the man at his side, after spending that time in the cell with him.

But Enjolras managed to shake it off when he heard Joly laugh, and followed the sound to find young to-be doctor all but skipping over to where their ride home was lounging around against the Police Station reception desk. And, to Enjolras’ surprise, their knights in semi-shining armour didn’t just consist of Combeferre, but also Bahorel. “What, exactly, are you doing here?” Enjolras asked, eyebrows raised and finger pointing at Bahorel’s chest.

“I’m your lawyer, you ungrateful little shit,” Bahorel said with a grin. “I’m the one who got your toned asses out of here.”

“So if we please can get your asses actually out of here...” Combeferre suggested, pushing himself up off the desk and shooing the small gang towards the door. Somehow the two groups became entangled once more, forcing Enjolras and Grantaire to be side-by side yet again, and a tightness in Enjolras’ chest loosened all that slightly. However, he felt a bit less pleased when the artist gave an over-exuberant wave at Sam as they left the station, his paint-stained hand coming far too close to Enjolras’ head.

Seeing how this would end if he didn’t act fast, Enjolras ducked his head and pinched Grantaire’s hip. As the artist yelped and spun around, Enjolras grabbed his wrist before it did anything that would later leave a bruise. “I appreciate you have to say goodbye to your cop friend to ensure your future happiness when you’re next arrested,” he said dryly, “but if you could perhaps do so without your hand waving being precariously close to my face?”

“Ah, well, I think that’d be tricky.”

“Put a little bit of effort into it, perhaps?”

“I can try, I guess.”

“Marvellous.”

Grantaire grinned, and Enjolras gave up on trying not to smirk.

Whatever thought was going to follow that was cut off before it began, when someone – Jehan, going by the high pitch – let out a squeak. Stunned, and a little scared, Enjolras jerked his head
around, in time to see Jehan hurrying down the stairs and jumping into the arms of Courfeyrac, who then proceeded to giggle into Jehan’s neck as he spun him around.

Enjolras grimaced. “We should have seen this coming. We should have taken steps to prevent it.”

“I don’t suppose there’s any hope of the exuberance fading after a few weeks?” Combeferre asked mournfully.

“I hoped that of Jehan’s Robert Frost phase,” Grantaire interjected. “Told myself it would be over by the end of the month.”

“Was it?”

“Nope.”

“We could always,” Combeferre suggested slowly, “You know... accept it. If it makes them happy, it makes us happy, and all that.”

Enjolras grimaced for a moment, then sighed. “Oh, fine.”

Grantaire chuckled, and called what would presumably be his farewell comment over his shoulder as he headed towards where Eponine was already unlocking a battered up car. “What affectionate friends you two are!”

Enjolras and Combeferre shrugged carelessly in unison. Grantaire laughed harder, shaking his head at them before finally jogging away. Enjolras didn’t even realise he was smiling until he noticed that Combeferre was watching him with a raised eyebrow. “Shut up, and why did you bring Courfeyrac?” Enjolras muttered, avoiding Combeferre’s gaze as he headed down the steps to the pavement, knowing Combeferre would follow. Everyone else was already on the pavement, anyway. “Bahorel, yes, fine, there’s logic there, but Courfeyrac?”

“He insisted,” Combeferre explained wearily. “Well, I say insisted – he climbed into the car before we could kick him out. Oh, but don’t worry, we didn’t just bring Courfeyrac. Bossuet’s here too.”

Enjolras didn’t quite understand, until Combeferre waved at where Bossuet was presumably ‘kissing better’ Joly’s cut palm whilst Bahorel looked on and laughed raucously at Joly’s embarrassed and exasperated expression.

And, yes, that was very touching, Bossuet coming up to pick up his not-entirely-platonic-life-mate-he-shares-a-girlfriend-with from jail because he was concerned about his anxiety disorder and wanted to make sure he was okay, very touching, definitely being a good friend, but – really now?

It didn’t take him long to get everyone’s attention – he’d had a lot of practise – so a clearing of the throat and the placing of hands on his hips was all it took before everyone was looking at him, even if Bossuet was still pressing random kisses to Joly’s palm and Bahorel was still chuckling. “I’m touched that four of you decided to come and pick Joly and I up,” he said, “But if I may enquire, how, exactly, where you planning on fitting the six of us into Combeferre’s barely-seats-four Mini? Were we going to be strapped to the roof?”

“No,” Courfeyrac said musingly, exchanging a glance with Jehan, whom he had his arm wrapped around, “but, now you mention it, that does sound a brilliant idea.”

Before this could get out of hand, Enjolras turned to glare at Bahorel and said, quite simply, “Never.”
Bahorel pouted like a ten year old girl, but made no protest. Yet.

“But we had to come fetch you, Enjo!” Bossuet whined, and however much Courfeyrac had paid Bossuet to use that nickname, Enjolras could, and would, match it. “Definition of a true friend, remember? Your true friend is the guy who’s in the prison cell with you, and since that was denied to us we had to do the next best thing or else.”

“Still doesn’t solve the fact that we’re not going to fit in that car, even if one of us is lying across your laps,” Enjolras pointed out.

From the corner of his eye he watched Grantaire sidle back across, putting himself on the other side of Jehan to Courfeyrac. “Um,” he said, and Enjolras turned his head to watch him, waiting. “What we said earlier, about fitting you in the boot? Still a viable option. Well, perhaps not the boot, but there’s four of us and we’ve fit eight in Eponine’s car before.”

To Grantaire’s left, Jehan and Courfeyrac seemed to have a ten-second long wordless conversation. Jehan squeezed Courfeyrac’s waist and tilted his head back to the tattered car, and Courfeyrac nodded.

Well, that was one passenger down.

“Are you sure?” Bossuet asked, grinning, and finally lowering Joly’s hand. “I mean, that thing looks like it’ll collapse with just the driver in it!”

“Hey!” Eponine yelled across, stepping forwards and waving a finger menacingly and in a very Feuilly-esque manner. “No insulting Gertrude!”

The silence that followed that outburst was, Enjolras felt, quite justified. “You... named your car Gertrude?” Joly asked carefully.

Eponine scowled. Feuilly grinned evilly. “Actually, Gavroche – her little brother, that is – named it Gertrude. It’s actually quite an infectious name.”

“And to this day, we still don’t know why he called it that,” Grantaire added cheerfully. “So, c’m’mon. Who’s gonna brave a ride in Gertrude? Aside from Courfeyrac?”

Courfeyrac gaped like a fish out of water. “How did you-”

The word ‘obvious’ chorused around the group.

“Perhaps our fearless leader?” Grantaire suggested, with a grin at Enjolras. It seemed hopeful.

And, perhaps, Enjolras felt slightly bad for pointing out, “That would be counter-productive, seeing as how, since he bunks with me, Combeferre will have no choice but to drive me home.”

“Mm, I don’t know, I could always choose to kick you out onto the curb,” Combeferre mused with a worrying amount of pleasure. Enjolras glared at him, and received a benevolent smile in return.

Enjolras was really starting to question the sanity of the people he kept company with – and not for the first time – when Bahorel chuckled darkly and rubbed his hands together. “I shall accept the challenge!” he cried gleefully, stepping towards the battered vehicle. “I don’t live too far away, so shouldn’t cause you too much trouble.” When Eponine winced, Bahorel’s grin just widened. “What? Don’t think your little Gertrude can handle my big manly weight?”

Eponine pursed her lips, before saying, “You’re on. Get in the fucking car.”
And that seemed to be the cue. Joly and Bossuet scrambled into the back of Combeferre’s classic Mini, Joly holding Bossuet’s arm tight so he didn’t fall. Feuilly shoved Bahorel into the back of Eponine’s old Ford, even kicking him at one point before clambering in after. Jehan pulled Courfeyrac around the other side, pushing him into the final backseat space before putting himself on Courfeyrac’s lap, the higher ceiling of the older car letting him sit there comfortably. Combeferre winked at Enjolras once, before sliding into the driver’s seat of his car.

Which left Enjolras and Grantaire as the only ones not safely tucked into a vehicle. Enjolras had never said ‘um’ in his life, but he felt he was close to starting.

“So sorry,” Grantaire said suddenly, walking backwards to the passenger seat of Eponine’s car. “I didn’t – I thought the crowd would be safer.”

“It would have been,” Enjolras conceded. “Should have been. It was just... poor luck.”

Grantaire nodded, smiling gratefully, before opening the car door. “Um. See you around?”

What did he say? Maybe? Hopefully? “Sure,” Enjolras said eventually, shrugging carelessly before tugging open his own door and ducking inside before the confusion got too much.

But the inside of the Mini wasn’t much more comforting. Enjolras frowned, looking around at the other three. “You’re all very silent,” he said nervously, doubly so when he realised they were all watching him.

“And?” asked Bossuet, smiling innocently.

“It’s disconcerting.”

They laughed. “Don’t worry,” Combeferre said, turning the key and pushing the small thing into gear, “We’re only doing it to show we care.”

* *

“Your suspension is shit.”

“Your mum’s suspension is shit.”

“Now, now, kids, settle down,” Courfeyrac intoned in a deep voice that was almost recognizable as a mockery of Combeferre, which caused Jehan to chuckle, his head twisted painfully around to press his smile against Courfeyrac’s cheek. Neither of them had seatbelts on, Courfeyrac protected by having the weight of Jehan on his lap and Jehan protected by Courfeyrac’s arms wrapped around his waist.

At the display of affection, Feuilly and Bahorel who were, poor sods, trapped in the back of the car with them, simultaneous gagged and called out, “Can you not?”

“You’re just jealous you don’t have a cute poet on your lap,” Jehan said proudly, and smiling superiorly.

Bahorel gagged a second time, and Feuilly choked on thin air. “You – yeah, definitely, I’m jealous I don’t have you – what, dude, just no, so painfully, resoundingly no.”

“Then perhaps you’re jealous you don’t have this hot piece of ass beneath you?” Courfeyrac suggested, and on cue Jehan played magician’s assistant and used his hands to display Courfeyrac’s assets to the awkward duo sat beside them.
Grantaire caught Eponine’s eye, and they both laughed behind firmly closed lips, before both returning their gazes to the road with matching wide grins.

There was a bit more gagging, before Feuilly confessed quite readily, “You two terrify me. I mean, I always had an inkling that Jehan would be involved in my demise, but really, you couldn’t have let my downfall occur in a slightly less painful way?”

“If Jehan’s hands get any more than a centimetre closer, I can sue them for public indecency or some shit?” Bahorel offered.

“Yes. You do that!”

Grantaire tutted loudly, looking in the rear view mirror to glare at the angry duo. “Would you really be so callous to such good friends?”

“Tennant, not a friend,” Feuilly corrected imperiously and without hesitation.

“And I’ve done worse,” Bahorel admitted quite freely.

Courfeyrac grimaced at that. “It’s true, he has.”

Almost in disappointment, Grantaire sighed. “Then, you have forced me to resort to blackmail.”

“Oh, have we now? And what blackmail have you got that we can’t match, exactly?”

This had to be too easy. And yet, when Grantaire said, “Poland,” at the same time Courfeyrac sing-songed, “Sizzling Wok,” both Feuilly and Bahorel fell eerily silent.

The silence was broken by Courfeyrac whooping. “Ha! Ah, that was beautiful, that deserves a high five. High five me, brotha!”

Grantaire winced with pain. “As long as you never say ‘brotha’ again.”

“Yeaaahh, I realised how wrong that was the instant I said it.” Several laughed, and Grantaire willingly lifted his hand, palm facing the back, and felt Courfeyrac slam his hand against it with a wonderfully resounding slap. You could always trust someone whose high-fives nearly incapacitated you.

“You guys better realise I’ve never driven around this posh-boy area of town before,” Eponine called over her shoulder suddenly, “so if I’m going wrong, you’d better yell.”

“Nah, lady, you’re doing fine,” Bahorel said, which led to Grantaire, Feuilly and Courfeyrac all making various ‘ooh la la’ and ‘my lady’ and ‘ooh, madame’ mocking noises, pinky-finger lifted and all, until Bahorel punched Grantaire’s headrest.

“You’re all dicks,” Bahorel growled.

“And don’t we know it!” Courfeyrac said happily, raising an imaginary toast.

Grantaire, Feuilly and Eponine all chorused, “Hear, hear!” with Jehan even chiming in a, “Long live the dicks!”

In the back, Bahorel’s frustrated grimace was slipping more and more into a stroppy teenager’s pout, an expression Grantaire had not expected to see on such a muscular, black man. “You fuckers can’t mock me for swearing too much then mock me for being too fucking polite, that’s just shitty, man.”
“Shitty, but is still doable, and still very fun,” Grantaire pointed out.

“I will sue your asses right into the fiery fucking furnace of the seven hells, I fucking swear-”

“Yo Rambo,” Eponine cut in, casually lifting a hand from the steering wheel as she careened around a 90 degree corner to wave a middle finger over her shoulder. “Just a reminder that the Head Bitch In Charge right now is the one with the steering wheel under hands. Got it?”

“Look, I respectfully called you ‘lady’ a second ago, what do you want from me-”

“Better step on it, Eponine!” Courfeyrac called, leaning forwards, and almost tipping Jehan off his lap and onto Grantaire’s shoulder. “He’s about five minutes from starting a brawl in the back of your car.”

“Now, c’mon, we don’t even have any peanuts to throw, let alone stools to break on each other’s heads,” Grantaire protested, rolling his head around to glare at Bahorel. “If you’re gonna do a brawl, do it properly.”

“And I may be thin and scrawny, but don’t assume I won’t kick your ass if you so much as try to drunkenly fight without considering involving me in all this,” Feuilly added.

Bahorel looked down at Feuilly and raised a sceptical eyebrow. Grantaire had seen this response a thousand times. “He’s half-Scottish,” Jehan chimed in, snuggling back against Courfeyrac’s chest after almost falling face-first into the ashtray when Courfeyrac had jumped forwards excitedly seconds earlier. “Don’t underestimate him.”

Grantaire physically turned around in his seat to watch, gleefully, as Feuilly tilted his chin up and matched Bahorel, crossed arms and raised eyebrow for crossed arms and raised eyebrow. Eventually, Bahorel nodded appreciatively, and Feuilly smirked.

It was all bullshit. Get Feuilly into a mob or bar brawl and he turned into this yodelling and manic hyperactive vicious monkey which, whilst being absolutely terrifying, lacked any of the real finesse or empowerment that his show of strength implied. Not that long ago, Grantaire had rediscovered some of his old Terry Pratchett books, and had spent a full month telling Feuilly in no simple terms that he was a Nac Mac Feegle.

The tension in the car was removed suddenly when Courfeyrac yelped and jumped forwards again – yes, sending Jehan flying into the back of Grantaire’s chair again – and poking Eponine’s shoulder with a frantic, “Left left left left left.”

Once again, the car was swung around a ninety degrees angle at high speed, sending about 80% of the inhabitants of the vehicle flying against windows like bugs. “Nice early warning, asshole,” Feuilly groaned, peeling himself off the glass.

“Hey, if you and Bahorel hadn’t been having your ‘set them on the table and measure’ muscle match, I wouldn’t have missed it – you can pull up anywhere by here, Eponine, you wonderful human being.”

“What, so ‘wonderful human being’s fucking fine, but call her lady and-”

“Just get over it, Bahorel.”

The car was full of well-intentioned laughter again as the car trundled up to the curb, in almost exactly the same place as where Grantaire had collected Jehan that morning. Or, well, yesterday morning, going by the clock on the dashboard. “Out, out, out, get out.”
“Cheers,” Bahorel said, leaning over Feuilly to tug the door handle open, then giving the semi-Scot a firm nudge in the ribs to get him to tumble out of the car. “Move.”

“I fucking hate you, you fucking twat.”

And yet, Bahorel kept kicking, lightly yet persistently, until Feuilly was out of the car groaning and slumped against the car door and the pavement, and climbed almost elegantly out of the Ford.

“It’s not even your stop, you prick.”

“Yeah, but I can walk from here.”

“Screw you.”

“Sure.” In a sudden and unexpected display of human conscience, Bahorel actually wrapped a hand around Feuilly’s upper hand and hauled him back into the car. “Pleasure to make your acquaintance,” he said, and, to Grantaire’s semi-surprise, he almost sounded like he meant it.

Feuilly’s reply of a raised two fingers sent Bahorel on his way, laughing.

The other side of the car was a different story entirely. Jehan had opened the door, climbed nimbly out, and was now offering his hand to Courfeyrac.

Their goodbye would no doubt be very touching, but Grantaire had the title of Best Wingman Ever to live up to. He looked across to Eponine, who slotted the car back into gear again, and then back at Feuilly, who nodded, and started to lean across to the other side of the backseat.

Grantaire wound down his window, and leant out of it, smiling benevolently. “Be the gentlemen you often pretend to be, Jehan,” he suggested, “walk this lovely young whippersnapper to his door, why don’t you.”

It was probably a sign of how the two of them were destined to be, Grantaire thought with some pride, in how they both grinned at his comment.

“Come on then, you,” Jehan said, grabbing Courfeyrac’s hand and tugging him towards the front door of the apartment block.

Wordlessly, Feuilly leant across the back seat and pulled the car door shut. “Aw, look at them,” Eponine said, putting the car into first gear. “If only your love life was so easily fixed, Grantaire.”

“Hey, my love life is... totally, utterly, fucking.”

* 

It felt nice, being able to stand in midnight and hold Courfeyrac’s hands. “Thank you for leading the police away,” Jehan said softly, unable to take his eyes from where their fingers were locked together perfectly.

Courfeyrac squeezed his hands as he chuckled. “As if you needed the help. I saw you run.”

Jehan looked up then, smiling. “Were you looking at my ass?” he asked innocently.

Even in the night’s darkness, Courfeyrac’s eyes still somehow managed to flash. “Absolutely,” he promised, face completely serious.

“Ah,” Jehan said, looking back down at their hands and turning them over, so he could watch as
Courfeyrac brushed his thumb over Jehan’s skin. “I had hoped so,” he admitted, still smiling.

He felt Courfeyrac’s laugh through his hands, but it wasn’t enough. He wanted to feel his chest shake beneath his hands, wanted to feel the short, harsh breaths of air over his lips. “It was hard to look away from, if I’m quite honest. Your jeans are... really tight.”

Jehan grinned, and managed to look up from their interlocked hands to look into Courfeyrac’s eyes. “I know,” he said, and there was no innocence that time.

It was a pleasure, a genuine, aesthetic pleasure, to watch Courfeyrac’s pupils dilate.

“I would,” Courfeyrac said, his tongue wetting his lips quickly, “I would invite you in, but I have this essay that I really should finish...”

On impulse, and trusting his friends, Jehan looked out towards the road to find Eponine’s car conspicuously absent. “I don’t have a lift home, it seems,” he said lightly.

Courfeyrac followed his gaze, and Jehan took the opportunity to admire his profile, his jaw line, and to start to plan where he would trail his tongue...

“Oh, would you look at that,” Courfeyrac said breathlessly, looking at the empty street.

“What is your essay on?” Jehan asked, eyes darting over the curls he could tangle between his fingers so easily, then back to Courfeyrac’s dark eyes as he looked back at him.

“It’s not interesting. The impact of Louis-Stevenson’s novels on the society of the time,” Courfeyrac breathed.

RLS. Jekyll, Hyde, and Long-John Silver. “I think I can help with that,” Jehan suggested, voice barely more than a whisper, hands lightly tugging Courfeyrac’s closer.

“Yeah?” Courfeyrac asked, eyes darting down to Jehan’s lips as he leaned closer.

“Yeah.”

It was strange, to think this was their first proper kiss. First kiss where Jehan wasn’t going to run away. First kiss, after midnight, after jail, after running from the police, on the doorstep of an apartment building. Courfeyrac was kissing him lightly, a barely tangible pressure, his breath ghosting across Jehan’s lips. Then Jehan was the one leaning forwards, applying pressure and heat and Courfeyrac’s lips opened up as he gasped, a sound Jehan wanted to taste so as he slid his fingers through Courfeyrac’s hair he pressed his tongue against Courfeyrac’s lips, testing, testing. And then he was the one moaning, being held up by Courfeyrac’s arms alone as his tongue was stroked by Courfeyrac’s, as his lower lip was taken between Courfeyrac’s teeth and Courfeyrac sucked just hard enough.

Their parting was necessary, for air, for a continued grasp on sanity, but Jehan’s hands stayed firm in Courfeyrac’s hair and, if anything, Courfeyrac’s grip on Jehan’s hips tightened. For a second they just breathed, chests rising and pressing together, foreheads resting together.

“That essay,” Courfeyrac breathed, head tilting forwards out of need so his lips brushed against Jehan’s lightly, so lightly, and not enough. “It’s not going to get written, is it?”

Jehan just laughed, before capturing Courfeyrac’s lower lip between his teeth in retaliation.
After Combeferre and Enjolras had dropped them off, Bossuet and Joly were left to try and climb into their apartment through the fire escape, as Bossuet had left his keys... somewhere, Joly had lost his somewhere in the flight, and neither was willing to incur the wrath of Musichetta by ringing the doorbell to get her to open the door at something past 3 o’clock in the morning.

It wasn’t the first time they’d done this.

“So,” Bossuet huffed out, jumping up to grab at the next ladder and pull it down, “did you get what you went for in the end?”

“Just about,” Joly said cheerfully, patting his pocket to check, yes, he hadn’t done a Bossuet, he did have his phone. “We found files of donor list stuff, grabbed photos before we had to make our swift departure.”

“And the wild Grantaire appeared... when, exactly?”

“The wild Grantaire and his trusty sidekicks appeared about halfway through.” Joly pushed an epically failing Bossuet to the side and jumped himself, grabbing the final ladder in one swift move, tugging it down. “The Grantaire used cynical commentary. It was super effective!”

“Anyone deck anyone?” Bossuet asked curiously. When Joly shook his head, Bossuet pouted. It took Joly slapping his shoulder before he started to climb. “But, c’mon, surely one of them has to end up with a black eye!”

“You’ve haven’t bet anyone on this, have you?”

“...no.”

“L’Aigle!”

“All right, all right, Bahorel, but it was only a twenty!”

“That’s twenty pounds coming out of your pocket money.”

“But Joly-”

Joly wasn’t all that annoyed, so lifted a hand off the rungs for a second to slap Bossuet’s rear, to show that. And to get him to speed up. It was really cold, four storeys up and not wearing a coat well into the early morning. “You know, if you got a job, I couldn’t dock your pocket money.”

“Yes, but, job.”

All things considered, it was probably better for all companies everywhere that Bossuet never went in for a career.

There had been talk, once, of Bossuet going in to social services, perhaps as a social worker, though mainly by Joly, Musichetta and Combeferre more than Bossuet himself. After years of carrying Joly through his hypochondria and the depression that came hand in hand with it, at the worst time, Joly had thought that Bossuet couldn’t have been too bad at the job. However, the idea had fallen from conversation, and if Bossuet still thought on it sometimes, then he didn’t mention it.

When Bossuet, now standing on their fire escape, offered a hand to help pull Joly up the last meter or so, Joly took it warily, but took it none the less. “Can’t we just keep a spare key under the
doormat, or something,” Bossuet grumbled, fumbling around blindly in the darkness to find that spot that nudged the window forwards just enough to slide the frame up and allow a big enough space to fit a reasonable sized being through.

Bahorel didn’t count as ‘reasonable sized’, apparently. It had been a bleak night, the night they’d found that out. A bleak night, which was followed by the costs of replacing a windowpane.

But, thankfully, neither Bossuet nor Joly were quite that muscular, and slipped in with an easy practise. Bossuet had even managed to perfect his clumsy sprawled landing, getting into a flat enough position to have Joly subsequently bouncing off his stomach and onto the carpet.

“You’re evil.”

“Well, if you’ve going to perfectly position yourself for being a landing mat...”

And Bossuet, as was his tendency, just laughed. “C’mon, let’s head bed-wards, before Musichetta comes out here and drags us under the duvet by the ears.”

“Oh worse, makes us sleep on the sofa,” Joly grumbled, pushing himself until he was vaguely sat up straight. He’d slept on that sofa before. His back had nightmares about that sofa. Even with Bossuet there. Bossuet had a tendency to sprawl.

It was hard to feel an undercurrent of dislike for Bossuet, though, when he was standing there and giggling as quietly as he could, with a carpet burn on his forehead and a hand, once again, held out to help Joly up. “Come on.”

Out of reflex, Joly lifted up the nearest hand – and then stopped, the cut on his palm catching the light just enough to send a slight trickle of worry back into his thoughts.

Bossuet ignored his hesitation, and wrapped both hands around Joly’s wrist, tugging him up onto his feet. “Do you want the medical kit?” he asked, voice soft, worriless smile still there, eyes shining, and waiting, patiently, to hear what Joly needed. “We’ve got a new bottle of disinfectant, and some awesome blue bandages, remember?”

Joly didn’t answer immediately, instead chewing the inside of his cheek and tilting his hand so it caught the one beam of light in the whole flat, that coming in from the street. “Nah,” he said eventually, a bright smile taking the place of his frown. “I’m... I’m good!” If he sounded surprised, that’s because, quite honestly, he was. He didn’t feel the need to disinfect it. One, it had already started to heal. Two, he had his tetanus jabs. Three... if anything happened, he could catch it early, and he’d be fine. “I’m fine.”

The smile Bossuet gave him was happy, tired, and his usual huge range of energetic emotions – but, mainly, it was proud. As was the quick peck on the cheek he gave Joly. “Wonderful. Now, can we please go sleep?”

“You can,” Joly said, tilting his head towards their door but, himself, turning to grab the laptop from the dining table. “I’m just gonna get these pictures off my phone and onto the laptop. Won’t be half an hour.”

The kiss Bossuet pressed to Joly’s forehead was a bit less soft and a bit more chaotic and haphazardly aimed – catching Joly just on the end of an eyebrow rather than his temple – but it made Joly grin as he swatted Bossuet away, anyway. “Night!”

“Sleep well,” Joly muttered absenty, sliding onto the sofa and flicking at the on switch. As the computer loaded, he waited and listened for the inevitable crash as Bossuet tried to navigate a pitch
black bedroom.

When it came, and was followed by a high-pitched screech of Spanish curses, Joly just **laughed**.

* 

“I’m quite honestly surprised you didn’t emerge from there drenched in blood,” Combeferre said **conversationally**.

“Unfortunately, holding cells have a strict ‘no hunger games’ policy,” Enjolras replied, pulling his own keys from his pocket to unlock their front door.

“Is that a fact?”

“Much to my dismay, yes. But then, I think I would have found it hard to kill Jehan. He’s too nice. That would have presented a moral challenge.”

“Perhaps you could have done the kind thing, and killed yourself to let him be the survivor?”

Enjolras considered this as he held the door open to let Combeferre through. Eventually, he pursed his lips and shook his head. “Sorry. No.”

“Not even for Courfeyrac?”

He bit back a smirk as he locked the door. Hopefully, they wouldn’t need to be going anywhere else that night. “Well, for Courfeyrac, I might hesitate.”

Combeferre laughed, and Enjolras grinned outright. “You’re a heartless bastard,” Combeferre said, turning around just long enough to catch Enjolras’ eye and wink.

Enjolras didn’t say a word, just gave him a thumbs up in return.

They didn’t bother with good nights anymore, mainly because they both knew that retiring to their rooms didn’t necessarily mean sleep. Both of them kept almost half their stock of textbooks in their rooms, and it wasn’t uncommon for either of them to substitute sleep for research or simple curiosity. So, Combeferre’s call of, “Sleep **well,**” before he shut his bedroom door and vanished into his room, was definitely more of an order than a polite nicety.

And, perhaps, that might be an order Enjolras followed.

He shrugged off his jacket and hung it up as he passed the coat rack, kicked off his shoes and left them in the middle of the floor. He pushed his door open with a socked foot, kicked aside the books strewn in his path, and, when he reached his bed, turned around, and let himself just **fall.**

Sometimes, there was work to be done.

But sometimes, he really fucking **loved** sleep.

He reached one hand up to grab beneath his pillow for his pyjamas, and started to shove off his jeans with the other, just in time to feel his phone vibrate against his fingers. More dazed and confused as to why someone would text him this late than curious, he pulled it out, and had to narrow his eyes against the brightness of the screen.

Grantaire.

The hand reaching for his pyjamas fell limp, and the other clicked on the screen with a renewed
energy, eyes opening as they became accustomed to the light.

So, you’re probably asleep, but I had a persuasive talk with Feuilly, and I can probably get the posters done by tomorrow! Though there is always the chance I’ll sleep in and forget. But definitely an 82% chance they’ll be done by 4 tomorrow.

Enjolras smiled as he replied.

Don’t worry – there’s the same 18% chance I’m going to oversleep, too. But that’d be great. I guess you’ll be seeing one of us tomorrow, then.

Though it made undressing awkward, Enjolras found himself keeping hold of his mobile in one hand as he tugged his clothes off and tried to clamber into his pyjamas, still lying on the bed, still waiting to see if he’d get a reply.

*

Feuilly had slammed his door on Grantaire’s face with cheery swearing and informing Grantaire that he’d be fetching Feuilly’s car in the morning, so plans for a friendly nightcap had gone down the drain. Eponine had fucked off, too, dropping the two of them off with a quick, “Adios, amigos,” and flying as fast as her car could go to get back to her bed.

And, what with Jehan getting nicely fucked – he’d been the kid’s friend for far too long, yes, he knew Jehan was nine times out of ten a bottom – Grantaire was alone in the flat.

He didn’t mind being alone for a night, but it still made him smile a bit more to discover that, in fact, he wasn’t the only one there.

A small body was curled up on the sofa, squishing one of the cushions in his arms and half buried under Jehan’s supersized fleece.

Grantaire smiled softly, and shut the front door as quietly as he could. “Hey, little fella,” he whispered, walking near silently over to the sofa. “You gonna wake up? No? Okay, then, you just stay asleep, I’ll carry your heavy little ass... I’m sure Jehan won’t mind if you nick his bed for the night...” Strategically picking places least likely to jostle Gavroche or knock the pillow from his arms, Grantaire slipped his arms under the kid and lifted him up, cradling him carefully against his chest. “If you wake up now with a spasm and whack me,” Grantaire muttered to him in a low voice, “I will not hesitate to drop you. Do we have an understanding?”

The boy snored lightly in his sleep, which Grantaire took as a yes.

“Good. Stay cool, man. No flying sleep punches like your deathtrap of a poetry uncle, okay? Uncle Grantaire’s the cool one you don’t want to punch or he won’t sneak you into your first bar when you’re sixteen.”

Thankfully, Grantaire managed to deposit the kid on Jehan’s fluffy-toy infested bed without any calamities occurring. He grabbed a furry blanket from where it had fallen on the floor and carefully draped it over the small, sleeping form, and carefully removed the pointy-edged notebooks and pens that were scatted around the pillow, where Jehan had probably left them in preparation of midnight enlightenment. Gavroche, however, was unlikely to get any midnight enlightenment, and was more likely to cut himself on the rough edges. So they were placed on the bedside table in a haphazard pile.

“Night, kiddo. Sweet dreams.”
He swung himself around the wall divide, pulling the door to a close behind him, and stumbled into his own room, over the various object until he could crawl onto the safety of his own bed. He collapsed backwards and tugged his phone from his pocket, going straight to Eponine’s number on autopilot.

*Your brother’s still around here. Was fast asleep, I just carried him from the sofa to Jehan’s bed. You can pick him up tomorrow. At a REASONABLE TIME.*

The reply was almost instantaneous.

*You beautiful human being. Thank you. I won’t be around before midday.*

Grantaire grinned, and was all prepared to close his eyes and drift into a hopefully restful sleep, yes, fully clothed and all, before he realised that he had a message. Enjolras had replied.

He read the words with his grin still in place.

Yawning, and eyes starting to flicker closed, he absently kicked off his Vans and curled onto his side, thinking how to reply.

Eventually, he settled for a simple, *See you tomorrow*, before falling asleep in jeans, jacket, and holding onto his mobile phone.

* 

There were many things, at that moment, that Courfeyrac didn’t understand.

For starters, he didn’t understand why, on his laptop, there was a finished essay, complete with quotations and references to critical works he hadn’t even known existed.

He didn’t understand why he was still dressed.

He didn’t understand why a man with a wicked smile, bright eyes and golden braid was leading him into his bedroom as if it was all he wanted in the world.

Didn’t understand why they were doing this so early in their relationship.

Didn’t understand why they hadn’t done it sooner.

Didn’t understand how someone so perfect was about to become, unequivocally, his.

“You realise, we haven’t even known each other a week,” Courfeyrac murmured, lips hovering over Jehan’s as they lingered in the doorway to his room.

Jehan shook his head, their lips brushing together ever so lightly, the gentle friction pulling Courfeyrac in, lips pressed, hot, open, exchanging breath. “We have,” Jehan breathed into his mouth, his hands slipping under Courfeyrac’s top, fingers pressing circles into the soft skin above his hip bone, “We’ve know each other forever. Can’t you tell?”

He slipped a hand into Jehan’s braid, into the hair, pulling it loose, hands grasping at it with desperation. As Jehan started to undo the buttons of his shirt, his fingertips brushing against the skin of Courfeyrac’s abdomen with each precise movement, Courfeyrac started to lose control of his breathing. “Yes,” he gasped, pushing his head forwards and capturing a kiss, a frantic pressure against Jehan’s lips as Jehan smiled, “Yes, I can feel it.”

Top button undone and Jehan was pressing one palm to Courfeyrac’s sternum, the other falling to
press against the bulge in Courfeyrac’s jeans. “Then let me know you,” he breathed, pulling his lips from Courfeyrac’s, nudging up Courfeyrac’s chin up with his nose and pressing his mouth, wet lips, teeth grazing, to his neck, right where his speeding pulse was nearest to the surface. “Let me feel you...”

He pressed down on Courfeyrac’s hard-on and bit Courfeyrac’s neck, holding skin between his teeth very lightly and just enough to send Courfeyrac’s eyes fluttering closed and his head falling back as he moaned. He felt the loss of the heat of Jehan’s hands on his skin, only to feel them shove at the material of his shirt, pushing it off his shoulders, down his arms. Jehan’s lips and teeth slid down to his collar bone, his nipple, as the material slid down his arms.

And then Jehan was stepping back, taking the sweet touch of his lips and Courfeyrac’s shirt with him. With a groan Courfeyrac lifted his head up and focused his eyes on the barely-a-man, cruel lover, who was walking backwards to the bed with an evil grin and holding Courfeyrac’s shirt as if it was a token for Courfeyrac to come and collect. “Why must you torture me so?” he groaned, playing with the idea of standing still and making Jehan come back to him – but he couldn’t even fool himself that would work.

Jehan sat on the edge of the bed and waited until Courfeyrac was standing over him before answering. “Because,” he said, the shirt falling from his fingers as he instead reached to hook them through Courfeyrac’s belt hooks, “the best love is slow... and thoroughly enjoyed...” He looked up to smirk at Courfeyrac through lashes and a strand of hair that Courfeyrac had pulled loose, before pulling the button of Courfeyrac’s jeans open with deft fingers and then pulling the zip down with his teeth.

Courfeyrac bit his bottom lip hard, trying to get a handle on himself as he waited for the wet warmth of Jehan’s mouth to slip over the head of his cock. But all that happened was that Jehan pressed a soft, chaste kiss to the tip of Courfeyrac’s erection through the material of his boxer-briefs as he pushed the denim down his thighs, out of the way, before lifting his lips away.

“No, come back,” Courfeyrac moaned, a hand blindly reaching out to curl into Jehan’s hair, to stop him pulling away, but Jehan just laughed and leant forwards again to lick a stripe from Courfeyrac’s groin to his navel. Before Courfeyrac could recover enough to do anything but breathe heavily, Jehan hooked a finger in the waistband of Courfeyrac’s underwear, pulling it forwards as he slid back onto the bed. Courfeyrac had just enough time to think how Jehan was, unbearably, still fully clothed, before Jehan’s finger was removed and the elastic waistband snapped back against Courfeyrac’s skin, knocking any train of thought right out of Courfeyrac’s head. And, damn, he shouldn’t find that hot but he did.

Jehan was lying on his bed, propped up by his elbows and legs spread to leave space for Courfeyrac. “You’re wearing too much,” Courfeyrac pointed out breathlessly, eyes roaming over the bulge in Jehan’s skin-tight violet skinnies, over the maroon jumper and the lips that had been pressed to his crotch.

As he watched, Jehan bit his lip. Courfeyrac licked his own. “Then come here and help me remove it,” Jehan ordered.

He didn’t need to be asked twice. Courfeyrac climbed onto the bed, easily slotting himself between Jehan’s legs and kneeling, leaning over his poet. He placed a finger under Jehan’s chin, pulling his head forwards so he could press their lips together. His other hand he slid up beneath the jumper, palm flat on Jehan’s thin, hot stomach. He pressed his tongue between Jehan’s lips, tasting each gasp he made as Courfeyrac’s fingers traced his ribs, brushed over his nipples, circling them. On a whim he pinched a nipple, and was rewarded with a moan and a jerk of Jehan’s hips, knocking
their crotches together for far too short a moment.

Jehan might have patience, but Courfeyrac didn’t. That slightest brush of friction only strengthened his desperation and he grabbed the bottom of Jehan’s jumper, pulling it over the poet’s head and throwing it to the floor before claiming Jehan’s lips again. He bit Jehan’s lower lip, sucking it into his mouth as he carded fingers through the base of the braid, and lowered his body to press against Jehan’s. He could feel Jehan’s stomach flutter against his with arrhythmic breathing, the heat, the dampness as sweaty skin slid over sweaty skin.

“Jeans,” Jehan muttered into Courfeyrac’s mouth. Courfeyrac gasped and jerked as one of Jehan’s palms kneaded his ass. “Jeans – please...”

Using one hand to hold himself up, Courfeyrac reached between them and tugged at the button to Jehan’s jeans, carefully pulling down the zip. One last forceful kiss before he quickly rocked back onto his heels, looping his fingers into the belt hooks and pulling Jehan’s jeans away.

He almost had a heart attack there and then. Jehan wasn’t wearing underwear.

Jehan lifted his legs up to let Courfeyrac pull his jeans off entirely, bearing his ass, round cheeks Courfeyrac wanted to hold, pull apart, put his tongue between... the jeans were discarded the same way as Jehan’s jumper.

Then Jehan was lowering his legs, Courfeyrac back to kneeling between his thighs and Jehan was sprawled in front of him, naked, still smirking like a devil. Licking his lips again, Courfeyrac slid his hands up Jehan’s thighs, eyes following his hands’ movements. “Commando?” he breathed, hands brushing over Jehan’s hipbones.

“You saw how tight those jeans were,” Jehan answered, his tone just too light to be serious. “Didn’t want a panty line.”

He didn’t have enough breath in him to laugh. So Courfeyrac let his hand close around the base of Jehan’s cock, and slide up. Jehan groaned loudly, head falling back and Courfeyrac jerked his head up to watch how Jehan’s mouth fell open, how he clenched his eyes shut. He stroked Jehan’s cock again, watching, memorised, wondering how loud Jehan could go.

He made to press forwards, to press his erection against Jehan’s, but Jehan moved quick and Courfeyrac’s world flipped, leaving him on his back and Jehan straddling his hips, hands clenched on Courfeyrac’s waist. “Stuff?” he asked, smile still in place but cheeks now glowing, braid barely still holding together. Strands of gold were hanging down, shining in the barely lit room.

Courfeyrac stretched to the side, hand tugging open the bedside table draw on autopilot, eyes fixed on Jehan’s eyes, lips and body. His fingers scraped the draw until he found a condom and lube. As he lifted them up, Jehan took his hand, unfurled his fingers and gently took them from him, setting them on the bed by his knees.

“You should, you should take my boxers off,” Courfeyrac said between heavy breaths, lifting his hips just that touch to press his erection against Jehan’s ass. Watching as Jehan’s head fell back, as he had to physically get control of himself, made Courfeyrac have to clench his fist in the bed sheets. “This needs to speed up, just warning you-”

Jehan was nodding jerkily, eyes shut, mouth open and skin starting to gleam with sweat. “I should do that,” he agreed, lifting himself up and frantically pushing at the elastic band of Courfeyrac’s underwear, using fingers, the base of his palm, even his feet to shove the scrap of material out of the way, until Courfeyrac’s legs were free and the boxers were on the floor. “Gods...”
And Jehan wrapped a hand around both their cocks, stroking softly as if he was simply getting used to the feel of their cocks in his palm. The rough feeling of Jehan’s palm, of the sheer heat of Jehan’s cock rubbing against his -

“Fuck, Jehan, Jean, I’m – if you keep doing, I’m gonna-”

“No, I need,” Jehan gasped, stroking once more before halting his hand, “I need you, in me, I need-”

It was a good job Courfeyrac had had lots of practise with this, with control. It was coming in handy, now, when he needed it most. “Yes!”

Hands scrabbling, Jehan picked the condom packet back up, tearing through the foil and discarding it. Courfeyrac got no warning before Jehan’s slim fingers were rolling the condom onto his cock, fingers sliding down his length. “Fuck...”

“Patience,” Jehan teased, reaching up and pressing a finger to Courfeyrac’s lips. Without hesitation, Courfeyrac opened his lips and let Jehan push his finger into Courfeyrac’s mouth. He held it lightly between his teeth, sucking lightly, watching as Jehan’s face spasmed at the sensations.

A sudden burst of movement and Courfeyrac pushed himself upright, a hand looping around Jehan’s waist and pulling him forwards to keep him on Courfeyrac’s lap. Jehan let out a short, sharp exclamation and his finger fell from Courfeyrac’s lips.

“You’re going to be loud, aren’t you?” Courfeyrac grabbed the lube, flicking it open and, behind Jehan’s back, squeezing it over his fingers. Jehan moaned, rutting forwards. Courfeyrac hissed at the friction. “How loud can you get?” he murmured, lips brushing the shell of Jehan’s ear.

Jehan rocked his hips forwards again. “That’s up to you,” he breathed back, hot breath brushing the skin of Courfeyrac’s shoulder.

And shit, Jehan shouldn’t give him challenges like that. Courfeyrac laughed, head falling forwards onto Jehan’s shoulder. He slid a wet finger down between Jehan’s ass cheeks before he finally found the hole. Jehan jumped in his grasp and made a not-so-silent ‘Oh!’ at the sensation, which made Courfeyrac laugh and lightly take a fold of Jehan’s skin between his teeth as he pressed his finger through the ring of muscle and inside Jehan.

He had Jehan’s nails digging in to his waist and the skin of his back and he had a feeling they were going to draw blood, Jehan’s mouth was letting out a steam of wordless exclamations that were only getting louder and would probably wake the people above and below Courfeyrac’s flat, but he didn’t care, he didn’t care one fucking bit because... fuck.

“Do you think I could make you scream?” Courfeyrac asked Jehan in a low voice, nothing more than a whisper into his ear. He was rewarded with a whimper. He, in turn, rewarded Jehan with another finger.

“Fuck Courfeyrac, Courfeyrac!”

“Come on, baby,” Courfeyrac breathed, the arm around Jehan’s waist tightening, pulling him closer, further onto his lap, pressing their chests together so he could feel every time Jehan’s breathing hitched, every time his heart stumbled or skipped. “Baby, love, come on, stretch for me, gotta get in you-”

Third finger and Jehan yelled, head flying back and eyes squeezing shut. Courfeyrac could feel Jehan’s nails break his skin as they scratched lines down his back. Courfeyrac buried his face
against Jehan’s neck, stretching and curling his fingers, pressing lightly, twisting –

Jehan’s head fell forwards again, nuzzling desperately against Courfeyrac’s, pushing it up until Jehan could trace his lips over Courfeyrac’s skin, his cheekbone, his jaw, his soft warm lips running over hotter and sweaty skin. His hair was almost entirely out of the braid, strands of gold held together with his sweat in the same way Courfeyrac’s curls were stuck to his skin. “Oh, never this whelming east wind swells,” Jehan muttered, low and frantic, lips never leaving Courfeyrac’s skin even as Courfeyrac curled his fingers again and Jehan’s whole body jumped in Courfeyrac’s arms, “But it seems like the sea’s return-”

It felt like Jehan was breathing the poetry into Courfeyrac’s skin and, by heave, Courfeyrac let him, let the poet turns this, their every touch into poetry of their own with his words and nails scratching poetry onto Courfeyrac’s body. Moaning – and Courfeyrac had never been loud in bed before now – Courfeyrac finally slipped his fingers out of Jehan and grabbed the lube to squeeze a haphazard amount into his palm, reaching between them to cover his cock as fast as he dared.

“To the ancient lands where it left – left – please – left the shells-”

When Jehan begged, Courfeyrac couldn’t take any longer. He lifted Jehan up with the arm around his waist, silently thanking his friends for all the time they’d dragged him to the gym, and used his other hand to finally, finally line his cock up with Jehan’s hole. It’s still tight, even after working at it with his fingers it’s still tight, and hot, and he wanted to ease Jehan’s down but the poet was pushing, thumbs digging into Courfeyrac’s shoulders and Courfeyrac was trying to do the careful thing, but it’s so much easier to-

“Be - Before the age of the fern; Ah – ah – and it seems likethetimewhenafter - OH!”

Jehan was sat on his lap, entirely, and Courfeyrac’s brain short-circuited, he didn’t know how long until he came back into himself to feel himself still throbbing in Jehan’s ass, Jehan’s hands scrabbling at him, wordlessly begging him to move as his mouth continues to let out high-pitched moans against Courfeyrac’s wet skin. Struggling to think, Courfeyrac worked by instinct, desperation, and set his hands on Jehan’s waist and lifted –

Jehan gasped –

- and let him fall.

Jehan’s verbal gasp as he landed In Courfeyrac’ lap, back on his cock, was so close to a scream. Courfeyrac bit onto Jehan’s neck again as he started to lose control. Jehan helped the next time, pushing himself up with his legs, mumbling frantically, nails digging again as he started to rise up and down on Courfeyrac’s cock. “Oh, our love c- came ba, back again-”

Courfeyrac’s whole body was thrumming, the heat and slickness of sweat was driving him to insanity, he could taste Jehan’s sweat on his tongue, feel Jehan’s heartbeat beneath his hands, it was all he could feel –

“Oh, oh come forth into st- storm ah, ah! And rout-”

One last lift, one last thrust and Jehan’s ass tightened, finally pulling Courfeyrac over the edge. Every muscle in his body tensed, eyes clenched shut and hands so tight on Jehan’s body they were sure to bruise, and he lost his handle on the world. Through it all, he could hear Jehan’s unrestrained scream of pleasure as he came with Courfeyrac.

He couldn’t have said how long it was before he came back into himself. He could feel Jehan’s
forehead pressing against his, could feel Jehan’s breath on his lips, and he was content to enjoy that for a while, before he could finally flutter his eyes open.

Jehan was there, still on his lap, flushed and almost hidden by a cascade of sweat-drenched hair, with swollen lips and shining eyes. “And be my love in the rain,” Jehan whispered, almost to himself, lips lifting into a small but bright smile.

If they didn’t move soon, didn’t disentangle themselves and get cleaned up, it would swiftly turn disgusting. They could do that; get a flannel, perhaps a shower to clean themselves. Then Jehan could curl up beside him, he could fall asleep with Jehan in his arms...

Courfeyrac smiled back, and pulled Jehan forwards those couple of centimetres to press a chaste kiss to his lips.

* 

Enjolras didn’t get Joly’s four o’clock text.

Combeferre got it, when the buzzing of Enjolras’ phone on the floor became too annoying. Marking his place in Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations with the small notebook he’d been making quotes in, he climbed off the bed and headed into Enjolras’ room to turn the buzzing thing off.

He couldn’t help but smirk at the sight of Enjolras sprawled out, covering the entirety of his double bed whilst snoring vaguely like freight train. He didn’t envy these normal people their undignified need for sleep, sometimes. Other times, when you’re the walking dead at 10 o’clock in the morning, insomnia isn’t as fun.

But other matters. Not at all concerned with waking Enjolras – he was asleep like the dead, as ever – Combeferre stepped around to the bedside, following the persistent buzzing until he saw the small glowing phone on the floor, where it had apparently fallen from Enjolras’ outstretched hand.

He smiled wryly at Grantaire’s text.

Then he saw Joly’s.

Just scanning the pictures we grabbed as I uploaded them from phone onto laptop. Mate, it looks like they’re already dealing with the issue. I don’t know what to say, I’m sorry. Guess we’ll just have to find something else to do? Sorry, again. I genuinely thought – yeah. Sorry.

Combeferre read the text just once. He knew that reading it any more times wouldn’t change the message.

He’d been so hoping – and outlet, a simple, safe outlet –

Silently as he could, he closed the phone and, after a moment’s hesitation, slipped it into his pocket.

It wasn’t until he was back in his room with his legs crossed and Wittgenstein’s work open on his lap that he realised he was chewing his bottom lip. It was a nervous of habit of his – a habit he thought he’d kicked years ago.

He rubbed a finger over his lower lip absently, smoothing away the blood with a frown, before forcing himself to focus on his philosophy. Any fall-out from this – and there would be a fall-out – could be dealt with in the morning.
Chapter End Notes

I've noticed it's a trend, with my long fics, for me to proceed the serious angst with sex... ho hum...
Thank you! And seriously, kudos or comments would mean the WORLD to me right now.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

There is a playlist! Well random amalgamation of songs that have the faintest connection to this fic. To he found here, on my tumblr... special cookies for those who can identify each of the pictures and their relevance!

some of the explanations for each song has slight spoilers for this chapter - nothing massive, just might spoil the fun a bit. Fair warning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Enjolras didn’t hurt as much, the next morning, as he felt like he should. Previous experience told him that, after a night spent in cells, your body should hurt. But then again, perhaps that was usually due to the activities that landed him in holding cells, rather than the holding cells themselves. Rallies, bar fights, being in a car Bossuet had crashed, shit like that...

He had a slight crick in his back from the way he’d been sprawled half-off his bed, but that wasn’t that bad, and that wasn’t that new, either.

And, to top it all off, it was only half nine when he emerged from his room, refreshed, redressed and wide awake, so he hadn’t even lost all that much of his day, either.

“Ah, look!” Combeferre said, turning from the hob momentarily to glance with vague disapproval at Enjolras over his glass. “The monster rises! Sleep well?”

Enjolras smiled at him, very friendly, very toothy, and very much like a shark. “I miss when you called me sleeping beauty,” he mused, sliding onto one of the stools by the breakfast bar and picking up a discarded copy of The Guardian. “Am I no longer worthy of your compliments?”

“You were never worthy, I just pretended so I could have someone who could keep up with me in debates and who had a decent book and CD collection I could steal from.” Enjolras smirked, eyes scanning the headlines absently as Combeferre tipped the scrambled eggs out onto a plate. “Sorry to burst your bubble.”

“You were never worthy, I just pretended so I could have someone who could keep up with me in debates and who had a decent book and CD collection I could steal from.” Enjolras smirked, eyes scanning the headlines absently as Combeferre tipped the scrambled eggs out onto a plate. “Sorry to burst your bubble.”

“You burst my bubble long ago,” Enjolras sighed, lifting the newspaper off the tabletop slightly to make room as Combeferre slid onto the stool beside him. He flicked past stories of cows on the rampage as Combeferre seasoned the fancy scrambled eggs – it was spotted with some kind of herb and no doubt he’d used crème fraîche rather than milk – with just the right amount of salt and pepper. Feeling his stomach rumble as the smell wafted up towards him, Enjolras glanced at the plate, at Combeferre’s concentration as he scooped up egg from one side of the plate, and, nonchalantly, reached across to pinch a bit.

His fingers were slapped away by the flat of Combeferre’s knife before they even reached the plate’s edge. “Get your own,” Combeferre said, with an air of weariness that made Enjolras almost feel guilty about hardly ever cooking.

And perhaps there was another type of weariness there, too. “How about you?” Enjolras asked, setting the newspaper down – nothing interesting today – and heading towards the fridge for a
glass of orange juice. “Sleep well?”

Combeferre shrugged. “Well enough.”

“About two hours, then?”

“About that, yes.”

Enjolras hummed disapprovingly. “You should get more.”

“I should, yes.”

Well aware that, however mature Combeferre pretended to be sometimes, he would end up with some of the egg being thrown against the back of his head if he didn’t end that line of discussion, Enjolras stopped talking and just drank his juice in silence. Combeferre returned the favour. Enjolras stared into the fridge, frowning, and wondering if he should eat something. Eventually, he decided against it. They only had yoghurts, meats and salad in there, anyway, and he’d finished the Weetabix yesterday. “Gonna need to get to Sainsbury’s,” Enjolras muttered.

“Your turn. I did the shop last weekend.”

“Sure. Have you seen my phone?”

As Combeferre’s cutlery clattered loudly onto his plate, Enjolras turned back around to look at him, meeting the disapproving over-the-top-of-the-glasses stare with a curious stare of his own. “Don’t tell me you lost it somewhere amidst the fun you had last night,” Combeferre ordered sternly.

Enjolras rolled his eyes and finished the juice before reply, with full sarcasm, “No, mother, I did not. I had it with me last night when we got in, but... I’ve just mislaid it. Couldn’t find it in my room this morning.”

“Perhaps if you tidied your room more...”

Suddenly suspicious, Enjolras narrowed his eyes and brandished the glass at Combeferre. “Is my mother paying you to say this stuff?”

His suspicions were not allayed when Combeferre only smirked. “You’ll never know. But no, I haven’t seen your phone.”

“Can I borrow yours, in that case?”

Combeferre pulled his phone from his pocket, and handed it over. “Why d’you need it?” he asked, after Enjolras already had it in hand.

Enjolras tapped in the password on autopilot, muttering back, “Want to call Bahorel.” His number, too, was typed in on autopilot. If there was any number Enjolras knew off by heart, it was his lawyer’s.

It was almost surprising that Bahorel answered so quickly – before Enjolras realised that the previous night hadn’t even been tiring by Bahorel’s usual standards. “Hey, Combeferre, my main man! How’s it hanging?”

Enjolras narrowed his eyes across the counter to Combeferre, who looked back innocently as he chewed his eggs. “Hey, Combeferre’s my main man,” he answered back, putting his free hand on his hip.
“Did I forget to tell you?” Combeferre asked, one eyebrow raised as he climbed elegantly off the stool and carried his plate over to the dishwasher. “Bahorel and I are eloping together. We decided it at the tattoo parlour last month. We’re going to Bora Bora and are going to sit on beaches drinking strawberry daiquiris until the end of our days.”

After glaring at him for a sufficiently long enough time, Enjolras demanded into the phone, “Is this true?”

“Yeah man. Sorry. Now, what did you want me for?”

“A man date,” Enjolras said, only to be almost instantly faced with a Combeferre brandishing a bottle of Fairy Liquid at him.

“What, so you’re cheating on me now?” Combeferre asked, the open top spurting greenish bubbles into Enjolras’ face.

“You cheated on me first,” Enjolras reminded him, puffing at the bubbles in an attempt to get them to fly at Combeferre instead. But no. They stuck loyally to fighting for Combeferre’s team.

“Aw, am I causing trouble in paradise? Sweethearts, there’s enough to go around.”

Enjolras smirked, and Combeferre withdrew the Fairy Liquid, grinning and shaking his head. “You’re starting to sound like Courfeyrac, you know that?”

“Never. Shoot me on the day. But man date, I can do that... actually, there’s that thing tonight. What about chatting at that thing?”

“What? What ‘thing’?”

“The thing, man, the thing!”

And this man was meant to be Crown Prosecution Services’ most up-and-coming newcomer. “What thing? Can you not be more specific?”

“The thing Bossuet and Courfeyrac’s been planning for months!”

Enjolras considered that for a second. “...You’re still gonna have to be more precise.”

With a world-weary sigh, Combeferre set the now clean plate on the rack and said as he dried his hands, “Mabeuf’s turning 67 today, so Bossuet decided we need to invade his bar with cake and banners and party poppers.”

“We do that about three Sundays a month anyway,” Enjolras pointed out, frowning. “Well. Minus the banners.”

“Yeah, and Bossuet and Courfeyrac decided we’d go tonight. You’re bringing bunting.”

“I am?” This was news.

“We are,” Combeferre confirmed.

It was always nice when people told him things. “Right. Sure. Whatever.”

“So you’re coming to Mabeuf’s?”

“I’m coming to Mabeuf’s.”
“And can the man-date be incorporated into that? ‘Cause I’m working overtime as an associate on this thing.”

The word ‘overtime’ coming from Bahorel’s was like the words ‘party time!’ coming from Combeferre’s. “Overtime?” Enjolras cut in, smirking, widening to a grin when Combeferre started up and looked across in shock. “What, you staying in the office until two pm now?”

“Ha, ha. It’s a good case, I want to get the fucker locked up, so, yes, I learnt the meaning of overtime. But yeah, talk at Mabeuf’s?”

“See you then.” Enjolras confirms. Bahorel hangs up on him, and Enjolras set Combeferre’s phone back down on the counter. Then, he turned to stare at Combeferre, arms folded across his chest and one eyebrow raised, which said it all, really.

With his trademark and borderline sarcastic weary sigh, Combeferre settled down into his armchair and reached for his book. “Look, I was told there would be cake, alcohol, loud music organised by Bossuet, unsuspecting women, as many sweets as Joly and Courfeyrac can fit in their man-bags, and possibly water guns, so naturally I made the logical decision.”

“That we should stay as far away as possible?” If there was any hope in Enjolras’ tone, it was both very well buried and very, very futile.

“No,” Combeferre replied, flicking through the book until he found his page. “That we needed to be there to maintain some attempt at logic and common sense and to collect all the blackmail material that fate is about to drop in our laps.”

This time it was Enjolras sighing as he sank into his chair. “I guess I can survive that.” Everyone would be there, it’d be wrong not to go, and wrong not to show up to a birthday do for Mabeuf. And thinking on it, Jehan and Grantaire would probably be there, too.

Besides, Bossuet’s playlists weren’t that bad.

* * *

Grantaire was nudged awake by the familiar sensation of Gavroche lifting up his arm to drop his hand into a small bowl of cold water.

“No you fucking don’t,” Grantaire muttered into his pillow, grinning against the fabric.

Gavroche laughed. “One day.”

“Never.” With general groan of annoyance at having to wake up, Grantaire rolled over, lifting his arm out of Gavroche’s grasp and shoving his curtains open, swearing mildly as the sunlight hit him. “Time?”

How Gavroche chewed his lip before answering didn’t fill Grantaire with any hope. “...Probably best if I don’t tell you?”

Grantaire paused, then nodded. Yeah, that was probably best. And he would have sworn he’d been about to say something, but then his stomach rumbled and plans changed. “You hungry, kid?”

Gavroche’s face split into the widest grin. Chuckling, Grantaire reached out to shove the kid back before swinging his feet off the bed and sitting up.

“You gotta make me pancakes,” Gavroche said firmly, still holding the bowl of water that, now
Grantaire looked, actually had ice cubes in it.

Shaking his head to attempt to clear it, blinking in the hope that it’d stop his retinas feeling like they were being set on fire, Grantaire said, “Okay, first, you don’t need to put ice in it, the ‘cold’ aspect of the cold water isn’t that essential-”

“Says you-”

“Says a pro, thank you very much, and second, why do I have to make you pancakes?” Grantaire demanded, rubbing his face, the next step in his carefully organised waking-up ritual.

Gavroche shrugged. “Because.”

“I’m not even sure if we’ve got enough eggs-”

“You have,” Gavroche interjected, smirk sneaking back onto his face. “I checked.”

Now, Grantaire knew that he was frequently intoxicated, but... “By which, you mean you went and stole some from Feuilly’s fridge,” Grantaire guessed, starting to match Gavroche’s smirk with one of his own, “Because I know we didn’t have enough eggs.”

Gavroche shrugged again. “Well, if he’s just gonna keep that lock when he knows I got me own key... ‘sides, I had to get lettuce for Soup.”

Grantaire laughed, reaching across to ruffle the kid’s hair - a mop of dusty-blonde hair that a night of sleeping had turned into a veritable bird’s nest - and pushed himself up, using Gavroche as a post. He ignored the kid swatting at his hand (still on the boy’s head) and said, “Yeah, fine, pancakes, I can do that.”

Gavroche cheered, raising tiny fists in triumph. He then proceeded to empty the bowl of iced water onto the middle of Grantaire’s bed, before laughing raucously and running off.

Stunned into awed silence, Grantaire’s mouth fell open. He stared at the wet patch, gawping, before growling, and running after him. “Get back here, you little shit!”

* * *

Jehan let Courfeyrac kiss him again, lips lingering together, Courfeyrac’s hands started to slide around his waist, pulling him forwards –

Something hit their faces, causing Jehan to jump and Courfeyrac to yelp. Laughing at him, Jehan looked down, to see a grape slowly rolling to a stop between their bare feet. Glancing up, he saw Marius, in tatty pyjamas, waving a middle finger in their direction and unceremoniously dropping more grapes into his bowl of Crunchy Nut. “Good morning, Marius,” Jehan said with a smile, waving, as Courfeyrac’s hand tried to slide back around his waist to grope a buttock.

Marius didn’t respond, instead turning and opening a cupboard, pulling out maple syrup.

Trying to subtly slap away Courfeyrac’s hand – and semi-intentionally leaning into him whilst doing so – Jehan frowned, and repeated, “Marius?” But he still didn’t get a response.

Confused, and a little concerned he’d done something to upset Marius – and okay, a night of loud sex with his roommate might come under that heading - Jehan turned his frown across to Courfeyrac, who dispelled all his frowns by grinning widely back at him.
“Hey, Marius!” Courfeyrac called across the room, ignoring Jehan’s squirming and sliding a hand into his jeans back pocket. “You look stunning today.”

No response.

“Have you done something different with your hair?” Courfeyrac continued, “I like it, very debonair, I hear the dragged through a hedge look is in this season.”

And still nothing. Marius was now pouring milk on the grape, cereal and honey concoction.

With a wink at Jehan, Courfeyrac raised his voice a little louder. “So, I saw that blonde waiter chick at the Pink Pussycat the other day...”

When Marius didn’t respond to that, Jehan started to get the idea there was something else going on. And, sure enough, when Marius carried his bowl of diabetes inducing breakfast from the room without a further glance in their direction, Jehan spotted a tell-tale spot of yellow in his ears. “Ear-plugs?” Jehan asked, turning back round to face Courfeyrac and starting to smile again.

Courfeyrac nodded enthusiastically. “He can’t sleep without them. Gets scared at the slightest noise. The night our boiler crashed and stopped working he jumped into my bed and screamed like the little girl he truly is. So, high-quality ear plugs every night.” He grinned a truly shit-eating grin. “Best. Roommate. Ever.”

“So...” Jehan muttered, thinking, leaning forwards that touch and tilting his head back, “does that mean... I don’t have to bake him cookies to apologise for how I forgot he was in, last night, when I selfishly seduced you and, by consequence, kept him up all night...?”

Courfeyrac laughed lightly, his chest shaking where it pressed against Jehan’s, and a hand pressed between Jehan’s shoulder blades. “Mm, I don’t know,” Courfeyrac mused, pulling Jehan’s closer with clear intent of another kiss, “You were pretty loud last night... might still have to make those cookies.”

Jehan grinned again. He liked this, this constant smiling. “Yeah?” he asked, before leaning forwards and rising up on his toes to solve that centimetre height difference between them to press their lips together. “You want to help?”

A hand stroked down his newly-made braid and Courfeyrac chuckled against his lips. “Making cookies together? I’m warning you, I’ll probably eat all the dough before it goes anywhere near the oven.”

“That’s fine,” Jehan said, peppering Courfeyrac’s cheeks and nose with small kisses as Courfeyrac continued to giggle. “That’s half the fun.”

Laughing, Courfeyrac dodged Jehan’s sweet assault and took his face between his hands, holding his face still so he could kiss him firmly on the lips. “I thought you had to be somewhere,” he said, clearly pretending to be sensible about this. And it might have worked, were it not for his smile and shining eyes, and the way his thumbs were brushing over Jehan’s cheekbones.

Jehan did. “I do,” he admitted, trying to think less about the feel of Courfeyrac against his skin and more about the phone in his pocket and the text summoning him.

Smiling affectionately, Courfeyrac pressed a kiss to Jehan’s nose – making Jehan laugh and pull away, swatting at Courfeyrac playfully – and said, “Then go! Begone! Avaunt from these hallowed rooms! And all that jazz.” Laughing harder now, Jehan forced himself to step back, but couldn’t yet turn from the sight of Courfeyrac just in a pair of slim blue jeans, thumbs in his belt loops,
brown hair completely tousled and smiling widely... Courfeyrac’s eyes widened and his grin split to show his teeth, before he laughed and actually shooed Jehan. “Go! I don’t want to get you in trouble!”

Jehan blew him a kiss, which Courfeyrac laughed even harder at, but blushed all the same. Then, finally, Jehan could turn around, finding his pink Vans amidst the other shoes by the door. His jacket he couldn’t see, couldn’t remember where it had ended up, so made a swift decision and grabbed what he recognised as a blue cotton blazer of Courfeyrac’s, slinging it on over his loose navy top and grey jeans. It was looser on his slightly slimmer frame, but he’d always liked baggier clothing. He looked over his shoulder to check his boyfriend’s reaction, and when he only saw Courfeyrac’s eyes slide over him appreciatively he grinned, suddenly feeling bashful, suddenly feeling excited, and said, carefully, softly, eagerly, “See you soon.”

Courfeyrac met his eyes and nodded, smiling. Jehan bit his lips to stop himself laughing gleefully, and left the flat, tugging at the blazer, loving how he could already identify the smell as Courfeyrac. When he got down onto the street in the early morning light, he pressed the end of the sleeve over his mouth in an attempt to stifle a laugh that he couldn’t stop from bubbling out of him, and half skipped, half ran away from the flats to the cafe where Cosette was waiting.

* 

“Hey, R, think fast!”

It was hard, when preparing to flip a pancake, to be able to ‘think fast’ enough to catch the mobile being thrown at you by an insane twelve year old and not miss it and have it flying onto a hob that is, coincidentally, on, but somehow Grantaire managed it, catching the phone awkwardly in his free hand. “You hate me, don’t you,” he muttered to Gavroche, brandishing the frying pan at him, before neatly executing a perfect flip of the pancake. Ignoring the hatred comment, Gavroche applauded his mad cooking skillz. Grantaire bowed, and set the pancake back on the ring, multitasking and checking the caller ID at the same time.

Grinning and winking at Gavroche, Grantaire clicked the green button and slipped the phone between his shoulder and ear. “Can I ask how Courfeyrac’s cock is now?”

“His cock is the cock of a God.”

Grantaire gagged. Gavroche chuckled, rocking back and forth on the edge of the table.

“What? You did ask. And it’s a valid description. He’s handsy, too. Kept lifting me up and around, onto his lap, pulling me closer-“

“Yes, thank you,” Grantaire cut in, praying the phone wouldn’t slip off his shoulder onto the floor as he used both hands to tip a five-star pancake out of the pan onto a plate. Before he could even start some kind of hand signal, Gavroche magically appeared to whisk the plate away, the various condiments already set out, lemon juice, sugar, honey, the cheaper own-brand of Nutella that was all they could afford (such a tragic life). “You calling because you want a lift? I’m assuming it wasn’t to wax poetic about his dick.”

“Mm, no, it originally wasn’t, but now you’ve got me started I’m really loving-”

He was going to throw up. He didn’t want to throw up. He had pancakes to make. “Stop,” Grantaire ordered, trying to focus on the pancakes as he used a cup to scoop up the mixture and pour it into the pan. “Just – leave that to the notebooks, okay?”
Jehan sighed on the other end of the line. “Fine.”

“Hey, perhaps that can be your next book-”

“I am not publishing a book of erotic poetry, Grantaire.”

“But-”

“No.”

Grantaire moaned like a stroppy teenager. “But it’d sell so well.”

“The answer’s still no. And no, I’m not calling for a lift, I’m calling to tell you that I’m meeting Cosette this morning, she texted asking to share notes on the last lecture.”

Cosette was cool. For one, she was the daughter of the man who let their little Gavroche perform on the streets illegally. For another, she gave Jehan an outlet for his hour long declarations of love for various poets and writers that wasn’t Grantaire, something for which Grantaire would be forever grateful. “Ah, sweet. Yeah, I have no plans this morning, save feeding Gavroche, drinking caffeine and doing these posters.”

Grantaire decided to play nice, and ignore the smug tone in Jehan’s small laugh. “I knew you’d make them.”

“Shut up.”

“Do you need me to pick anything up? We were low on eggs, right?”

Grantaire looked across to where Gavroche was shovelling something into his mouth that was definitely more chocolate spread than pancake. “Nope. Not anymore. Could use some more juice, though. And peppers. And carrots. Butter, maybe. And fruit.”

“I’ll just do a grocery run, shall I?”

“What? No. We’ve got everything aside from those five things.”

“Okay. I’ll be back for lunch or so, then, with the shopping. Do you think you can cope with Gavroche on your own until then?”

“Truthfully?” Grantaire asked, looking sideways at Gavroche again and remembering the wet patch of iced water in his bed. “No. But I’ll persevere somehow.”

“Good! Okay, see you soon.”

“Bye! Don’t limp too much, you’ll draw weird looks,” Grantaire advised, trying to sound serious, “And I don’t need social services poking round here again.”

“Ha ha.”

“Oh, and-”

“Bye, Grantaire.”

Jehan hung up, and Grantaire chuckled. Until smoke drifted into his nose.

He spun to the hob, and almost wept at the blackened mangled remains of his pancake. Gritting his
teeth, taking it like a man, he lifted the pan off the stove and stepped over to Gavroche. When the boy looked up at him, all cherubic, Grantaire turned the pan over and let the black mess fall onto the boy’s head.

As Gavroche let out a wonderfully rewarding squeak of shock and annoyance, Grantaire smiled and turned back to the hob, scooping out more mixture and whistling ‘Busy Doing Nothing’ as Gavroche continued to sputter behind him.

*

The alarm went off at nine am, and upon the instant of waking up, Feuilly made an executive decision that he wasn’t going to be opening the Corinthe for another few hours.

He tried mumbling this out to the alarm clock, to get it to listen, but it just kept beeping.

Giving the technology up for a lost cause, Feuilly let out a muffled stream of curses, letting a hand drape over the side of his bed, brushing at the floor. Finally finding what he was looking for, he grabbed the handle of the cricket bat, lifted it up and slammed it as hard as he could onto the clock.

That shut it up.

Smiling happily, he rolled over, burying himself under the duvet. He’d add the damage costs to Grantaire’s rent.

He promptly fell back asleep.

*

He was woken up for the second time a few hours later, by someone using his doorbell.

He rolled out of his bed, hand instinctively grasping the handle of the cricket bat again. It took him to get to the doorway of his bedroom before he was crawling on his knees and not just slithering along the floor, until he got to dining room table before he opened his eyes, and he used his sofa to finally pull himself onto his feet.

Eyes still barely focusing, he opened the door warily to see two very public-school kids – perhaps young men – on his doorstep, both grinning expectantly.

Unsurprisingly, the happy faces fell upon seeing a tall, gangly redhead opening the door, in chequered pyjamas that had enough holes to no longer be considered decent, and brandishing a cricket bat to round it all off.

“You’re not Grantaire,” one of them said, still somehow sounding cheerful, and the voice was familiar, bringing back a small rush of exasperation, panic, and hatred of humanity. He’d been there last night, had been the guy who’d waited outside. He was Jehan’s thing.

Feuilly grunted back, rubbing his eyes with the back of his free hand, and shifting his grip on the cricket bat.

“Wrong art shop?” the other one asked, and, no, Feuilly didn’t know this one. Wouldn’t stop him being violent at him, though.

“No, no, this is... thingy. I know him. We’re bros.”

Feuilly grunted again, trying to transfer a bit more of a threat behind it.
“Soo... thingy, um. Where could we find Grantaire?”

Feuilly waved the cricket bat – laughing a bit internally when, through blurry eyes, he saw the two flinch – and lifted it to point upwards.

“Thank you!” Jehan’s thing sang at him.

Feuilly slammed the door shut in their faces, and crawled back to bed, sliding back under the duvet and cuddling the cricket bat.

*

“You are Grantaire!”

Grantaire looked between Courfeyrac and Marius with more than a little bemusement. “I was the last time I checked, yes,” he replied to Marius, and it was early enough that he had to look down and check nothing had changed. He barely managed to stop himself reaching up to pat his face. There was always the risk Gavroche had done something whilst he slept, but he didn’t think it’d be that radical. He’d feel pain, or something.

“We had an encounter with someone who wasn’t Grantaire,” Courfeyrac explained, shrugging as he did so in a cheery ‘what you gonna do’ kind of way. He seemed to be clutching in his hands something that looked astonishingly like Jehan’s favourite patchwork jacket. “I think it was the red-head from last night?”

“Feuilly?” Grantaire checked, which was ridiculous, because of course Courfeyrac wouldn’t know the name, Courfeyrac and Feuilly hadn’t been introduced because they’d been too busy running late last night and – oh no. “You woke him up, didn’t you?” Grantaire checked with exasperation as the thought occurred to him, and at the matching pained expressions on their faces, Grantaire stepped back and held the door open for them. They were cool dudes. The least he could do was give them asylum from a raging Feuilly that had slept less than his desperately required 8 hours sleep. “Was he very violent?”

Courfeyrac was kicking his shoes off and adding them to the pile without asking first, and, yes, perhaps they had reached that stage. “I think he was too tired to be violent, but he was wielding a cricket bat.”

Grantaire tutted, closing the door behind a slightly dazed looking Marius. But then, Grantaire had spent enough time around Marius to have realised this was the man’s standard look. “What a poser. He hasn’t even played cricket for at least six years.” He tried a wide, toothy grin at Marius. Marius gave a toothy grin back. He wasn’t entirely out of it, then, and his pupils were too small for him to be high. Grantaire ignored him as a problem to be solved later, and turned back to where Gavroche was slumped on the sofa and playing pinball on his laptop. “You’d better not beat my high score,” he threatened, stepping past to the kitchen, meaning to offer people drinks. That was what hosts did, right?

“Your high score?” Gavroche echoed, far too patronising for someone only just over half Grantaire’s age. “Your high score is shite, man.”

Before Grantaire could bite out a retort, Courfeyrac was laughing, and Courfeyrac had a laugh that could fill in a room – but somehow in a good way. “Up here, little man,” Courfeyrac said, leaning over and holding up his palm. Gavroche reached over and slapped it in what must have been an agonisingly painful high-five, before returning his attention to the game. He hadn’t even dropped the ball. In fact, he’d gained another fifty points whilst his attention had been elsewhere.
“Don’t bond with him,” Grantaire ordered, brandishing a spatula at Courfeyrac. “That’s dangerous, you two working together is terrifying. Don’t do that.”

Courfeyrac frowned in confusion at the spatula, met Marius’s eyes – who just shrugged – and then asked Grantaire cautiously, “What’re you doing with a spatula?”

Grantaire looked down at the spatula in his hands. “I was going to offer you drinks,” he explained slowly, trying to think through and find the logic where there probably wasn’t any, “and thus ended up in the kitchen corner, and I think I picked up the spatula by default.”

All three of them exchanged looks, all shrugged, and moved on. “Are you perhaps going to do the offering of drinks, now?” Marius suggested. “Might be an idea?”

There was pause in conversation for an errant cry of, “Motherfucker!” from Gavroche on the sofa as he dropped a ball. Grantaire grinned victoriously. “Offer drinks?”

“Drinks,” Courfeyrac echoed in confirmation, grinning. “My friend, if you’re taking social tips from Marius, you’re really in trouble.”

“Hey, now!” Marius protested, as Grantaire laughed. “I’d resent that, if, well, if it wasn’t so true,” Marius trailed off, smiling in his typical, self-deprecating way.

Grantaire flung open the fridge and the cupboard that held their various squashes. “Gents, cast your eyes upon the beverages this establishment has to offer. I’m afraid the cupboard of alcoholic drinks is firmly closed until at least midday.”


Turning his attention away from the snot-nosed little shit, Grantaire realised Marius was making wide eyes at him, trying to get his attention, whilst Courfeyrac was leaning forwards with narrowed eyes to get a better look at the squashes. “Psst,” Marius said, and yes, he actually said ‘psst’, something Grantaire had assumed was a trait restricted to Jehan after he’d been silently stuck in a world of written words for too many days. “I didn’t know you had a kid!” Marius hissed.

It took a full ten seconds for the comment to sink in, during which Grantaire just blinked at Marius aimlessly. When he finally realised the kid in question here was Gavroche, Grantaire started to howl with laughter, holding the counter to keep himself upright. “That little tosser?” he asked, when he could breathe normally. “Gods, no! Jesus, he’s not on my hands – I might be unfortunate, but I’m not that-”

“You’re the tosser,” Gavroche muttered mutinously, interrupting Grantaire’s rant, which just served to prove Grantaire’s semi-affectionate point about him being a tosser.

“Don’t you have an underground black market to go and run?” Grantaire shot back, got him a rude gesture from Gavroche before his little 12 year old brain went back to being focused on his game. “No, he’s not mine, he’s Eponine’s little brother,” Grantaire finished explaining to Marius. “Oh, and Gav – Gavroche! This dude’s Marius. Whom you will have heard of.” Grantaire layered the last line with lots of meaning.

Gavroche instantly paused the game to turn and glare at Marius over the armrest of the sofa. So, Eponine had been moaning about Marius just as much at home as she did everywhere else, then.

Marius looked terrified. “What – what’s he heard?” he asked, sounding more than a touch desperate.
“Ooh, is that Ribena?” Courfeyrac cut in suddenly, eyes widening like a little child’s. “Ribena, please, Mr Barkeep!”

“What have you told him? Or was it someone else? Who told him stuff about me?”

Grantaire smirked, and turned to grab the Ribena from the cupboard. “Ribena it is, my fine fellow! A good choice, if I may say.”

“The squash for the man who is confident of his maturity!”

“Indeed!”

“No, guys, seriously, what’s he heard, he’s starting to scare me-”

“So, why the visit, comrade? Your little love-bunny’s off gallivanting with other English students, if it was his allure that drew you here.”

“Guys!”

Seeing a mirrored humour about to explode across Courfeyrac’s features, Grantaire finally grinned and turned to face a frantic Marius. “Is our Gav bothering you?” he asked mildly. As Marius nodded quickly, Grantaire leant around him to stick his tongue out at Gavroche, and wink. Gavroche nodded, and spun back around to his game of pinball.

Marius still looked really awkward. And for some reason, his brain thought the best way to recover from this was to blurt out, “Courfeyrac made us wander around all of Covent Garden until we found an art shop so he could find you and Jehan’s flat so he could return Jehan’s jacket that he left behind after having really loud sex last night and he owes me a better pair of earplugs.”

Grantaire was really starting to like being around Marius. He had a feeling it could be endlessly amusing, so long as you weren’t on the bad end of his social awkwardness. So he was smiling mildly and enjoying the general atmosphere, whilst Courfeyrac’s eyes widened and he rounded on Marius. Grantaire felt like he should be eating popcorn. “Really?” he asked, more stunned than angry. “You’re just gonna drag me up to the heights of social awkwardness with you? That’s what you’re gonna do?”

“Apparently?” Marius squeaked. He started to back up. “I’m just gonna... um...”

Time to intervene. “If you want to find something to do so you’re not standing awkwardly in a corner but also not here and directly in Courfeyrac’s firing line, there’s a stack of CDs and DVDs you can peruse through over there,” Grantaire said lightly, pointing at the pile of cases by the too small TV. Eyes screaming a silent ‘thank you’, Marius all but fled backward.

There was a few seconds of silence as they both watched Marius stumble off, before Courfeyrac said, “He’s adorable really.”

“I’m sure.” Grantaire set the Ribena on the mini breakfast bar between them, and leant beside it. “So. Jacket?”

Courfeyrac pulled what was probably meant to be an innocent smile, but it was on Courfeyrac’s face, so by default the ‘innocence’ was transformed into ‘guilty’. In his hands, barely hidden behind the table, he was turning Jehan’s dark-tone patchwork jacket over in his hands. “Yeah. He left it behind. And we had to go and buy some new textbooks anyway, and Marius needs new jeans and I felt like splashing out a bit, and I remembered that you two lived above this art shop, so, I just thought-”
“Aw, you have really cool music taste!” Marius cut in suddenly.

Grantaire got distracted for a second by the album Marius was holding up. “You like Mallory Knox?” he asked, thoroughly bemused.

Marius looked bashful. “‘Hello’ speaks to me on an emotional level,” he explained, as if aware that someone like him probably shouldn’t like something as non-hipster as Mallory Knox.

Much to Grantaire’s entertainment, Courfeyrac buried his face in his hands and muttered something that sounded a lot like, “Actual fucking stalker.”

Grantaire chuckled. “And for future reference – because, terrifyingly, I have a feeling situations like this will arise a lot – hearing of the loud sex you had?” He paused to let fear start to take root in Courfeyrac’s mind before continuing, “Doesn’t faze me. I’ve already been told that you have the cock of a god.”

Courfeyrac’s eyes brightened. Grantaire considered the possibility that he’d made a terrible mistake. “Really?”

“But don’t think I won’t castrate you if you have a rerun of that loud sex in the flat when I’m here,” Grantaire hurried to add, backtracking at the terrifying gleeful expression on the face of the man across from him. “I’ve heard enough of Jehan’s screaming and I think I could live happily without knowing what you sound like, thankyouverymuch.”

Courfeyrac grinned, and no doubt there was a fine piece of witty repartee waiting on the tip of his tongue but, thankfully, he was cut off by high, girlish laughter drifting through the front door.

Speak of the devil. “That’ll be him now,” Grantaire said with a grin, pushing himself up off the table and starting to head towards the door.

“Uh – that didn’t sound like-”

“No, that was his co-founder for the ‘I Want To Bang Robert Frost’ fan club,” Grantaire explained, reaching the door just as it was flung open, revealing Jehan with one hand holding a bag from Costco and the other around the shoulders of the petite Miss Fauchelevent.

She looked, as ever, like a china doll brought to life. Perfect and spotless skin, platinum blonde hair in a French braid with not a strand out of place, and cute little polka-dot dress straight from the fifties. And, of course, a lovely warm smile on naturally rosy lips. “Grantaire!” she said, all pretty and smiling and friendly and utterly adorable. Grantaire wanted to put her on a shelf and keep her safe and bake cookies with her whilst bopping along to stuff like Dolly Parton’s ‘Working Nine ‘til Five’.

Yes, Cosette genuinely had that affect on people.

“Hello, lovely,” Grantaire replied, grinning, scooping her out of Jehan’s arms and pulling her into a hug of his own. “I haven’t seen you in weeks. You’ve been hiding from me, it’s not good. Come by more.”

Her arms squeezed his waist, before letting go and pushing him back so she could smile up at him, all motherly. “Sugar, some of us have jobs and school work we have to do,” she informed him, but with a tilt to her lips that suggested she wasn’t being entirely serious, “And not just whatever it is you arty lot do.”

Grantaire hummed, considering her comment with humour as he looked between her and Jehan,
who had dumped the food on the floor and was now facing the wall as he removed and hung up a
jacket that was definitely not his own. “Schoolwork, was it?” he asked Cosette, amused.

She tried to hide a smile behind pursed lips and a disapproving shake of the head, but Grantaire
could still see it. “Yes, something I’m sure you know nothing of,” she tutted, bopping his nose
before stepping back towards the door. “But I shall linger no longer-”

“Oh, c’mon, Cosette, you know you’re welcome-”

But Cosette seemed adamant. “No, no,” she said, backing up with hands raised and serenely
shaking her head. “No, I wouldn’t want to impose, not when I see you already have guests...” and
there, that wicked grin of hers showed its face for a second as her eyes flickered over to
Courfeyrac, who was, Grantaire noted, still clutching Jehan’s jacket. She was a smart girl, that
Cosette. She never missed a trick. “And besides, I have work to get to. I shall give you a ring later,”
she promised, blowing a kiss at Grantaire and leaning over to press an actual kiss to Jehan’s cheek
as he struggled with an errant knot in his laces.

“You’d better,” Grantaire called after Cosette with a grin, as she darted out through the door. He
didn’t see enough of her. And she was unparalleled when it came to fixing people’s fucked up
lives. Like Grantaire’s. Which she did very frequently. And that he really needed help with right
now.

In the meantime, Jehan had managed to take off one shoe, laces neatly tucked inside. “Wait, we
have visitors?” he asked, sounding thoroughly bemused.

Grantaire hummed an affirmative, rocking back on his feet and grinning back at Courfeyrac and
Marius. “Dry cleaning,” Grantaire explained, “come to drop off some clothing.”

“We don’t-” But Jehan stopped talking when he finally looked up, and saw Courfeyrac standing
like a lemon in the middle of their open living space area. “Oh,” he said, straightening up and face
breaking into a wide, sunshine smile. “You brought my jacket back!”

Courfeyrac grinned back, somehow managing to look half his age and all bumbling kid-with-a-
crush, even though Grantaire had now heard from both participants that Courfeyrac had had his
dick up said crush’s ass last night. Really, they should both be too old for this kind of behaviour.
“Well, you said to see you soon, so I kinda presumed-”

“Please don’t be cute, because I will throw up,” Grantaire moaned, shaking his head and neatly
dodging an elbow Jehan had aimed at his stomach. “For one thing, you’re still wearing only one
shoe,” he continued, pointing at Jehan, who just pouted, “and for another, I think Marius is having
an aneurism.”

That got people’s attention.

Jehan gasped a bit, and Courfeyrac spun to look at his roommate, who, quite honestly, did look like
he was one gentle push away from falling onto the ground, rocking back and forth, and frothing
from the mouth. Or just dying. “Dude?” Courfeyrac asked hesitantly, taking a cautious step
towards the dying man. “Are you okay?”

Grantaire was really doubtful that Marius would be able to reply, but, somehow, he did. “It’s,” he
stuttered out, eyes fixed on the doorway to the apartment. “It’s...” he raised a shaking hand,
pointing at the doorway. “It’s her. Courf... Courf that was her!”

Apparently, that meant something significant, because Courfeyrac’s eyes widened and his jaw all
but dropped to the floor. “What – really? I didn’t recognise her…”

Marius turned wild eyes on Courfeyrac. Grantaire exchanged bemused looks with Jehan, who looked like he was about to burst into laughter. “Cosette has a secret love,” Jehan whispered, delight in the young Romantic’s voice. “Figures.”

“Well, Courfeyrac did just call Marius a stalker,” Grantaire muttered back, and Jehan snorted before pressing a hand over his mouth.

“Do you doubt me?” Marius was starting to yell at Courfeyrac, and Grantaire was starting his usual internal debate on whether to break the fight up before it started, or start making bets with Jehan. But no, that wouldn’t work, because Jehan would refuse to put money on anyone but Courfeyrac and Grantaire wasn’t stupid enough to bet on Marius.

“No, I do not doubt your epic creeping skills!” Courfeyrac replied, voice rising in volume and pitch and hands starting to flap frantically as Marius started to hyperventilate. “But she was, like, for three weeks, like, four months ago!”

“I know!” Marius shrieked.

There was a disturbing clattering sound from below their feet. The Scot had awoken. “Guys!” Grantaire hissed, joining in with the frantic hand flapping. “Volume!”

Courfeyrac looked back to Grantaire and nodded. Marius didn’t respond, but he didn’t keep shrieking, so that was a bonus.

Turning back to Marius, Courfeyrac made his frantic hand flapping aim vaguely towards the door. “Can I?” Marius hissed in high-pitch, dithering on the balls of his feet. Courfeyrac nodded manically at him. Marius nodded back, and, still really starting to hyperventilate now, dashed towards the door and out into the corridor.

Silence filled the small flat for a few seconds, Grantaire trying to exchange more bemused looks with Jehan only to find his best friend looking at Courfeyrac with adoring amusement and exasperation. “So,” Grantaire said, rolling his eyes instead, “Not that that wasn’t fascinating and amusing, but, quite simply – what the hell?”

It seemed to take Courfeyrac a minute or two to remember that the world still existed outside of Marius’ little insanities. “Hm? Oh, she was a waitress at the Musain for a while... got Marius discovering his inner creeper...”

“Not actually, right?” Jehan checked seriously. Secret love, yes, that was romantic. Actual stalker? Not so much. And Grantaire liked Marius and all, but if he was creeping on their Cosette he was going down.

“Actually? Nah. He barely could get the courage to say hello, let alone... oh, hey, that was quick...”

True enough, two footsteps were sounding along the corridor again. And again, true enough, Marius showed up in the doorway. But no one could mistake a Feuilly in tattered boxer shorts and well-worn white shirt for Cosette.

He was pushing Marius back into the house using the tip of his cricket bat.

“Have you married that thing, yet?” Grantaire asked, pointing at the bat, whilst Courfeyrac carefully tugged a petrified Marius out of the danger zone and Jehan said, as a slightly different
greeting, “You hair looks really pretty like that!”

Momentarily distracted, Feuilly raised a hand to the ginger halo of red hair which really was a pretty spectacular display of bed head. But then he shook his head, swinging the bat around so it was pointing at each of them for a few seconds. “Shut up,” he ordered.

Grantaire grinned. “It’s half eleven. You not gonna to open the Corinthe some point? Just a suggestion, of course.”

Feuilly growled, swinging the bat in Grantaire’s direction. “I hate you.”

“You’re a shite shopkeeper,” Grantaire countered. Which was a lie, but the comment served its purpose.

Feuilly growled again, but he turned and left without another word.

Feuilly was in a less-than-conscious state. Better use it to the best ability. “Hey, can I print a couple dozen posters off the supersize printer downstairs?” Grantaire yelled after him quickly. He took the mumbled, inaudible groan he got in return as a victory.

“What a lovely man,” Courfeyrac mused, looking after Feuilly with amusement.

“Oh, just you wait,” Grantaire said, “you’ll be worshipping at his altar soon enough. Everyone falls for it eventually. You can’t not love him.”

“Except before midday, perhaps,” Jehan added lightly, with a smile. “Ooh, groceries...”

It was tempting to point out that if the groceries had been waiting on the ground for the full twenty hectic minutes since Jehan had arrived then anything that could go off probably already had, but Jehan looked so content running over to the fridge protecting his ickle bag of fruits and other chillables, so Grantaire let him be. Besides, his focus was more taken up by a gibbering Marius standing in the middle of the room.

As Courfeyrac not-so-subtly sneaked around the edge of the room towards Jehan, Grantaire took on responsibility and grabbed Marius’ shoulders, resisting the temptation to shake sense into him.

“Breathe. Breathe, dude, breathe.”

Breathing seemed to be low on Marius’ list of things to do. “She was... she was there... and then gone... and now gone again... gone...”

Okay, so Grantaire permitted himself a little shake. “Listen, idiot, you can get her number from me or Jehan or some shit, now get your head back in the game!”

Amazingly, Marius managed to nod, refocus his eyes, and say, “Yeah... yeah. Yes. Yes, that’d- oh god.”

He was staring at something over Grantaire’s shoulder. Grantaire had a horrible feeling he knew what it was.

Jehan and Courfeyrac were kissing each other in the middle of the kitchen area. And it wasn’t even passionate kissing, it was just... domestic kissing. Which was even worse.

“Can you... not?” Grantaire tried lamely.

Beside him, Marius let out a sigh. “I’m almost jealous of them,” he admitted with a second forlorn
and lovesick sigh.

That was probably over-sharing, considering how long they’d known each other, but rather than employing his rapier wit and humorously embarrassing Marius, Grantaire found himself sighing, “Same.”

And then he realised what he said.

Aghast, Grantaire spun back around to Marius. “What — no — *wait*, do I have something *in common* with you?”

Marius chewed his lip, before, to Grantaire’s horror, nodding. “I guess-”

“No!” Grantaire insisted, waving a finger between them. “No! I refuse to have some kind of, of *moping* connection with you! Not happening. Doesn’t exist! Got it?”

Marius had the audacity to *chuckle* as he raised two hands in defence and protested, “Hey, it’s not like I *made* you develop the motherload of crushes on him!”

“Okay, no, but... *wait*, does *everyone* know?”

Marius shrugged. “I dunno. Courfeyrac just babbles a lot. Sometimes I listen. Don’t know who else knows, Courfeyrac just picks up on this stuff very quickly.”

“And then *tells* a lot of a people very quickly,” Grantaire added, feeling very weary all of a sudden.

He didn’t feel better when Marius just grinned and said, “You got it.”

Having suddenly lost all appetite for conversation, Grantaire turned away from Marius silently. Apparently, socially awkward though Marius was, he knew not to say anything then.

However, this meant that the only sounds in the flat were Gavroche pressing buttons and Jehan and Courfeyrac talking under their breath, no longer kissing, but standing forehead to forehead, giggling and chatting as if they were the only ones there.

Grantaire tried to clear his throat. “Uh. At least shut the fridge door? No? Okay then.”

“Do you have any grapes?” Marius asked, a hint of desperation starting to sound in his voice.

“If we do, they’ll be in that bag,” Grantaire muttered, wincing with some disgust as he pointed at the bag on the surface just behind Jehan, who was leaning forwards to touch Courfeyrac’s nose with his own nose. “If you want to go and get them, feel free... And why do need grapes, again?”

“I threw some at them before,” Marius explained. “It seemed to work.”

Grantaire nodded, and fell silent again. He and Marius slowly turned, looking around the flat, trying to find something to look at and discuss that wasn’t the chunder worthy display in the kitchen corner.

There was nothing. The display was just too focus-absorbing, like a road accident; as disturbing as it was, nothing could make you focus on anything else.

“Well,” Grantaire said, making a snap decision, “I have stuff to do.” He dived over to the sofa, grabbing his laptop from Gavroche and ignoring the protested squeak.

Marius was doing some squawking of his own as Grantaire dashed past, power-walking out of the
Grantaire paused in the doorway, turning back quickly to hiss, “Then come!” After that, he finally made his escape out down the corridor.

There was a moment of dithering, before Marius was hot on his heels, leaving the adorable couple in peace, standing together by the fridge, watching the dust cloud that followed their friends and laughing so hard they had to lean on each other to stay on their feet.

* *

When it seemed like Jehan and Courfeyrac were still enveloped in their own world – and Gavroche had spent a fair amount of time around them the other day, after his street show, he knew how self-absorbed those two could be – Gavroche slid off the couch as quietly as he could, and made his way to the front door in complete silence. He left his shoes amidst the pile, and instead headed out barefoot. He was only going downstairs, anyway.

He didn’t think they’d even heard the door close. Must be nice, to be able to find your whole world in someone else like that.

Just as he’d known she would be, Eponine was at the desk in the Corinthe, sat there with a book in her lap, one headphone in, and a careful eye on the customer browsing the shelves of moulding clay.

“Extra shift?” he asked, resting his arms and chin on the edge of the desk. “We don’t need the money.”

“No, but I need the good reference,” Eponine replied, not even looking up. She turned the page. “Have a good night? You didn’t stay up all night pranking Grantaire, did you? Or playing video games?”

“No, ‘Ponine,” Gavroche promised. “He put me in Jehan’s bed and made me pancakes.”

Eponine smiled down at her book, but Gavroche was pretty sure that the smile had been caused by what he’d said. When he’d been younger, when they’d just escaped the family, when they’d first met with the poet who hugged him a lot, the fiery redhead and the fun guy who’d made his sister laugh for the first time in ages, he’d had thoughts of them settling down together and Eponine and Grantaire being happy together and that would be that. He’d been seven. It had seemed like the next best thing, after losing his actual family to the judge. Now, he’d long realised that that would never happen. But it didn’t mean Grantaire and Jehan and Eponine couldn’t have a happy life together.

And it just meant that Gavroche had to look after his sister a bit more, until she did find someone to permanently make her laugh.

“Sis?” he asked. He hadn’t meant it to sound so serious, but apparently Eponine had understood anyway, from how she instantly looked up from her book, frowning.

“What is it?” Eponine asked softly, concern clear in her eyes.

He tried to think of a way to say it, that might not hurt so much. Eventually, he just said, straight and simple, “I don’t like that Marius guy. You know, the one you keep talking about.”

In a second, Eponine’s frown turned into an amused and patronising smile. “Oh, c’mon, you’ve met him for a grand total of, what, ten minutes?” she asked, chuckling and shaking her head. “He’s
nice, honest.”

It was hard, being the younger brother. Being only twelve and wanting to protect your eighteen
year old sister from all the guys in the world. Desperate to get the point across, Gavroche shook his
head. “He’s not. He’s a, a coward, a wuss, and a liar and he’s stupid and a fool and-”

“Gavroche!”

“He’s not good, Ponine, you shouldn’t like him.”

Eponine was frowning now, and that was good, perhaps he could get her off him before it hurt her
too much. She didn’t need any more scars. She opened her mouth to ask something he knew he
wouldn’t want to answer, but she didn’t get around to voicing her concerns before the door to the
back room swung open.

And Marius came running out. “Eponine!” he was calling, “Eponine!”

Wordlessly, Gavroche slid around to hide behind the back of the desk, still just tall enough to have
his eyes looking over the edge.

Still clearly confused, Eponine frowned down at him before looking up at Marius with a smile.
“Yeah? You after something?”

“Yes!” Marius said energetically, grinning, and of course that set Eponine grinning, too.
“Mortimer’s Bookshop, uh, directions, can you give me, please?”

Eponine didn’t understand why he needed the directions yet, so she was still half-laughing at his
energy as she answered. “Uh, yeah, just go straight through to the other side of the market, then
take the road down to the Strand, and go left, it’s just opposite of the Hotel Chocolat shop, bright
blue sign, you can’t miss it.”

Don’t ask why, Gavroche pleaded, pressing his lips to the edge of the desk so he didn’t say
anything out loud. Don’t ask-

“Why’d you need to know, desperate for a bedtime story?” Eponine asked, still smiling, and
leaning forwards.

“It’s Cosette!” Marius yelled to the world, laughing as he ran from the shop. “I’ve found her! I’ve
finally got the name, and can find her again – thank you, Eponine, thank you!”

The bell to the door tinkled quietly as the door closed behind him. Eponine was frozen, half-leant
over the desk, but the smile had fallen from her lips and left a ghost in her eyes.

Without a word, Gavroche stepped forwards and wrapped his arms around his sister’s waist,
burying his face in her clothes, giving her as much comfort as he could, for all the good he knew
it’d do.

He’d never love anyone. It just hurt too much.

*

The day had been surprisingly productive. Plenty of research into his next paper, read and
annotated a full chapter in his latest textbook for his Law course, found a good upcoming court
case he could follow for experience, put the court dates in his diary – so he was in a good mood,
even if he hadn’t yet been able to find his phone.
And now his clock was telling him it was three-forty five, so now he had an appointment to get to by Covent Garden.

Enjolras straightened up his desk as much as he could, stacking his notes into a semi-orderly pile (the system made sense to him, even if no one else understood it) and sliding his books back into place on their respective shelves before doing one last desperate scan of the floor and various surfaces to see if his phone had made a miraculous reappearance. For god’s sake, he’d had it in his hand, as he was lying there, just last night –

Enjolras breathed out, slowly, running a hand through his curls. It was fine, stuff like this happened. Socks went missing, keys vanishing off clean tabletops, stuff vanished sometimes. True, stuff had never vanished for him before, but he’d heard of it happening, to Bossuet, and people like that.

He’d have to buy another one on the way back home, he decided, giving up for now and heading out into the main room.

Where Combeferre was waiting, standing in front of the TV with hands clasped together in front, and a teacherly look on his face that Enjolras knew well enough to start to worry.

“What?” Enjolras asked suspiciously, walking cautiously over to the shoe rack. “What are you planning?” When Combeferre merely continued to look on with caring benevolence, Enjolras narrowed his eyes, not taking his eyes off this new possible enemy as he lifted his favourite mid-length red wool jacket off the hook. On reflex, he reached to the bowl where they kept the loose change and keys – only to not find keys. Exasperation starting to bubble up, Enjolras said firmly, “I have not lost my phone and my keys in one day, where are my keys?”

Wordlessly, Combeferre lifted up a hand, Enjolras’ keys hanging from his index finger.

Thinking fast, Enjolras nodded, and shifted his weight so he was standing more comfortably. “Okay,” he said, “what’s going on?”

There was the faintest twitch to Combeferre’s lips, before he said, “This is an intervention.”

Enjolras blinked. And then he swore at Combeferre using both tongue and two middle fingers. His mood didn’t improve when Combeferre finally gave up pretending to be serious and grinned. “Not that I’m an expert on this stuff,” Enjolras bit out, “but shouldn’t there be more people?”

“Courfeyrac was busy, Bahorel wanted no part in this and no one answered when I called the doctor and his sidekick,” Combeferre said quickly. “Now, what do you mean, ‘not an expert’, we stage an intervention for you every single exam season-”

“Shut up, and give me back my keys-” Enjolras demanded, striding towards Combeferre and sticking out a hand. “I swear to god, I will tickle you if I have to.”

“Where are you going, Enjolras?” Combeferre asked, stepped back with elegance and hiding the keys behind his back. “I mean, ‘not an expert’, we stage an intervention for you every single exam season-”

“Give me back my fucking keys-”

But Combeferre just dodged his hands and stepped quickly around the back of the sofa. Gritting his teeth, Enjolras paused with the sofa as a barrier between them, just waiting for Combeferre to make a wrong move. “I’m going to meet Grantaire to collect posters,” Enjolras admitted furiously, “And that’s all it is, so shut up and give me back my-”
“You know,” Combeferre mused, standing perfectly still, and still protected by the damned sofa, “Courfeyrac pointed out to me the other day that Grantaire’s actually kind of your ‘type’.”

“Insufferable?” Enjolras asked sarcastically, trying to calculate if he could vault over the back of the sofa before Combeferre could escape.

“Insubordinate,” Combeferre corrected with a wry grin. “Though I’m sure this won’t have crossed your mind, what with all the work to do, and with how ‘insufferable’ he is, which is clearly why you lingered to talk to him last night.”

“Have I mentioned how much I hate you?” Enjolras asked, “Because I feel I don’t say it enough.”

Combeferre just smiled.

Enjolras paused to take a deep breath, in the hopes that it would calm him slightly. “Look, it’s under control,” he said, forcing himself to keep his volume down to a level that could be perceived as calm and rational. “I have everything under control. I’m still focused on the work, it’s all – look, just give me my damn keys, let me get the posters and show you how logical I’m being, okay?”

With a near indistinguishable relax of his shoulders, Combeferre finally caved. He held out Enjolras’ keys – and then refused to let go when Enjolras tried to take them.

“What-”

“Be happy,” Combeferre said, suddenly sounding very serious.

Enjolras looked up from the keys caught in Combeferre’s fingers to see his best friend of some ten years peering at him over his glasses. “Why do you always think I need help with being happy?” he asked, almost wryly.

Combeferre laughed once, gently. “Enjolras, if you need help with anything,” he said, finally releasing the keys, “it’s being happy.”

* *

“Hey, kid.”

Eponine reluctantly lifted her head off the keyboard, half closed eyes looking up at a blank faced Feuilly. “Hey, sleepyhead,” she said, unable to find any humour to put into the words.

Feuilly frowned at her, before sighing, and stepping around the desk to her side. “Rough day?” he asked.

He knew. She could tell he knew. As decent a guy as Feuilly was, he wasn’t nice unless he knew you needed him to be. And, yeah. Perhaps she needed someone to be nice to her just then. “Gavroche told you, didn’t he?” she asked softly.

“Hey, the kid’s smart,” Feuilly muttered with a small grin, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and pulling her against his chest in a rough imitation of a hug. “But don’t tell him I said that.”

Eponine choked out a laugh. “I won’t,” she promised, turning and burying her face in Feuilly’s old chequered shirt, to blot out any tears. “Sorry for, well, making you deal with emotional teenage girl shit.”

“Yeah, you can shut up,” Feuilly grumbled, “I knew what I was getting into when I gave you that
job. The shirt needs a wash anyway, so if you just want to sob a bit more... save me a laundry trip...”

Somehow laughing again, Eponine shoved him away, smiling as he almost tripped over his own feet. “You’re disgusting,” she told him.

He scoffed back, straightening himself up and brushing down the shirt. “Us old people don’t have to care so much about our appearance as you young whippersnappers,” he said haughtily.

“’Old people’ indeed!” Eponine crowed. “What, you want me to fetch your slippers, grandpa? You’re not even thirty!”

“Not far off,” Feuilly muttered, but he was grinning. “Here,” he said, leaning around her and slamming the till until it opened. “Go get something sweet, cupcake or some macarons or some shit. Don’t tell Grantaire.” He tugged a couple of fivers from the till and shoved them into her hand.

She’d ended up in the art shop by mistake, a few years back. Heading in from the rain with Gavroche in tow, no home but the Vauxhall Arches, and no clothes but the tattered dress and trench coat she was wearing. The new shop had looked warm and as she and her brother had stumbled in for a few minutes’ respite. The redhead behind the counter, the new businessman had taken one look at the two of them, sworn, and kicked them upstairs to his flat and fed them hot chocolate and demanded their life story from them. He’d then given them the flat above for a few months, free of charge, until she had worked enough to afford a place not on his charity, and the flat was given to the two students instead.

A mistake, a lucky chance, which she’d be eternally thankful for.

“Who’s gonna man the till?” she asked, but she was already sliding to her feet.

Feuilly shrugged. “Eh, I’m almost finished with the shelving, I’ll get your brother to sit here and look responsible. You just go and get some fresh air.”

She nodded, smiling, and turned to go but before she got very far, Feuilly had grabbed her arm and tugged her back against his chest, giving him the huge bear hugs that Feuilly was known for. She punched him lightly when he propped his chin on the top of her head but he just squeezed her.

“You’re not ugly, you’re not annoying, and you’re certainly not broken,” he muttered against her hair quickly, before releasing her and shoving her towards the door.

Smiling to herself, Eponine did as ordered, hurrying out into the warm sunlight. Sometimes, she thought that getting themselves locked up was the best thing her shitty parents had ever done for her. She could actually have a true parent, now.

*

Enjolras only vaguely knew where the art shop was, so spent longer than he’d like to admit wandering around Covent Garden aimlessly, especially after getting pleasantly distracted by a magician’s show.

Nor did it help that when he finally found what he guessed to be the right shop, rather than having one of the four people he’d presumed would be there, there was an unfamiliar young boy sat behind the till.

Before Enjolras could decide to make a U-turn and head back out – because this clearly must be the wrong shop – the door swung shut behind him, knocking the bell again and causing him to jump
out of his confused reverie, and simultaneously making the kid look up. “You alright, mate?” the kid called, pulling one headphone out and presumably pressing pause on whatever handheld game he was playing with. “You’re looking kinda lost?”

With a moment of irrational terror, Enjolras realised he’d almost said ‘um’ again. He’d never even felt the inclination to say ‘um’ before this week. “Yes, I’m looking for an art shop run by a man called Feuilly?” Enjolras said, trying to sound authoritative and not lost.

The kid grinned. “You’ve found it. Bossman’s upstairs – I can yell for him if you want?”

Enjolras shook his head. “Actually, I’m not looking for him, I’m looking for one of the tenants above the shop-”

“Jehan’s upstairs being icky with his boyfriend, Grantaire’s in the back room doing stuff I don’t care about,” the kid rattled off before Enjolras could finish. “Go to the back of the shop, brown door leads to a small staircase, you want the flat on the second floor for Jehan and R’s flat. Further back in the shop, fancy white door leads to fancy white room where Grantaire’s working. Yeah?”

Courfeyrac was here? Of course Courfeyrac was here. Why wouldn’t Courfeyrac be here? “Thank you,” Enjolras said, nodding at the kid. But the kid was no longer paying attention to him. He was bent over the electrical gaming device in his hands in such a fashion that Enjolras doubted anything but food would draw his attention from it.

Though this was apparently an erroneous assumption, as a short while after Enjolras had thought that he’d finished all conversation with the youngster, something hit his back. He looked around and down in time to see a crumpled post-it landing on the floor. Biting back a scathing remark – he’d been told by Combeferre that since he was no longer a child himself, he could not verbally abuse those of that age – he raised an eyebrow at the kid.

“You’re that blonde cove, right?” the kid asked, not even looking up from his game. “The one that does all that protests and stuff?”

It took him a few minutes to translate the question. “Yes,” Enjolras settled for eventually. When it seemed that no more questions were forthcoming, he turned away, leaving the kid to whatever it was that kids did these days.

He must be spending too much time with Combeferre. He was becoming middle aged before his time.

The ‘back of the shop’ was harder to find than it sounded. The rows of shelves in the shop didn’t seem to follow any logical layout, forming not so much a maze, more a mousetrap of haphazardly stacked sculpting tools, bright paints and bits of wood Enjolras wasn’t even going to guess the purpose of. After stumbling ungainly past something that seemed like a pile of glorified felt tip pens, he found a wall of the shop and decided to stick to it, using it as a guideline so not to get lost.

The shop wasn’t even all that big, how the hell was he managing to get lost in?

Thankfully, though, the doors the kid had mentioned weren’t so complex to find. True enough, Enjolras found the brown door in the wall he was following, about three-quarters of the way down, and the white door was just visible in the back wall, tucked right into the corner. Though it wasn’t entirely white; more a thin white frame around a pane of frosted glass. Looked almost professional, were it not for the spatters of paint that covered it. But then, Enjolras had to consider that for an art shop, random paint splatters were probably a good thing.
More relieved about finding the door than he should have been – it wasn’t a door to Narnia, and the shop wasn’t actually a maze, for fuck’s sake – he stepped forwards, only to have the brown door fly open and almost whack him in the face.

Courfeyrac flew out from behind it, almost crashing into him, the already smiling face splitting into a shining grin as he saw one of his best friends.

In contrast, Enjolras’ face fell into a scowl.

“Hey, Enjo! Good to see you, looking good! Snazzy jacket, as ever-”

He started to edge past, waving about his hands (his mobile clenched in one of them) in a careless and casual manner, but Enjolras was having none of it. He grabbed a handful of Courfeyrac’s light blue blazer, and tugged him close. “Combeferre staged a one man intervention,” Enjolras hissed into Courfeyrac’s ear, unrelenting as his friend tried to wiggle and worm his way out of Enjolras’ grip. “And don’t act like you had nothing to do with it-”

“Not at all, not at all, I would even have been there but I had pressing matters-” He’d somehow managed to disentangle Enjolras’ fingers, and was backing away, hands up as if in peace. “Clothes to return because, not that I’m one to brag, but I got laid last night-”

“Yes, well done, congrats on the sex but I don’t need a fucking intervention,” Enjolras growled at him, taking a furious step forwards. Courfeyrac flinched, but still continued to grin like the damned Cheshire Cat.

“You sure about that?” he asked cheerfully, “Because you tend to be pretty shit at this stuff.”

“Courfeyrac-”

“Well I’d love to stay and chat, but Marius sent his usual distress signal, I’ve got to go rescue the poor socially awkward damsel and all that-”

“Courfeyrac-”

“You’re coming to Mabeuf’s, tonight, right? What am I saying, as if Combeferre would be able to withstand us without your calming presence – TTFN, Oh Furious One!”

“God damn it, Courfeyrac!” Enjolras yelled after him, more exasperated than enraged, as Courfeyrac shot him one last grin, wiggled his fingers and half-skipped his way between the shelves towards the shop’s entrance.

Enjolras was left standing there, fuming. There was something miraculous in how Enjolras had yet to kill Courfeyrac, in their five years of knowing each other. It was probably in part due to Courfeyrac’s extensive music collection. Perhaps his good dress sense. Maybe his sharp political mind. Definitely not his obsession with Enjolras’ love life which did not require intervention. Okay, he’d concede to having made a... mess, let’s say, of things a few times before, but not now. Now, Enjolras had everything under control.

Which was why he was able to turn and walk to the white door calmly, with no heart palpitations whatsoever.

The last thing he heard before entering the room were the echoes of Courfeyrac striking up conversation with the kid on the front desk. After having entered, however, it was impossible to hear anything but the music blaring from a set of speakers resting on a chair in the middle of the completely white room.
Hooks on the wall implied that the room’s prior purpose was to be a gallery, but currently the space in the room was being taken up by beanbags, cushions, blankets, chairs substituting for tables with notebooks, pens, cans of drink, paint tubes and all sorts resting on them, a mini fridge in one corner, and a couple of easels; a few collapsed and on the floor, and one upright, holding what looked remarkably like a poster of the sketches Grantaire had shown him yesterday.

And there, of course, was Grantaire himself, doing what could vaguely be called dancing and making what seemed to be minute adjustments to the poster with a paintbrush.

It was no surprise, really, that he hadn’t noticed Enjolras’ arrival, what with the music loud enough that a meteor could have struck the street outside and the music would have covered the sound. So, after attempting to get attention by yelling Grantaire’s name a few times, Enjolras gave up and went for the logical if annoying option of stepping over to the speakers and connected iPod, and physically turning the volume down.

As he did so, he caught sight of the album playing: Frank Turner, *England Keep My Bones*.

He swallowed.

He jerked back upright when Grantaire started to yell. “Turn my fucking music back up, and never touch my iPod again you goddamn wanker-”

“Apologies, but I found it was the only way to get your attention,” Enjolras interrupted, vaguely amused by the outburst.

Grantaire’s chaotic spin when he heard Enjolras’ voice was even more amusing, though it did come with the risk of flying splatters of paint. Upon seeing Enjolras, Grantaire’s shock turned into a full-blown grin. “I was wondering when you were going to get here,” he said, relaxing the grin to a smile and gesturing to the floor behind him with the paintbrush.

“I said four, I’m here at four,” Enjolras muttered, stepping forwards and looking at where he’d been directed. Scattered across the floor were posters, none bigger than A3, some as small as A5, some of each design he’d seen the other day. Each one was ever so slightly different, a slight 3D paint affect on each.

“Actually, it’s just past four.”

“Barely, and hardly enough for it to make a difference,” Enjolras countered. He turned his head, just enough to meet Grantaire’s eyes as the man grinned smugly before he turned back to the poster on the easel. “You felt the need to add paint?” Enjolras asked, crouching down and running his fingers lightly over the puppeteer NHS poster, feeling the dry ridges of paint under his fingers. He couldn’t deny the design was stunning, and the extra level of paint just gave it that... something more.

“Eh, I have this thing against mass-produced stuff,” Grantaire explained, pausing in his explanation as he held the paintbrush between his teeth and dipped a finger in some blue paint, and swiftly dabbed it onto the poster. Enjolras watched on in patient silence, pushing himself back upright. Eventually, Grantaire held the paintbrush in a paint-drenched hand and continued, “Call it a painter’s whims, if you will. Just like stuff to be unique, y’know? And I like it to have a touch of *me* about it.”

“It’s your design, shouldn’t it already have a touch of you?”

“Then it can have a touch more *me*,” Grantaire said, looking at Enjolras over his shoulder. Then he
laughed, and added, “You can’t have too much of me.”

Enjolras smirked at Grantaire’s back. “I’m sure some people might beg to differ.”

Grantaire stopped painting, and half turned around, staring at Enjolras with a hyperbolic shocked expression, mouth open. “Rude!” he cried.

Enjolras merely hummed in agreement. Grantaire laughed again, and spun back to attack the poster with more blue fingers. “Have you got much more to do?” Enjolras asked, scanning the posters on the floor again. It seemed that the rest had already been given the ‘more Grantaire’ treatment.

“Just this one left,” Grantaire confirmed. “Shouldn’t take me ten minutes. Just touching it up a bit. Courfeyrac’s upstairs, if you want to go chat with him, or you could loiter. Be warned, though, loitering would mean we have the challenge of finding a topic of conversation that won’t leave us at each other’s throats.” Grantaire glanced back at Enjolras over his shoulder, this time with a shit-eating grin that put Courfeyrac’s to shame. “You really like your arguing, don’t you?”

Enjolras pursed his lips, arms crossing almost on reflex. “Courfeyrac was leaving as I arrived. I don’t like arguing,” he blatantly lied, “You are the one who always comes up with a point of contention, not me.”

“No, I provide topics of debate,” Grantaire calmly disagreed. “And then you, with your righteous passion, lift it up to the levels of homicidal argument.”

“But your inability to consider anything but complete and irrational pessimism has absolutely no contribution to that,” Enjolras countered fiercely and sarcastically. “You realise, for something to be a debate, the parties involved have to consider the other’s arguments, not just dismiss them through sheer irrevocable stubbornness?”

Grantaire was starting to chuckle and that, right there, was another reason why talking to Grantaire always turned into such enraged arguments – “You see?” Grantaire asked, lazily spinning to face Enjolras and grabbing a tattered piece of cloth from the back of a nearby chair, “We’re doing it again.” He started to wipe the paint off his hands with the cloth, but it looked more like he was just spreading the paint further across his skin, up his forearms. Enjolras wanted to suffocate him with the tattered piece of material.

“This isn’t arguing,” Enjolras muttered, “This is me listing why you’re such an idiotic person who is incapable of holding a logical debate.”

“No no, this is definitely an argument,” Grantaire mused, then laughed sharply. “Oh my god we’re even arguing about whether we’re arguing. This is so clichéd.”

Not willing to retaliate further and just prove Grantaire’s point even more, Enjolras sucked on the inside of his cheeks until he’d managed to calm down, slightly. He let out a long breath, and said mildly, “So, finding a neutral topic of conversation? Sounds like a fun challenge.”

Grantaire laughed.

Unwilling to stand around like a lemon as Grantaire finished his final poster, Enjolras looked around, trying to see if there was a chair that wasn’t covered in art materials. Spotting one with only a few pens and a notebook scattered on it, he cleared his throat for attention, and waved a hand at it. “May I?”

Grantaire turned his head, and nodded shortly. “Yeah, go ahead. Though I don’t recommend looking in the notebook – if Jehan finds out you read some poems before he deems them complete,
he will castrate you.”

“Good to know,” Enjolras mused, carefully lifting the pens and notebook and setting them onto another almost-empty chair. He then seated himself down. He shuffled, eventually settling for sitting there with ankles crossed under the chair, arms crossed over his chest. Comfortable enough.

There was silence for a few minutes as Grantaire worked, and Enjolras chewed the inside of his cheek and waited. “Thought of a topic yet?” Grantaire asked eventually, clearly highly amused by the whole situation.

Enjolras was starting to doubt that such a topic existed. So he neglected answering, instead choosing to watch Grantaire work in silence. Some lines of the muted music drifted out to him.

*I still believe in the need for guitars and drums and desperate poetry...*

“You like Frank Turner?” Enjolras blurted out suddenly, and kicked himself immediately after. One wrong word about Frank Turner and the heat of Enjolras’ argument would put all his prior arguments to shame.

Thankfully, however, Grantaire said, “Yeah, the dude’s awesome. You like him too?”

Enjolras’ lips curled into a wry grin. “A little,” he conceded. So far, no cause for argument. “Have you heard the new album?” he asked, as if testing the waters further was a safe move. “Tape Deck Heart?”

Grantaire laughed, and in answer set down his paintbrush and picked up the iPod. Seconds later, *Way I Tend To Be* was playing. “I waited for it with Rocky Horror Show level of anticipation,” Grantaire explained with a grin, “And I was not let down.”

“His lyrics are as strong as ever,” Enjolras agreed with admiration. “My only regret is that it left Bahorel serenading me with *Tattoos* for a full week.”

“That’s why the dude is so brilliant, though,” Grantaire said absently, tilting his head as he considered the poster, probably planning what to do next. “Everyone can relate to his songs so easily, they’re so personal. God, the emotions in his singing... and Tape Deck Heart is definitely his most emotion-filled album to date.”

Ah. Enjolras narrowed his eyes. “No,” he said flatly. “Most emotional album would *have* to be *Love Ire & Song*.”

Grantaire grinned. “Again, I respect your argument, but still no. I mean, I could list Plain Sailing Weather, Good and Gone, Polaroid Picture, Broken Piano, Anymore, but I won’t have to do that because look me in the eye and tell me that, when you first listened to Tell Tale Signs, you didn’t cry.”

Enjolras opened his mouth, completely ready to rebuke Grantaire’s point – but had to concede defeat. “I made the mistake of finding a live acoustic version on youtube the other day,” he admitted. Grantaire winced sympathetically. “Combeferre thought I’d been told my father had
died—Lemarque’s funeral. He’d have to go to Lemarque’s funeral.

In all the rush of everything, he’d almost forgotten.

But no. That was what all this ‘rush’ was for, wasn’t it? Making a difference, making Lemarque proud...

“...heathens,” Grantaire was saying, shaking his head. “But no, wait, let me guess,” he said, grinning and pointing at Enjolras with the paintbrush, that was now definitely more paint than brush. “Favourite song – has got to be Love Ire & Song, right?”

Refusing to admit that Grantaire had got something right – for the second time – Enjolras said back, “And yours is Heartless Bastard Motherfucker, I presume?”

Grantaire barked laughter. “Ha – funny, but no. No, Glory Hallelujah’s up there, I think. Though Losing Days is growing on me...”

Glory Hallelujah? Enjolras should have known. “You really don’t believe in anything, do you?” he asked, almost wryly.

He watched as Grantaire paused for a second, before shrugging. “I believe that Gavroche will have stolen anything sugary left in my flat by the time I get back up there,” he said, “but aside from that? Not really. Used to. Didn’t work out. Decided against it.”

“Then why do you do your art?” Enjolras asked, hesitantly. If he was being honest to himself, he wasn’t sure he wanted to know, wasn’t sure the answer he’d get would be one he’d like. “If you don’t see the point of—”

“I see the point of making people smile,” Grantaire cut in, sounding so casual, but there was something in how he was standing, how carefully he was holding the paintbrush against the paper that made it clear that the decision not to turn around and face Enjolras was a conscious one. “If you can make someone laugh, then you’re doing something right, and what you’re doing can’t be wrong. I see people on the internet taking photos of my stupid little bits of graffiti, and laughing over it, people point and giggle in the street, and I might not be making any big comments on society but it’s brightening up a few lives, a little bit, right?” The paintbrush stopped moving, hovering over the paper instead. “And, of course, because I get a thrill out of breaking the law,” Grantaire said suddenly, and then he finally turned to face Enjolras, grinning.

Enjolras felt he should say something, should do something other than frown, and stare at Grantaire. But he couldn’t.

Eventually, silently, Grantaire turned back to the poster again.

“How did you guess?” Enjolras said, after a while. “About Love Ire & Song, I mean.”

Grantaire snorted. “Not exactly hard. You kidding me? The whole ‘martyred death for a cause’ thing, all ‘where’s the harm spending the evening on the old barricades’ and ‘once more to the breach’ – is Henry V your favourite play, too?”

“No, but I do like that speech,” Enjolras admitted, smiling slightly. Grantaire laughed.

“Don’t do that, though, if you can help it,” Grantaire added, and Enjolras couldn’t quite decide if Grantaire was amused or weary. “The whole martyred death thing. It generally doesn’t do any good.”
Or perhaps Grantaire was a little bit of both. “History tends to show otherwise,” he said.

“History only tells the success stories,” Grantaire muttered.

“But,” Enjolras continued, deciding to pretend Grantaire hadn’t spoken, “Dying for a cause isn’t high on my agenda. I’ve found I can do much more whilst I’m alive, surprisingly.”

This time, when Enjolras met Grantaire’s gaze, he didn’t awkwardly turn away, didn’t pull an exaggerated expression, didn’t make a joke or say something annoying. He just held Enjolras’ gaze. And Enjolras was finding it hard to break it.

“Are you – you planning on finishing that poster any time soon?” Enjolras asked eventually, raising an eyebrow.

And Grantaire finally looked away with a roll of his eyes, throwing a huge flourished bow and declaring, “Yes, my liege.”

Enjolras chewed the inside of his cheek for a few moments, thinking. Then, with no real purpose to his movement, he picked up the iPod and turned the volume up just in time for the chorus of If Ever I Stray.

Grantaire’s laugh was drowned out by the music.

*

Twenty-five minutes later, Enjolras was re-entering his own flat, with a bag of carefully rolled posters in his hand. Combeferre was back in place at the dining table, a multitude of textbooks and writing pads spread out around him.

“So,” Combeferre asked, not looking up, “How was it? Were you as logical as you promised?”

Enjolras dropped the posters onto the table, and collapsed onto the sofa. “He likes Frank Turner,” he blurted out.

“...shit.”

“Yeah,” Enjolras sighed, rubbing his face. “Yeah, shit.”

“You’re fucked.”

“I know,” Enjolras groaned, leaning forwards and picking up the nearest book, which, of course, this being Combeferre and his flat, was Plato’s Republic. “I know.”

*

It was a few hours before Jehan appeared in the makeshift studio to bring Grantaire food. Grantaire gratefully accepted the marmite and marmalade sandwich Jehan was offering him, and shoved it into his mouth as Jehan tilted his head at the piece Grantaire had been working on.

“...Is that a genderbent version of La Belle Dame Sans Merci?”

“Mm-hm.”

“Using Feuilly?”

“Apparently. Hey, he’s got cool hair.”
“And... is that Bahorel in the armour?”

“Again, apparently.” Grantaire swallowed his mouthful. “I don’t know, it just kinda came out like that.”

Jehan hummed as he considered the painting. “It’s good though. Is that part of your coursework?”

“I’m sure I can fit it into the course topic somehow,” Grantaire mused, though relatively sure the topic was something to do with modern living... “How’s your day been?”

“Wrote an essay on Wordsworth’s influences on the creation of Rime,” Jehan muttered, eyes still darting across the painting. “Like you, I’ll shoehorn it into the curriculum somehow... you ready to go?”

“Hm?”

“I thought you might want to put something neater on... I mean, not that paint splatters don’t suit you...”

With a scowl, Jehan shoved his shoulder against Grantaire’s. “Mabeuf’s. Apparently he was some friend of Bossuet’s dad or something... but anyway, he has a pub the guys hang at, and he’s really nice, and they’re going to go to his pub to celebrate his birthday and we are going too.”

“We are?”

“Yes!” Jehan ordered him, cheerily, “And we’re bringing Feuilly and Eponine, of course.”

“Is that a ‘we’ve been asked to bring’ or ‘we’re going to bring anyway’?” Grantaire asked.

“Well,” Jehan started, sounding very philosophical, “I wasn’t told we couldn’t... and I’m sure they wouldn’t mind.” He grinned benevolently across to Grantaire, who just smiled and shook his head. With a sigh, he shoved the last of the sandwich into his mouth and set down his paintbrush. The painting wasn’t quite finished, but he could leave it for another day.

“They will, of course, all be there,” Jehan continued, still sounding perfectly benevolent and cherubically innocent. “Courfeyrac, Bahorel, Joly, Bossuet... Enjolras...”

“Yes, you bastard, I get what you’re saying,” Grantaire cut in, torn between scowling and smirking as Jehan laughed. “What time are we meant to be gatecrashing?”

“In about fifteen? And it’ll take about that long to get there, from the directions I’ve got.”

Woefully, Grantaire looked down at his clothes. Green plaid over tattered white vest, black-ish jeans, and not a single square inch without some colour paint splattered over it. But then, what clothes of his weren’t like that... “Eh, within ten minutes I’ll be too drunk to care anyway,” he said, tugging absently at the green cotton, flicking at a bit of red paint (that matched the colour of Feuilly’s hair perfectly, even if he did say so himself).
He could feel Jehan judging his life, judging his choices, but the kid was wearing a huge Breton jumper with purple chinos and pink doc martins, so he was in no position to comment on Grantaire’s clothing. But Grantaire waited for Jehan to finish the silent tutting, and for him to lead the way out.

They ran into Gavroche in the shop, leaning against the counter and checking his watch. “We’re gonna be late, tossers, move faster would you?”

Grantaire laughed outright. “No,” he said, pointing a finger at Gavroche’s nose. “You’re not coming.”

There was something worrying in Gavroche’s grin. “Yeah? Well, I got an invite, so...”

“Courfeyrac,” Jehan muttered apologetically. “Thought it’d be nice.”

Grantaire spun to glare at Jehan. “You boyfriend really needs to get a handle on his life, quickly,” he hurried to say, because this was important, “because at this rate he’s going to end up friends with that little shit.”

“And that’s such a bad thing?” Gavroche asked with an offended air that Grantaire was vaguely sure was at least partly put on.

“You’re about to stand on something,” Jehan said barely a beat later, pointing down at Grantaire’s feet before walking on ahead.

Grantaire’s eyes lingered on Gavroche’s face just long enough to see the kid’s eyes widen with fear, and to see him turn and walk very quickly outside, where Grantaire could just about see Feuilly and Eponine waiting, leaning against Feuilly’s car. Narrowing his eyes suspiciously, Grantaire looked down to see his toes brushing against a crumpled piece of yellow paper – a post-it note, probably off the desk. He picked it up. He unfolded it. He read, in Gavroche’s scrawl; Date Grantaire: yes, no?

“Huh,” Jehan said cheerfully, leaning over Grantaire’s shoulder. “Crude, but effective. Yet I guess Enjolras didn’t bother to pick it up... shame...”

Enjolras?

He’d – this – it’d been – at Enjolras?

Jaw clenched and shaking slightly, Grantaire crushed the post it in his fist, his feet starting to carry him out of the shop and onto the street, after the small blonde fucker who had abandoned the car and was running down the path searching for safety... “Gavroche!”

*

It was only just 7pm when Combeferre’s car pulled up in front of the small, unobtrusive and ancient pub, and yet Friends Like These was already blaring through the open windows. Someone – probably under Courfeyrac’s fierce instructions – had tied balloons to the hanging flower baskets on either side of the door.

Enjolras leant forwards, peering out of the windscreen at the pub with slight despair. “Are you sure we’re at the right place?” he asked.

“Unfortunately,” Combeferre sighed back, “yes. Out, come on, out, let’s get this over with.”
“Don’t lie to me, you’re looking forward to it.”

“It is true, you are the only antisocial member of the group.”

“I’m not antisocial, I just prefer other ways of spending my time-”

“Shut up, grab the bunting and get out of the car.”

Still mumbling rebelliously, Enjolras did as instructed.

Someone must have heard the car pull up, because Courfeyrac came sprinting out of the pub and all but jumped into their arms. He seemed to be wearing something fluorescent. And those plastic glasses that were actually just rows of plastic and lacking any actual lenses. “There you are you’re dreadfully late I told you to arrive earlier to get everything sorted before any customers started to arrive, but you’re here, so that’s good, and we’ve actually got more cake and Haribo than alcohol at the moment but I’m sure that can be remedied if we need it to, and oh you brought the bunting I’ll have Bahorel put that up presently, and Bossuet’s playlist is sounding excellent isn’t it?”

Enjolras wriggled in the arm Courfeyrac had firmly wrapped around his waist, and shot a glance to the side. Combeferre had let one of his own arms drape around Courfeyrac’s shoulder and was slyly grinning at Enjolras’ displeasure. “Yes, it’s wonderful,” Enjolras deadpanned, making Courfeyrac laugh and squeeze his waist, before continuing with his rant.

Thankfully he managed to escape when they reached the thin door, dodging forwards when Courfeyrac’s grip loosened for a second. Marius reached out a helping hand, tugging him in to safety. “What’s he on?” Enjolras grumbled at him, dusting down his jacket even though, logically, he knew Courfeyrac’s energy couldn’t actually contaminate him.

“You couldn’t confiscate them?”

“I tried, but he’s just too sneaky with the packets, they keep appearing from nowhere!”

A giggle drew Enjolras’ attention to the bar. Bossuet was perched on the edge, legs swinging, wearing his usual tattered top and jeans, and looking far too happy for Enjolras’ comfort. “Have you been helping him?”

Bossuet grinned. “You think I have the intelligence for that?”

“You have intelligence, it’s the ability to lie that you lack,” Enjolras told him, making his way over. “Where are you hiding them?”

“I’ll never tell,” Bossuet swore amiably, leaning down to give Enjolras a bro-hug, quick pats on the back before pulling back and sitting straight again. “Any sign of the other guys out there? We’re just missing them now!”

“Other guys?” Enjolras asked, scanning the pub. As well a few members of the general public, just enjoying a pint or two – and god but Enjolras pitied them – Combeferre was now only a short way off, hugging Joly and greeting Bahorel. “Who – oh, Grantaire and Jehan?”

“They’re probably bringing Eponine and their redhead,” Bossuet added cheerfully, legs starting to swing again.
“Feuilly, and little Gavroche,” Courfeyrac chimed in, skipping into place at Enjolras’ side, leaning against the bar. “You met Gavroche, right, Enjo?”

That must be the kid who’d been on the front desk, then. “And he is...?”

“Eponine’s little brother,” Courfeyrac said, suddenly darting off again to see to a probably multicoloured something somewhere. Bossuet struck up conversation with Marius, and Enjolras idled over to Bahorel and Combeferre.

“My man!” Bahorel yelled, not hugging Enjolras – he doubted Bahorel had hugged anyone since he was too small to protest – but punching his shoulder.

“Not your main man?” Enjolras asked wryly.

“I told you, that’s me,” Combeferre corrected him, grinning. When Enjolras flipped him a middle finger, he laughed lightly. “But you can’t honestly say you’d rather you were playing wingman, instead of me?”

So that was it. “No, no,” Enjolras sighed with mock sorrow, flapping a weary hand at them. “No, you two make a far better team than I do.”

“You need to get inked up, then you can join us!” Bahorel suggested, punching Enjolras once more. “Well, inked in a place more publicly displayable, that is-”

“Shut up,” Enjolras ordered, pointing a finger at Bahorel, and backing off slowly, “Or I’ll make you.”

“Yeah, like you could take me-”

“I could so take you,” Enjolras retorted, starting to smile. As much as he protested, in truth, he didn’t quite hate the atmosphere created by all his friends being manic in one place. No, not even when Courfeyrac came barrelling past, running from Joly for some inexplicable reason to hide behind Combeferre – Enjolras laughed, and took the distraction to head back to the bar, sliding onto a stool and watching the chaos. Bossuet, running after Joly, had tripped and was lying, sprawled on the floor, the other laughing and crowding around him.

“Evening, boy.”

Enjolras turned his head slightly, finally seeing the supposed reason for this whole affair leaning on the other side of the bar. The genuine embodiment of patience, wisdom, and dangerous humour, Mabeuf was a damn good barman, and had been a good uncle – blood relation or not – to Bossuet, after losing his father at war. Bossuet had suggested the pub for them all, one night, and, unfortunately for Mabeuf, they’d kind of... stayed. “Sorry for all this, sir,” Enjolras said, nodding over to the puppy pile on the floor.

Mabeuf shrugged, and started to pour a pint out for Enjolras. “They mean it with the best intentions. And besides,” he said, gesturing down the bar, “They have bought me cake.” Sure enough, the far end of the bar seemed to be completely hidden under cake tins and packets of sweet.

“Anything that gets broken,” Enjolras hurried to say – as he always did, as he always felt he should, pointless though it might be – “Any damages, expenses, you know we’ll-”

Mabeuf laughed lightly at him, shaking his head and setting the pint down by Enjolras’ hand. “Shut up, boy,” he ordered amiably, “And just enjoy the night, would you?”
Something green outside caught Enjolras’ eye. A more tattered car had pulled up behind Combeferre’s, driven by a redhead, and Jehan and Grantaire were just visible through the window, Grantaire in the green shirt, and laughing as he lifted up a blonde kid and shook him, playfully. Jehan slapped his arm, and Grantaire just laughed harder as he set down – Gavroche, that must be Gavroche – who proceeded to kick Grantaire’s ankle, and run into the pub, heading straight for Courfeyrac once he’d got inside.

“Yeah,” Enjolras said, picking up the pint and watching the last of the guys enter the pub, “I’ll try.”

*  

They’d barely entered the pub before Jehan was pulled from Grantaire’s side by a slightly manic Courfeyrac, who wasted no time in grabbing Jehan’s face and pressing a kiss to his lips. Quite ferociously, really. But Jehan was rising onto his toes and grabbing at the material of Courfeyrac’s shirt, so he seemed to have no complaints.

“Please, god, not in front of the kids,” Grantaire moaned, grabbing Gavroche and slapping a hand over the kid’s eyes.

“Get off!” Gavroche moaned as everyone else started to laugh, “I don’t mind! S’natural, and all that!”

“There is nothing natural about the way those two are sucking face, and at least let me have an excuse to moan,” Grantaire instructed him, keeping his hand firmly in place over Gavroche’s face.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got it!” someone yelled, and without warning a low-flying Bossuet came rushing past, and with barely a pause had wrapped his arms around Courfeyrac’s waist, hefted him off his feet and Jehan, and carried him away to be dumped on a stool in the far side of the bar where Bossuet proceeded to lecture the slimmer man on public decency. When Courfeyrac tried to escape, mewling for Jehan (who was currently collapsing with laughter, clinging onto the shoulder of an equally collapsing Eponine), Bossuet quite simply sat on him, continuing his rant without a break.

Grantaire was distracted from the spectacle by the arrival of Bahorel, carrying, somehow, about five glasses of amber liquid. “Lads, drink, drink!” Bahorel cried, holding the drinks out to Grantaire and Feuilly.

But, of course, Gavroche had his hand out first, collecting a drink. “Sweet!” he said cheerfully. In one smooth motion Grantaire lifted the glass from Gavroche’s hand, put his other hand on the boy’s head, spun him, and pushed him away. Then he downed the drink – Famous Grouse whiskey, none of your overseas stuff – in one, and took another glass. “And you’ve just gone up on my list of favourite people,” he said cheerfully to Bahorel, who was booming laughter.

Bahorel only then seemed to notice Feuilly. “Ginge!”

“I still hate you,” Feuilly said, without preamble.

Bahorel pulled off some impressively cute puppy eyes for someone who’d belong in the heavyweight category, and held out the remaining glasses.

Feuilly pursed his lips, then related. “Okay, perhaps I hate you a bit less.”

“Ya know,” Bahorel said, slapping a hand around Feuilly’s shoulders and laughing, “I think I could
grow to like you.”

“Sure, I’m very likeable,” Feuilly muttered, taking a gulp of the whiskey, “doesn’t mean I’m going to like you.”

He was lying. Anyone who bought him Scottish whiskey was a winner in Feuilly’s eyes.

Leaving them to it, Grantaire made his way down the pub, lifting Gavroche away from the pile of cakes as he did so. Passing where Eponine, Jehan and Combeferre were chatting, drinks already in place in their hands too, he clapped his hands on Jehan’s shoulders and went onto his tiptoes to lean over him and say, “Bets on those two ending up fucking?” whilst tilting his head towards Bahorel and Feuilly.

Eponine all but choked on her drink. Jehan spun to look – his braid whacking Grantaire in the face in the meantime, and then giggled.

Combeferre just narrowed his eyes – his was wearing contacts again, Grantaire noticed, and was still wearing a long-sleeved shirt even though it must have been twenty degrees out there. “Fiver for within a month or two,” he said calmly, sipping a glass of what probably wasn’t straight coke, “raising it to a tenner if Bahorel hits the apple sourz by the end of the night.”

Grantaire raised an eyebrow. “Really? Now, I can’t speak for Bahorel, but Feuilly’s as straight as they come.”

Combeferre’s smirk made Grantaire slightly concerned. “I know. My bet still stands.”

Eponine spat out her drink again.

“Don’t waste it!” Grantaire snapped, snatching the cider from her and spinning away before she could grab it back, laughing.

Like a magnet, he found himself drifting further down the pub – past where Joly was dancing like a skeleton as he and Gavroche sang the head bone’s connected to song and where Marius was giving Courfeyrac a piggy-back ride, all noble steed to Courfeyrac’s far-too-dramatic knight, carrying him to Jehan’s location – to where Enjolras was seated on a stool, alone but for a bottle of Stella he was cradling, and smiling ever so slightly at everything that was going on.

Enjolras’ eyes flickered to Grantaire once and away again immediately, as Grantaire leant against the bar beside him. “So,” Grantaire said, letting both of his drinks swing loosely between his fingers, “Come here often?”

Enjolras turned his head slightly, and glared at Grantaire out of the corner of his eyes. When Grantaire refused to remove the expectant grin from his face, Enjolras shook his head despairingly and took a swig from his beer. “A beer?” Grantaire asked, eyes widening with faux shock. “That’s a bit unadventurous, isn’t it?”

Enjolras raised an eyebrow at him, lips still circling the rim of the beer bottle. Lowering the bottle, he said, “This, coming from the man holding a simple straight whiskey and a cider.”

Grantaire blinked. He’d forgotten Eponine’s cider. “These?” he said, lifting them and pretending to inspect them. “Oh, these are just for starters.” To prove his point, he, for the second time in under fifteen minutes, downed a glass of whiskey in one.

Forget his liver, his throat was going to kill him.
But... Enjolras’ expression...

His wide eyes were lingering on Grantaire’s throat, as if he could see the liquid peeling the layers of flesh away. Then, with a final glare at Grantaire, Enjolras pushed himself off his stool almost aggressively, and stomped off over to Combeferre, Bahorel, Feuilly and Eponine.

Grantaire grinned after him, stretching his arm around to set the empty glass on the bar – and it had barely touched the wood before he felt someone take it from him. He half-turned to see a man with a shock of white hair and benevolent smile turning Grantaire’s glass around in his hands.

“Uh... Mabeuf?” Grantaire tried. The man’s smile widened in response. “So this is your shindig, yeah?”

“You’re as much as fool as the rest of them,” the man sighed in way of an answer, turning and setting the glass at the back. “If you hope to get anywhere with that oblivious piece of marble, you need to stop play flirting, my boy, and actually divulge him of his attire.”

Safe to say Grantaire’s jaw hit the floor.

“Oh, and remind me boy,” Mabeuf said, changing tack suddenly, “you got a steady job?”

Grantaire shook his head, stunned.

“Then I’ll put some of your drinks on the tabs of those who do,” Mabeuf said, winking, before casually strolling away to deal with a customer who, shockingly, wasn’t one of the guys.

Grantaire blinked again, shook himself, and took a chug of cider as Bossuet skipped over. “Okay, I get why you like the dude so much.”

“Who, Joly?” Bossuet asked, skidding to a stop in front of Grantaire, looking up at him from his crouched position with wide eyes.

“What? No, Mabeuf!” Grantaire corrected with a grin and another swig of his drink.

“Oh! Yeah, he’s awesome, but c’mon cake!” Bossuet cried, tugging a random rhythm on Grantaire’s shirt.

“Cake?”

“With ‘Chetta’s special icing and cream filling!”

“Special?”

Joly came skidding up, crashing into Bossuet and almost sending him flying. “She doesn’t use water with the icing sugar!” he cried, wide eyes suggesting that Joly didn’t hold his alcohol all that well.

Grantaire raised an eyebrow. “Uses alcohol?” Joly laughed. “Does that even work? And do I even want to know what makes the cream filling special?”

With an impressive yodel, Courfeyrac came skidding into the picture next, pulling a manic looking Marius along behind him. “Who cares, it’s fucking lush!” Courfeyrac yelled. “CAKE!” he continued to yodel, pushing forwards, sending Bossuet flying and pulling Joly down with him. One of Marius’ flailing hands caught Grantaire’s shirts. He had just enough time to down the last of the cider and set it onto the bar before he was pulled down into the bundle with the rest of them.
The icing was epic. The sponge... was set aside, respectfully.

Courfeyrac scooped some up with his finger and offered it to Jehan, who was already tipsy enough to lick it off, slowly, which in turn caused Grantaire to picture licking it off Enjolras and Enjolras’ tongue licking-

He turned straight back to the bar and ordered a run of Jaegerbombs.

Twenty minutes in, there was a very distinct alcohol-smudged feel to the air, and it was shocking there were people left in the pub who weren’t in their group. Enjolras tried to hide his fear as Bossuet crouched-run on the bar – the actual bar, and wasn’t that an accident waiting to happen – towards Enjolras’ location with horribly brightly coloured drinks in his grasp. His hands tightened on his bottle of Stella protectively.

“C’mooon,” Bossuet wheedled, looking like some kind of monkey as he set down drinks and grabbed at Enjolras’ beer.

“No.”

“Something a bit fancier-”

“No-”

“Look, Enjolras, pretty, pretty pretty drinks, tasty pretty drinks-”

“What, is Courfeyrac bribing you or-”

“Yes, but that’s not the point-”

Bossuet’s grip on Enjolras’ drink slipped at the same time his feet slipped out from under him. He tumbled backwards off the bar, with a slightly misguided cry of, “Wheee!”

Sighing, Enjolras set his beer down and leant over the old wood to check on Bossuet. He was rolling from side to side, clinging to his stomach as he laughed. A yell of, “You’re too young to die!” forewarned Enjolras of Joly vaulting over the wood.

Feeling the situation was being dealt with, Enjolras smiled at their joint stupidity, and sank back into his seat – to find his beer had been replaced with something pink, and smelling quite strongly of rum.

Furious, he spun his head around, trying to – three seats down, Grantaire was smirking, and holding a bottle of Stella.

Glaring, not breaking eye contact, Enjolras picked up the pink concoction, and took a sip. Grantaire raised his eyebrows, and just matched him, wrapping his lips around Enjolras’ bottle of beer and taking a pull from it.

Blushing furiously and hating his friends with a passion, Enjolras turned away, instead focusing on Bossuet and Joly barely managing to help each other to their feet and stagger down behind the bar to help out Mabeuf with fetching their friends’ drinks.

It didn’t help that the drink – strawberry margarita, perhaps – actually tasted quite nice.
Jehan had found that, if they were pressed really close together, Courfeyrac and he could share a bar stool. Well, if it counted when he was perched on the centimetre-square of stool available between Courfeyrac’ legs. But he liked it there. So he stayed there.

While, over his head, his boyfriend debated heatedly with Combeferre and Marius over whether purple haze or purple WKD would be the indigo or violet in their alcoholic rainbow.

The alcohol rainbow may have been Jehan’s idea.

“You gotta look at the colour schemes,” Marius was moaning, resting his chin on Courfeyrac’s shoulder.

“Yes, but you’re clearly colour blind,” Combeferre protested.

“You’re not using your eyes!” Courfeyrac cried, waving manically the hand that wasn’t wrapped around Jehan’s waist. Jehan smiled and leant back dozily against Courfeyrac’s chest. “For an empiricist, you’re a bit of an-”

“Oh, you want to go philosophical with this?” Combeferre asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah, I’m going there!”

“You’re going there?”

“He’s going there!”

“I’m going there!”

Jehan giggled and opened an eye. He swayed forwards, pushing at the WKD with his middle finger – and Mabeuf walked by and silently swapped the bottle and glass around, like Jehan had wanted.

The arguing people fell silent. “...Okay, that does look about right.”

“Yeah that looks good.”

“Aww, all the pretty colours...”

“So, gents, shall we start?”

But Combeferre’s attention was drawn by something else. “Sorry, hombres,” Combeferre said, saluting them, “but my skills are required elsewhere.”

Courfeyrac chuckled. “No trouble,” he said softly, leaning and pressing his lips to Jehan’s ear as Combeferre walked away. “The more for us.”

Marius ruined the moment by finally losing his sense of balance and falling off his stool.

“Now what we have here, is a rare but incredible sight.”

Grantaire almost choked on his – what even was he drinking now? Never mind, it tasted good. “Sorry?” he spluttered, looking back to Courfeyrac, who, again, had a scary grin on his face, and
an impressively small sway to his stance.

“There,” Courfeyrac said, pointing towards the end of the bar as he slid into the seat beside Grantaire.

“That’s Bahorel chatting up a woman, and where’s your little boyfriend?” Grantaire said.

“Don’t worry, your bestie is safe, he’s just helping Marius stop the world spinning, and Bahorel’s not our point of focus here,” Courfeyrac told him, his grin becoming infectious. “It’s what’s about to happen next that deserves a novice’s full attention.”

“I take offence that you think I’m a novice-”

“We’re all novices in the wake of these two, just, shut up and watch,” Courfeyrac hissed, grabbing Grantaire’s shoulders and forcibly making him face where Bahorel was leaning against the bar, quite obviously flirting with a very hot redhead. Female, that is.

Grantaire obediently paid attention.

Within the space of a few seconds, Bahorel had winked and apparently made his excuses, as he was pushing away from the bar and heading over to where Combeferre was quite reservedly talking with Enjolras. As Grantaire watched, Bahorel muttered to Combeferre, smirking, and ever so subtly tilting his head to a very cute looking brunette, a few seats down from where Bahorel’s girl had been.

“Now,” Courfeyrac hissed into Grantaire’s ear and making him jump, “Bahorel will be telling Combeferre of the girls he’s seen eyeing up his tattoos – the tattoos he has so stunningly displayed, what with his wearing that very fetching, tight fitted black tank-top – and Combeferre will eye them up, see which he thinks he would get along with best…”

“Why the-”

“Sh!” Courfeyrac demanded, pressing a finger to Grantaire lips so, yes, he’d had a few, “Waaaatch. Ah, yes, there goes the master at work... no you’re meant to be following Combeferre, not your blonde god – look at that smooth criminal.”

Grantaire managed to tear his gaze from the affectionate smirk Enjolras was looking at Combeferre with, and to the man himself. It was true, he has slipped himself onto the stool very casually, had flagged Mabeuf to get a drink, had calmly started up conversation, not paying her too much attention - “Courfeyrac, why-”

“Sh!”

And then Grantaire almost dropped his drink again, as Combeferre oh-so calmly rolled up his sleeves.

“Is that-”

“Oh yes.”

“That’s-”

“Oooh yes.”

Grantaire almost whimpered, which was precisely what the brunette was doing.
Because covering Combeferre’s left arm was the most stunning tattoo Grantaire had ever seen. All black, pointwork, not a picture but a pattern vaguely resembling chemical formula diagrams, or computer circuitry.

Combeferre had a tattoo sleeve.

Courfeyrac was looking horribly smug. “You’ve never seen Combeferre without long sleeve shirts on before, have you?”

Grantaire scanned his memories of the man. “No,” he said, slightly stunned. “No, I – but – Combeferre?”

“I know, right?” Courfeyrac said gleefully. “He just rocked up to A-level results day like that. No one expected it!”

“I can understand why!”

“Suits him, though.”

“But – studious Combeferre!”

Courfeyrac just laughed at him.

The girl was completely fawning over Combeferre now. All Combeferre had to do now was be the gentleman he was. “Bahorel and Combeferre have perfected that routine over the years,” Courfeyrac chuckled. “Sometimes they switch places. But always works. He gon’ get laid!”

“I can see why,” Grantaire muttered.

Courfeyrac laughed. “Whoa, hold up there Romeo! You’re not thinking of switching from a blonde to a bespectacled Juliet, are you?”

“No!” Grantaire protested, hand unconsciously raising and brushing his left arm, eyes flicking to where Enjolras was now chatting with Bossuet, who seemed to be sat on the floor. “...Do you think a sleeve might suit me?”

Courfeyrac promptly explained why Bossuet was sat on the floor, by laughing so hard he fell off his chair.

*

When, at about half nine, Musichetta arrived at the bar straight from her lesson with her last music student, carrying a multitude of Sainsbury’s bags filled with various bottles and a promise of nothing home cooked, she was hailed like a hero.

She was then tackled by Bossuet, Courfeyrac, Bahorel, the final of whom lifted her off her feet and carried her over to the bar.

The bag of alcohol went swinging to the side, slipped from her hands but that was okay. Grantaire had a sixth sense about this kind of thing. He was cradling the bottles before they’d even got close to the ground.

And then Feuilly was tackling him and the whole charade started all over again.

It took a full twenty minutes to get the alcohol the five meters from the door to the safety of Mabeuf’s hands, behind the bar.
Mabeuf watched as his pub slipped in chaos, music that was probably *slightly* too loud for his taste playing through a speaker system Lesgles Jr had up and about ten students cavorting back and forth, and he was about to run out of Famous Grouse.

He picked up a packet of discarded Haribo from the bar and the very dilute rum and coke he’d just poured out, and headed down the bar. He paused at where Lesgles was struggling to get onto a stool to smile and pat the kid on the head.

Lesgles grinned up at him, eyes a little unfocused. “Hey, Mr Mabeuf! I hope you’re having a good time!”

The boy meant well. “It’s all appreciated, Lesgles,” Mabeuf told him, which *wasn’t* a lie. But the boys were happy, and he’d had worse nights at work. Besides, it was quite amusing, watching them all.

He left Lesgles to it, pretty certain Joly would come help him out, and carried on.

About halfway down the bar, he stopped, and slipped the Haribo and glass down to the cubbyhole under the bar, where small hands took them.

Mabeuf peered down, and met the wide grin with a small smile. “Thanks, mister,” the blonde kid said gleefully.

“Just get the camera ready,” Mabeuf told him, and sure enough in the boy’s hand something silver glinted. “I have a feeling the fun stuff will happen soon.”

*“You gotta, gotta *good* name for a Scottish bloke,” Bahorel said firmly, arm tight around Feuilly’s shoulders as the ginger held a bottle at full-tilt against his lips. He was bobbing in time to the guitar music currently playing over the speakers. “*Suits* you. Scottish. Fwee.”

Feuilly lowered the bottle, burped, and shook his head. “*Not* Scottish. Not. Half. I am *Polish*, I have Polish blood in my bones...”

“No blood in bones, dumbass,” Bossuet chuckled, legs dangling off the bar again.

“You’re the dumbass, dumbass,” Joly slurred. “Bones... *make* blood...” He gave up on talking, and continued to brush his nose back and forth across Bossuet’s ear.

This gave Bahorel the time in which to declare, “Fwee!” again, really loudly, with an emphatic hand-slam onto the bar.

“You not making sense.”

“Excuse you!” Bossuet gasped, swaying a little, to Joly’s apparent displeasure. “He’s making *perfect* sense!”

And he and Bahorel both flung their heads back to yell along with *Twin Atlantic*, “AH SET MA BUDDY ON FYAH SO I CULD BE FWEEEEEE!”

Feuilly snorted with laughter against his will. Bossuet whooped, lost balance, wailed, and fell backwards off the bar again.
Joly leant forwards to look down at him. “Woops,” he said pleasantly.

* 

Marius wailed from where he sat, cross-legged on the floor.

Courfeyrac was at his side in seconds, holding his hands and looking up with wide-eyed concern into Marius’ tear-filled eyes as Jehan stroked his hair and Bossuet hugged him. “What is it, sweet socially awkward Bambi?” Courfeyrac asked. “What’s wrong?”

Sniffling, Marius pointed to the empty boxes just to his left. “The cake,” Marius sniffled, “it’s gone!”

Joly flopped to the ground in sheer despair.

Dire as the situation was, Courfeyrac was determined to keep a logical mind. “It’s okay, gents,” he said, rocking back to sit on his feet, “times are hard, but we can remedy this. The cake is gone-”

“Why is the cake always gone?” Joly wailed.

“Sorry!” Bossuet said cheerfully, on reflex.

“So we need more cake,” Courfeyrac concluded wisely, proud of his genius. “And to get more cake, we must...”

“Go to a shop that sells cake!” Jehan chimed in.

“Yes!” Courfeyrac yelled, leaning clumsily over Marius to slam a kiss to Jehan’s lips. Marius started to whimper.

“Marius, this is your mission!” Courfeyrac charged him, rising unsteadily to his feet and pointing down at Marius. “You must venture into the outside world, and buy us some cake!”

Marius looked up at him with wide, watering eyes. “But, Courfeyrac!” he cried, lower lip trembling. “It’s dark outside!”

Courfeyrac would get exasperated at that, but Jehan was peering over Marius’ hair with puppy-dog look. Courfeyrac’s brain wasn’t working clearly enough to figure out when he and Jehan had adopted Marius, but apparently that had happened. “Okay, then we shall send out one of the manly-men,” Courfeyrac cried, again proud of his quick-thinking assessment of the situation.

“But, none of the manly-men in our group would feel the loss of cake as strongly as we do,” Bossuet pointed out, stroking sobbing Joly’s back absently. “They wouldn’t leave their alcohol to go and fetch us cake!”

Frowning, Courfeyrac sank back down to his feet again. “This is a cumundrum, gents,” he declared. “We have no cake, and no one to fetch cake...”

There was a moment’s silence, before Bossuet cleared his throat. “I shall do it. I shall... I shall fetcheth the cake!”

Marius and Jehan’s eyes started to shine again at this new beacon of hope. Joly sat bolt upright again, eyes wide. “You would do that, Bossuet?” he asked. “You’d fetch the cake?”

Bossuet nodded confidently, which was slightly undermined by how unstable he was, climbing to his feet. “I shall fetch the cake!” he declared, standing like a slightly unsteady Superman, before
leaving the pub and dancing out into the night.

“My hero,” Joly sobbed.

*

Bossuet stumbled back into the pub ten minutes later.

“Has anyone seen my other shoe? It seems to have run away.”

*

The world was good to Grantaire right then. He had a nice bottle next to him. Or two. He could no longer tell. And that was a very good state to be in.

*And, at a table not too far away, was the beautiful man, utterly gorgeous, so fucking passionate, so quintessentially good where morals were concerned if not social skills, and Grantaire had had the pleasure, several times now, of making him blush by keeping eye contact as he swallowed whatever alcohol was nearest to hand, lips around the bottle rim.*

Now this was feeling vaguely like something he’d regret in the morning but Enjolras blushing.

Not that he was the only entertainment, of course. Only a few seconds ago Feuilly had slid past, on his back, on the floor. Grantaire had given him a cheery little wave as he past. And Gavroche was somewhere, running around with a camera. Grantaire had last seen him jumping from table to table to get away from a furious and blushing Eponine.

Performing his bi-minutely check on Enjolras, Grantaire found him to be in a heated debate with Combeferre and Courfeyrac, the three musketeers all tied up in their own world for the meantime. As he watched, Courfeyrac cracked up laughing, holding his stomach, as Combeferre rose out of his seat a little to reach across the table and slap Enjolras round the back of the head. Enjolras just scowled like a rebellious teenager.

Just that moment, distraction zoomed past in the form of Jehan atop Bahorel’s shoulders, singing vaguely melodiously the Nyan-cat theme tune.

“What the fuck?” Grantaire yelled across to them, as Jehan continued to bounce up and down and sing and Bahorel made a circuit of nearby tables.

“I drank a raaaaaainbow!” Jehan called back, grinning and spreading his arms wide. “I am a rainbow! Nyan nyan!” And the music started up again.

Biting his lip to stop from laughing, Grantaire point his bottle at Bahorel. “Which makes you?”

“I am poptart,” Bahorel said, deadpan.

Grantaire couldn’t have explained the thinking process that followed, but Gavroche had photographic evidence that a few minutes later Grantaire, Joly and Courfeyrac were in a train behind the two, dancing along, Gangnam style.

*

Grantaire stared down at the glass. “I think I just broke science,” he muttered.

Courfeyrac nodded next to him, also staring down at the cup. “Yup,” he agreed. “I think you did.”
Robotic, stunned, Grantaire mimed opening and closing his hand, as if repeating his actions could help figure out how, exactly, he’d managed to drop his glass, only for it to land perfectly upright, contents still inside.

He was still opening and closing his fingers as Courfeyrac stumbled to his feet and ran over to Combeferre, bellowing in a way reminiscent to a kid running over to his mother, “Combeferre! Grantaire broke science!”

Carefully, as if moving too fast would fracture the universe, Grantaire picked up his glass. “There’s no other explanation,” he decided in a hushed voice, “I am a god.” He turned to find the nearest person to share this with. Seeing Bahorel, he pointed at him and declared, “You, mere mortal! Bow down to me, for am a god! Worship at the altar of me, you pathetic weakling—”

He got a punch in the gut for his efforts.

* * *

One hour, forty-eight minutes after he’d set out (with both shoes), Bossuet returned from his quest for cake, “I’m alive!” he cried happily to the pub.

Joly cheered. Musichetta pressed a badly aimed kiss to his cheek.

The rest of the pub wasn’t quite so cheerful. “...That’s a Battenberg,” Marius said, tilting his head. “Yep!”


Bossuet laughed. “Oh, don’t be silly. I didn’t just get a Battenberg.”

“What else did you get?”

“A traffic cone!”

“...Why the fuck did you get a traffic cone?”

Bossuet paused, chewed his lip, and looked down at the orange cone. “Uh. I thought it’d be useful?”

Marius started to cry again. “But I can’t eat a traffic cone!” he wailed. “A traffic cone doesn’t come with icing! With sweet spongey goodness! What use is a traffic cone?”

* * *

Gavroche’s next photo of the night was of Marius standing on a table, Jehan’s jumper tied around his neck like a cloak and the traffic cone on his head, informing the pub that he was “Orange Gandalf.”

He fell off the table five minutes later when a topless Jehan tried to tug his jumper back.

* * *

Jehan didn’t get his jumper back.

He ended up wearing Grantaire’s plaid shirt, buttoned up and very baggy on his frame, with Courfeyrac wearing the Breton jumper over his white shirt. Seeing how well it suited him, Jehan
found and stole Courfeyrac’s blue blazer, wearing it over the green plaid shirt, purple chinos and pink Doc Martins.

But that exchange of clothing was nothing. Some point near eleven, Grantaire would have sworn he saw Joly skipping past wearing ‘Chetta’s full-length red skirt and sleeveless embroidered vest.

*

*Skirts ruffled as Joly collapsed into the seat beside Enjolras, slipping slightly on the excess of material. “Heya, hey, buddy,” Joly slurred, slumping on the table slightly, but grinning, as always. “You good? You tired. You look boring.”

“I think you mean bored, not boring,” Enjolras corrected, amused. “Well, you could mean boring, but you’re not usually that callous. That’s more reserved for Combeferre, or Bahorel.”

“You should drink up,” Joly told him, either not hearing or not caring that Enjolras had just spoken. A jagerbomb appeared from nowhere, and Joly haphazardly pushed it across to him. “Drink. Stuff’s more fun when you’re drunk.”

Obediently, Enjolras downed the drink without a flinch – just because he didn’t drink didn’t mean he couldn’t – and lightly set the glass back down again. In truth, the world had started to go fuzzy, and he was smiling much more than he felt he should, but his friends needed to force a few more drinks down his throat before he was up and dancing stupidly with the rest of them. “You don’t need to sit with me, Joly,” Enjolras told him, grinning as he watched Joly fiddle with the elastic on the skirt. “Go, sing, trip over your skirt-”

But Joly shut him up with a wave of his hand. “Nah, no, shut up a second okay ‘cause I just... I gotta apologise, okay? Lemme apologise.”

Enjolras’ eyebrows rose. Considering Joly hadn’t actually done anything as of late – he never did anything bad, it was Joly – this would probably be quite amusing. “Oh? What for?”

“The deal, the doctors and, and the lists, that I said – sorry for being wrong, we got caught, and for nothing... sorry for the effort you went through, Enj- Enjlo- uh-”

Enjolras frowned. “What? What the hell are you talking about?”

“The text-”

“I lost my phone,” Enjolras said through gritted teeth. “Haven’t got any of my texts.”

Joly’s eyes widened. “Oh – so you haven’t – you don’t-”

“No, Joly, I don’t so could you please-” getting a little exasperated, Enjolras looked around, to see if he could find someone to translate Joly’s unclear speech. But Bossuet was on top of a table with Grantaire and Eponine, dancing badly, Courfeyrac and Jehan were somewhere definitely not to be disturbed and Musichetta was chatting with Bahorel and Feuilly. Combeferre was busy, too, talking to his brunette, who had returned to the bar after leaving to go meet friends, or something. But, as Enjolras watched, Combeferre’s eyes flicked from the girl to him, to where he was chatting with Joly, with a concerned expression that didn’t sit right with Enjolras.

“All for nothing, I mean, I’d been sure – but there’ll be other stuff, right? I’m so sorry, dude, bro, mate, sorry ‘cause I know this means a lot to you an’ everyone was saying you need the distraction, after losing Lemarque, you need the, the cause or whatever-”
The mention of his teacher – his dead teacher – was a cold hand around Enjolras’ heart. He wanted Joly to shut up, wanted him to have shut up five minutes ago. “You mean there’s nothing,” Enjolras echoed, voice flat. “At the office, there was nothing?”

“Well, there was, but they’re already dealing with it,” Joly muttered. “Guess I was just too late in hearing about it... or that the NHS is quicker than we thought! So that’s good, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Enjolras agreed, nodding once, unable to say anything else.

“And apology accepted, yeah? You don’t blame me?” Joly asked, hopeful.

Distracted now, Enjolras had to focus to look across to Joly and shake his head. “No. No, Joly, I don’t blame you.”

When Joly beamed and leant over to hug him, Enjolras let him, motionless as the thin man’s arms squeezed him before letting go. There was even a sloppy and cheesy press of Joly’s lips to the top of Enjolras’ head before he sashayed over to Musichetta’s side, resting his head on her shoulder as she played rock paper scissors with Feuilly and Bahorel, for something.

Enjolras closed his eyes, just breathing for a second. When he opened them, a few seconds later he found himself staring at Grantaire, and Bossuet and Eponine, still on the table, still singing along to Patrick Stump about being wild.

Several minutes later, he rose to his feet, and went to get something from the bar. Not another Stella, not one of the pop drinks Courfeyrac kept trying to bribe him with. Something stronger.

* 

Grantaire had always thought that his ability to pace himself was one of his prime talents. Watching everyone else fall off their feet from a simple standing position whilst he could still make his way to the bar with minimal damage was a good skill to have. It was a skill that came hand-in-hand with his ability to act completely abominably, along with those completely hammered, and not feel a touch of regret.

So as he yelled out the chorus to Young Volcanoes with Bossuet and Eponine, he was still able to dance without stumbling and falling, still able to multitask and watch Enjolras demand a drink from Mabeuf at the same time. And – and this actually surprised him a little, he felt more drunk than this – he was also able to climb off the table without breaking anything.

He’d meant to go and check if Enjolras was okay; suddenly going for a stronger drink seemed out of character for him. But instead he found himself almost tripping over Marius, who was sat cross-legged on the floor.

Marius was clutching a kettle to his chest, and apparently crooning the lyrics of Don’t You Want Me Baby. Thinking this was a situation he wasn’t qualified to deal with, Grantaire started to back away desperately, but thankfully Courfeyrac appeared out of nowhere, crouching down beside the man and whispering what were presumably comforts.

“Where the fuck did you even get a kettle?” Grantaire asked, cutting into Courfeyrac’s words, but apparently that was the wrong thing to see because Marius burst into tears, clutching the kettle even closer. Courfeyrac mouthed something up at Grantaire that looked a lot like ‘he gets like this’, but it was hard to tell because he himself was swaying a fair bit.

Grantaire just nodded and decided to leave them to it, but he raised his head only to find that Enjolras had vanished.
It was fucking cold outside, but Enjolras didn’t care. It was quiet, which was what he needed.

He’d almost finished his drink, though. He needed more. God, he needed more.

That could wait. That could wait, until the others had worn themselves out being stupid, being loud and careless and acting so ignorant...

With a sigh, Enjolras let the arm holding the near empty glass fall loosely down by his side, and his head fall back against the cold glass.

He’d had a plan, yesterday. Had ideas. Had something to focus on that he could do, that he could change, a way to help the way Lemarque had wanted him to help, and now he didn’t. Now there was nothing for him to do and he should, he should be doing something otherwise what was the point, to any of this and everything was just... he had a job, he had a thing to do, that Lemarque had shown him he could do and to do nothing...

“There you are!”

Enjolras didn’t open his eyes.

“I was looking for you – I saw you go to the bar, and you vanished, and then Bahorel said he’d seen you come out here... man, aren’t you cold? It’s fucking freezing... but then, I guess the cold can be refreshing, this late into an evening. It’s all relative and all... I’m rambling, aren’t I?”

Biting back a sigh, Enjolras turned his head to look at Grantaire. His smile was lopsided, due more to drink than a desire to appear cute, or any conscious decision really. He still had a bottle of something in one hand, was leaning against the doorframe to stay upright and his eyes were wide and he was so clearly happy to have found Enjolras, but all Enjolras could think was, not him, not now. I don’t know how to be about him yet. I can’t deal with his cynicism right now. He, he is the last thing I need.

“If you’re cold, then go inside,” Enjolras bit out, downing the last of his rum in a smooth movement. He hoped, god but he hoped Grantaire would take the hint.

There was a pause, before Grantaire replied. “Nah,” he said, pushing himself away from the wall and taking a few hesitant, unsteady steps towards Enjolras. “It’s getting very loud in there, and Marius is crying... could use the fresh air. That why you’re out here?”

Enjolras didn’t answer. He looked down at his glass, spinning it in his hands, wishing that he still had some.

“You can have some of this, if you want?” Grantaire offered, sounding unsure. One of his hands had reached out to steady himself against the wall, again.

“You always have a drink with you, don’t you, Grantaire?” Enjolras muttered, before common decency could stop him.

There was a beat before Grantaire replied. Enjolras didn’t look across to see what his face would be like, shocked or hurt or just confused. He tried not to care.

“Well, you see,” Grantaire answered eventually, a hint of bravado in his tone, “not all of us can be pristine, morally and physically perfect beings like you, some of us have to be drunk and depraved. If there weren’t people like me, then who would you martyrs have left to try and save?”
For some reason, that was it, all that Enjolras could take. “Oh, fuck off Grantaire!” Enjolras yelled, a sudden burst of rage made him push off from the glass, hand clenching so tight on the glass that he felt it surely should shatter beneath his fingers. “Jesus Christ, why are you even here?”

“I was invited,” Grantaire said demurely. The lopsided smile was gone now, mouth open and eyes wide with something unreadable. Or something Enjolras refused to read.

“Not by me,” Enjolras retorted, arms flinging wide as anger took him over. “Did I give any indication of wanting you here? Do I look as if I want your company? No? So why the fuck are you following me and pestering me?”

Hurt flashed across Grantaire’s features and for a second, a second Enjolras felt like he’d gone too far. Then, as if he’d been wanting to the whole time, Grantaire smirked. “What, you mean you don’t enjoy me ribbing at you? Aw, damn. And I thought we were getting along so well.”

“Getting along?” Enjolras echoed, laughing darkly. “You really think I need someone like you in my life? Someone who’s given in to whatever shitty life they’ve had, given up? Become a cynic? I don’t need a gutless bastard like you yelling your useless pessimism in my ear, you heartless, lacklustre.”

“Ah, but how do you expect to shine your healing benevolence onto the world, Apollo, without a darkness to make yourself seem all the brighter?” Grantaire teased, his tone bitter and smirk sharp. “Every yang needs its yin, and all that.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Enjolras laughed back, laughing at him, at his stupidity, his oblivious stupidity. “You’re not yin! You’re not, not a matching darkness, anything as glorious as that. If you are anything it’s a black hole, but you’re not, you’re not even that you’re just nothing. A drunken, babbling nothing. All you do is talk and pretend that you doing something but you’re doing nothing, you’re just wasting everything, your time, everyone’s time. You waste the air you breathe! Attempting to criticize what I say doesn’t make you needed. It makes you an annoyance!”

People had started to emerge from the pub but Enjolras wasn’t paying attention to them. He’d never felt anything like the hatred he felt for Grantaire in that moment. A pathetic cynic who’d had more affect on the way he thought than anyone had, since Lemarque. And he didn’t like it.

“Well, if you want to talk about wasting, Enjolras – how’s the campaigns going?” There wasn’t a smirk at all, now, nothing but blazing eyes fixed on Enjolras. “Saved the world recently? Oh, no, that’s right – you don’t need to, do you? I heard from Joly that your efforts of late have all gone, oh that’s right, to waste. And I’m hearing that bank you tried to save is now, actually, falling apart at the seams because of bad management. So I guess that was a waste, too.” Enjolras was finding it hard to breathe. He felt rooted to the spot, or else he’d have swung a fist at Grantaire. “You see, I’m happy with what I do with my time. Fuck it, if I affect ten people, ten hundred, or even just little old me. Better making one person happy than wasting time on futile efforts that are just gonna go tits up every fucking time.”

He didn’t give a damn about proving Grantaire wrong, not anymore. Right then he just wanted to hurt Grantaire in any way possible. “You think you’re making people happy?” Enjolras asked, voice low. “Well, I guess you can keep dreaming that, if you want. I guess everything looks better through a permanent haze of alcohol, right? You were drunk at four this afternoon. You had wine with you, when you came to mine yesterday. Fuck it, I wonder if anyone can ever see you without a drink. And if your philosophy is to make yourself happy, then sure. Go with that. I’m sure that makes a wonderful role model for kids,” he said, pointing his glass at where Gavroche was visible in the doorway, at Feuilly’s side. “I’m sure Gavroche is a lucky kid, to have a drunken, cynical graffiti like you, in place of a parent. Yeah, you keep making that one person happy, Grantaire.
Who gives a fuck about the rest of the world, right?"

He didn’t see the drunkard move, and barely felt the fist hit his jaw. It sent him staggering back, all the same. And suddenly the air was filled with yelling voices that weren’t his, weren’t Grantaire’s, but it was easy to ignore them and fixate on Grantaire’s face, to try and pull back his fist to land one on Grantaire’ face, to try and make him bleed because –

His fist managed to hit Grantaire’s cheekbone before a hand wrapped around his wrist, another around his upper arm, dragging him back. Bahorel was yelling into his ear, calling him a fucking idiot, asking what the fuck was wrong with him. Enjolras didn’t answer, just spat to the side. Blood hit the pavement.

A few paces in front of him, Grantaire was being held upright by Courfeyrac and Feuilly, who had arms around his waist and holding him back with hands on his chest. Grantaire had sagged in their arms, face utterly unreadable.

Enjolras met his eyes, hoping his face was just as unreadable.

Tearing his gaze away, Grantaire looked down, and shrugged off his two friends. He swung his arm back again, but rather than throwing a punch, he threw his bottle out into the street. It shattered on the tarmac, the sharp sound in the silence making several flinch.

Without another word, Grantaire turned and walked off down the street.

“Let me go,” Enjolras muttered, trying to tug his arms out of the grip of Feuilly and Bahorel. “For god’s sake, get off me.”

“Are you going to go after him?” Bahorel asked, voice quiet.

Enjolras rolled his head to look over his shoulder at Bahorel. “What the fuck do you take me for, of course I’m not,” he bit back. This time, when he tugged his arm, it slipped out of Bahorel’s grasp.

“C’mon, guys,” Feuilly said, the words sounding hesitant, “Let’s get back inside... nothing to see here...”

Enjolras made no motion to move, just let the others pass him, leaving him alone again. From the corner of his eye he saw the kid, Gavroche, staring at him. But he didn’t look at him, waited for Feuilly to put a hand on the kid’s shoulder, and pull him inside.

Eventually, it was just him and Combeferre left out on the street. Combeferre had steeled his expression, crossed his arms, sleeves still rolled up and tattoo still visible.

Enjolras smiled at him wryly, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. His skin came away bloody. “You going to lecture me about going too far?” Enjolras asked, not entirely without sarcasm. “Try to teach me about emotional sensibilities? About being nice?”

Combeferre dropped his head, face hidden from view for a few moments. Enjolras could tell from the stiffness in his shoulders that Combeferre was struggling to keep his breathing measured. “You already know you went too far,” Combeferre said eventually, each word carefully picked out, harsh and unforgiving. “You wouldn’t be asking me that otherwise.”

Part of him knew he should be listening to Combeferre – he always listened to Combeferre, because Combeferre, without fail, always knew the best option – but the heat hadn’t quite faded from his rage, yet. So he was still on the defensive as he said, “You know what, I rather think-”
“I don’t give a damn what you think,” Combeferre said wearily, raising a hand to shut Enjolras up. “Right now, I actually don’t care what you think. You’re not thinking right. I don’t know what you’re doing. Enjolras, we had a plan,” Combeferre reminded him, half stepping forwards, arms unfolding as he struggling to stay mild. “We made a plan of how we could make things better, and this wasn’t it! Get our degrees, get the work experience and jobs we need then I could go into education, teach in universities, get known and speak out about education and you would go into law, become famous, make a name for yourself and take on those political and civil rights cases that people daren’t touch and actually make a difference, like that! That’s the plan, Enjolras. Make it so society can’t ignore, get ourselves into a position of power and use it for the right reasons!”

“That still is the plan-”

“Then you need to stop acting like a stupid, reckless, hormonal teenager!” Combeferre yelled at him, waving a hand furiously. “We’re not going to change the world at the age of 21, Enjolras! No one listens to boys who are barely men! We can change stuff, but we need to think of a bigger picture! And then, maybe, we can help people listen to the right people again, but not now!” Combeferre paused for breath, holding a hand against his forehead, as if he had a headache. Enjolras didn’t dare speak. “Lemarque didn’t expect you to fix humanity before you graduated, Enjolras. But then, he didn’t expect you to turn into such a fool after you lost him.”

Enjolras opened his mouth to retort, not even knowing what he was going to say but again, Combeferre held up a hand to silence him before he even spoke. “I can’t deal with you right now,” Combeferre said, simply. “Louisa’s waiting for me inside. She’s a solid nine out of ten, she’s a journalism major, and her summer reading was Plato’s Republic. And I’m going to take her back to the flat. I don’t give a damn where you’re sleeping tonight, but it’s not at our flat.”

He turned and headed back into the pub without another word, leaving Enjolras standing outside, alone.

*

“Grantaire!”

He didn’t slow down. He knew Jehan could catch up with him, easy enough.

And he did, sure enough, pulling up alongside him a few seconds later, going straight in with, “Are you alright?”

Grantaire laughed in his face.

“Fair enough – but you’ve got to come back, R. I mean, everyone else is worried about you,” Jehan babbled, hands shaping the air in front of them weirdly as he spoke. He hadn’t quite sobered up, then.

Grantaire had. Surprisingly, having someone point out all your bad features will do that to you. Especially if it’s someone you-

“And Eponine wants to punch you for being an idiot, and Gavroche hasn’t said it but I’m pretty sure he wants to hug you-”

Grantaire laughed again at that. “Yeah? Well, perhaps I shouldn’t go back, then. Start distancing myself from him now. For his own good, and all that shit.” He walked a bit faster, as if Jehan would, somehow, lag behind, stop reminding him of it all. He didn’t have anything left to drink – knew he’d feel worse, now, if he did – but perhaps, if he walked through enough new areas of
London, he could forget everything else.

Beside him – not missing a step – Jehan whimpered. “Grantaire – look, that’s bullshit, surely you know that? Everyone was drinking around him tonight! And you’re great with Gavroche, you know that, Eponine wouldn’t trust him with you else-”

“Yeah, well, not everyone drinks around him pretty much all hours of every day-”

“Neither do you, anymore! You’re getting so much better!” When Grantaire didn’t reply – refused to reply, he couldn’t tell Jehan what he was thinking, how he felt, because he knew that if Jehan knew how much pain Grantaire was in it’d only make Jehan feel worse and Grantaire couldn’t do that – when he said nothing, Jehan continued to babble, “Look, just come back, we can get you a, a coke, or something, and you can eat cake and have fun with everyone and-”

Stopping suddenly, Grantaire turned to face Jehan. “Shut up,” he begged, ordered, he didn’t even know. “Please, for fuck’s sake just stop! I’m not wanted back there, I think that was made pretty damn obvious just now. Their blonde leader can’t stand me, and if they had to pick one of us, it’s so clearly going to be him. Hell,” Grantaire said, starting to laugh, “even I would pick him over me! If I could have him in my life, and not have me in it fuck but I’d do it! If I could, could just sit there invisible, unable to say or do anything as long as I could watch him-” He couldn’t finish that. It hurt too much, knowing something that he knew, now, was an idea so repellent to Enjolras. “But that’s not gonna happen, right? So I’ll do what he wants, I’ll stay as far as fucking away as he wants. Gladly. I’ll do it, gladly. God, I do not need to be stripped bare like that every single – why do I do this to myself-”

With desperate hands, Jehan was pulling at his arms, his pleads barely sounding coherent. “Just – come back – Grantaire – please, a little while-”

“How hard is it for you to get?” Grantaire yelled, shoving Jehan off him, away, into the street. “I don’t want anything to do with them! But you do, you clearly do, because of your precious Courfeyrac-”

“Grantaire-”

“Go, go on then, run along, run back to him and your new friends. You don’t need to follow and check on me, little old me, oh no, you can go back to all the happy laughter and chaos and your boyfriend, but I swear right now I’m having nothing to do with them, ever, not ever again.”

It was hard to see Jehan’s face, the street dark save for the streetlights, but he could still pick out the moment when Jehan’s face hardened. “Don’t you dare,” Jehan breathed, shaking his head slowly. “Don’t you dare do this, don’t you dare-”

“What don’t I dare, Jean, hm?” Grantaire challenged, part of him wondering why he was pushing like this, why he no longer cared. “What?”

“Don’t you dare make me choose!” Jehan yelled, stepping forwards, putting his hands on Grantaire’s chest and pushing him away. “No! You can’t make me do that, can’t make me choose between you!”

He still had tears in his eyes, Grantaire could see. But Grantaire still had ice covering his heart. “Why can’t I?” he asked furiously. “I can do whatever the fuck I want!”

“No,” Jehan muttered, shaking his head still, “You don’t want me to-”

“Why not?”
“Because I don’t know who I’d pick!” Jehan screamed at him.

Grantaire’s heart stopped.

“Screw you!” Jehan yelled, braid swinging as he spun away from Grantaire, and back, as if undecided as to what he wanted to do. “Screw you, and your bloody pride! For once, my life and my happiness is not just about you, so don’t you dare fuck with it! I don’t give a fuck if your love life is like fucking Chernobyl, but nothing, no amount of years of friendship gives you the right to do this to me!”

Jehan fell silent, panting in the night, before turning and walking away.

“Where are you going?” Grantaire called hesitantly after him, heart still trying to restart.

“None of your fucking business!” Jehan yelled back over his shoulder, before breaking into a run.

Alone again, Grantaire looked down at his hands. They were shaking.

*

“C’mon man, hup hup, you gotta get up!”

Bemused, brain not quite working, Enjolras looked up to see Marius grinning down at him. He was still swaying a bit, but he didn’t seem too out of it. “What?” Enjolras asked, blankly.

Marius frowned in confusion. “You’re coming home with me, right?”

“I am?” Enjolras asked, without inflection.

“Yeah. I mean, Combeferre’s got a girl at yours, hasn’t he, and Courfeyrac’s fussing over Jehan isn’t he, so Mabeuf told me that I could offer you lodging for the night.” Marius held out a hand, and offer to help Enjolras to his feet.

Pushing up off the windowsill with one hand, and grasping Marius’ with the other, Enjolras somehow managed to get off the pavement and on to his feet. “Thank you,” he muttered on reflex. “Uh – how’re we-”

“Taxi!” Marius explained cheerfully. “Mabeuf gave me some money for it, too. He’s a really good man, isn’t he? C’mon, we’ll need to make our way to a busier road for a taxi-”

Letting go of Enjolras’ hands, Marius started walking off. Moving on autopilot, Enjolras followed.

There was silence for a short while, and Enjolras could tell that Marius was slowing his pace to let Enjolras catch up, let them draw level.

“You realise,” Marius said after a while, “I do have a date with Sandra Bullock when we get back, yeah? And a tub of ice cream. Well, half a tub, I’ve already had a fair bit. It’s While You Were Sleeping, you like that movie?”

Courfeyrac had made him watch it once, had called it a classic. “Yeah, I’ve seen it,” Enjolras said.

“You can watch it too, if you want. I mean, my sobbing at the end would probably disturb your sleeping anyway,” Marius said, apparently babbling. “You up for that?”

Enjolras didn’t answer that time. But, it seemed he didn’t have to.
“I know I can be a bit socially inept sometimes,” Marius said casually. “I mean, I’d be the first to say it. But I know a bit about needing some comfort time, you know? Chicken soup for the soul and all that?”

The corner of Enjolras’ lips curled up, involuntarily. “Thank you,” he said. It was barely more than a whisper, really, said under his breath. But he really hoped that Marius heard it anyway, before he ran off to hail a taxi that was about to drive past.

*

Hey – Jehan needs you. He’ll be on South Bank, probably by Southbank Centre.

Grantaire’s fingers hovered over the keys, unsure what else he should say.

Eventually, however, he clicked send, trusting that Courfeyrac would know what Jehan needed.

Then he turned off his phone, slipped it back into his pocket. He leant back against the pillar of whatever building he was outside, slid down to the floor, and buried his face in his hands.

Sure that no one would find him, wherever it was he was, he finally let himself cry.

Chapter End Notes

The events whilst drunk are inspired by my wonderful followers - the kettle serenading actually being done by one of them - save for Orange Gandalf, inspired by an entirely sober 7 year old.

Undying love, again, for my beta, stormhornets.tumblr, the legend that is Priya.

ALSO.

I ask for not too much violence after that angst. If I get hurt, I cannot fix it, okay?? Though I would LOVE comments with, or without, threats! Seriously, the more comments, the more motivation I have to write quicker!

(I'm kinda sorry, kinda not)
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Sorrrryyyyyy yes this has taken ages (again) but quite frankly I'm not sure why I decided to write something this big during the most stressful year of my life so far. I'm off to uni, as a fresher, in three days now. Welp. But yes. Enjoy this! A nice long chapter to keep you satisfied until the next update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jehan was, unsurprisingly, exactly where Grantaire had said he would be.

He was about halfway between the Oxo Tower and the Southbank Centre, leaning against the railing and staring down at the Thames.

And he was shivering. He was still wearing a jacket – Courfeyrac’s blue jacket, actually, he was starting to wonder if he’d ever get that back – over what was presumably Grantaire’s green flannel shirt, reminders of the hectic, brilliant chaos that had been the pub, before things had taken their dramatic spin for the worst. But even through the layers, Jehan was still shaking.

A very large part of Courfeyrac wanted to run those last few steps to Jehan’s side and hold him close, use his body heat to warm him and comfort him until he stopped shaking, but something was telling him that was the wrong thing to do. Something in how Jehan was holding himself, perhaps. The stiffness in his shoulders, sharp breaths as he looked down into the water.

So Courfeyrac found a nearby tree and leant back against it, waiting.

Some time had passed – and he couldn’t have told you how much – before, slowly, Jehan’s shoulders started to relax. After leaving it a few more minutes, Courfeyrac pushed off from his tree, and went to lean on the balustrade beside him.

“Hey,” he said, softly, not looking at Jehan but copying him, looking down at the glistening black surface of river.

In response, Jehan turned his right hand so the palm was facing the sky. Smiling, Courfeyrac slipped his hand over Jehan’s, and locked their fingers together.

“It didn’t take you long to find me,” Jehan said, voice barely more than a whisper.

“Actually,” Courfeyrac confessed with a wry smile, “I’ve been waiting against that tree for a while. I stayed back – you looked like you needed space.”

Jehan’s fingers tightened on Courfeyrac’s slightly. “Then... what made you move?”

“Because you’d started to look like you needed company,” Courfeyrac said simply, leaning over and nudging their shoulders together gently. “You looked... sad, rather than guarded. If that makes sense.”

“I’m a poet, anything can make sense to me,” Jehan replied, a hint of a smile starting to show. He didn’t say anything else for a while.
“‘Sides,” Courfeyrac said, eventually, clearing his throat, “I kind of cheated. Didn’t exactly find you, Grantaire told me where you’d be.” Jehan didn’t say anything. “I’m guessing you fought,” Courfeyrac continued, letting his fingers brush over Jehan’s skin as what he hoped was a comfort, “But he really does care about you, so I guess that counts for something?”

Jehan shuffled slightly. “I worry about him,” he muttered. His left hand clenched on something Courfeyrac couldn’t see. “But that doesn’t stop me from hating him, sometimes. Or loving him.”

“Just checking, here, for a second,” Courfeyrac said, tone light, and nudging Jehan’s shoulder again, “By ‘love’, you mean brotherly love, obviously?”

Jehan’s smile grew that bit wider. “Yes, I mean brotherly,” he said, lifting their clasped hands so he could press a kiss to the back of Courfeyrac’s.

“Good, good, just checking.”

“But he’s... gods, he’s such a dick sometimes,” Jehan sighed, head falling back. His hair – most of it out of the braid, now – fell back. It shone beautifully in the moonlight. “A bastard, a complete...”

Courfeyrac hummed an agreement. “I get what you’re saying. I mean, only kid and all, Combeferre and Enjolras are my closest things to brothers, but... damn I want to rip Enjolras’ head off right now. Actually, I think Combeferre pretty much did...”

“Good,” Jehan muttered. “What he said was...”

“Probably the reasoning behind Grantaire’s dickish behaviour,” Courfeyrac suggested carefully, shuffling closer so their arms were pressed together. “Which hardly excuses him, but. Y’know. He wasn’t exactly thinking straight.”

Jehan chewed his lip, eyes fixed on the Thames again. “He said – well, truthfully, he implied that I’d have to choose,” he said, eventually, quietly. “Between – well, between him and you.”

The possibility of that had occurred to Courfeyrac. It made sense, really, that Grantaire would want to run as far away from all of them as possible. “No!” Courfeyrac gasped with mock affront. “How dare he! That cynical dickwad ain’t getting me out of his life so easily, hell no! I am not above standing beneath his window and playing loud music at ungodly hours until he invites me back into his life again. So help me but I will.”

“Nah, Feuilly would kill you if you did that,” Jehan reminded him softly.

Courfeyrac chewed the inside of his lip as he considered this new problem. “True, there is an issue there. No matter. I will find a way around it. But really, he is not getting rid of me so quickly. The dumb idiot – both of the dumb idiots – will need the entirety of my genius, if they wish to come through this intact.”

“Hey!” Jehan protested, lightly pushing his elbow against Courfeyrac’s chest. “My genius, too.”

“Of course,” Courfeyrac conceded, pressing a quick kiss to Jehan’s forehead. “And probably everyone else’s, come to think of it. Ah, the course of true love never did run smooth...”

Jehan tilted his head, looking up at Courfeyrac through strands of blonde hair with a tentative smile. “Are you quoting Shakespeare again?”

“Maybe,” Courfeyrac conceded with a grin. “C’mon, admit it. It still impresses you.”
“Only a little,” Jehan said, and it was close enough to a tease to abate Courfeyrac’s worry, for now. “What about us, then?” Jehan asked, hand squeezing Courfeyrac’s lightly, but his eyes fixed on the river. “We’re running pretty smooth.”

Courfeyrac thought for a moment or two, before eventually leaning closer to Jehan and telling him, fully serious, “We? We are... a simple equation. No complications to leave us confused. If this is love, then it’s the easiest thing to do.”

Jehan looked sideways at him. “That was a quote too, wasn’t it?” Courfeyrac nodded. “Where from?”

Courfeyrac sucked his cheeks, swallowing laughter. “I, uh,” he, said, grinning with slight embarrassment, “That might have been lyrics from a McFly song.”

“Really?” Jehan asked, smiling across at him, turning their hands over so he could see each angle of their interlocked fingers. “‘If this is love...’” he echoed, trailing off.

“Hey, now, I was not about to misquote the genius that is Tom Fletcher,” Courfeyrac protested, holding up his free hand in defence. “I’m not some kind of uncivilised monster, okay?”

“So... it is love?” Jehan said, pushing against Courfeyrac lightly and smiling innocently up at him.

Concern giving way to exasperation for a second, Courfeyrac looked down at Jehan with wide eyes. “You’re really not going to let this pass easy, are you?” he sighed, as Jehan’s smile only grew more innocent, which was a sure sign of trouble. “Okay, okay... well, I’ve got to point out that it’s only been about a week, since I first saw you and consequently almost fell two storeys from a ledge, and I don’t know about you, but declarations of love within a few days feels a little bit Romeo and Juliet to me, and that might have worked out well for them-” Jehan laughed lightly, “But I’m not sure I’m up for that, to be honest with you. But, well... in this past week, I’ve spent whole days with you, babysat your friend’s brother with you, protected you from who I am still certain was a paedophilic ice cream man, broken the law with you, got drunk with you and all the rest of our friends, and had some frankly epic sex with you, so... I think we’re well on the way.” He finally looked away from the river and back to Jehan. “Yeah?”

Jehan blinked, then smiled widely. “Yeah,” he said, quite happily.

There was a second, as Courfeyrac optimistically waited for more. “‘Yeah’?” he echoed, wanting to look annoyed but unable to stop himself from grinning. “I give you all that, and I get ‘yeah’ in return?”

“Yeah,” Jehan said again, grinning widely.

With sheer disbelief, wondering what the hell he’d got into and not regretting it in the slightest, Courfeyrac shook his head. “You’re such a fucking tease,” he muttered, grinning, leaning across to press his lips to Jehan’s temple.

When Jehan didn’t lean into his touch, Courfeyrac pulled back slightly, sighing internally. You could only distract people from issues for so long. “Hey,” he muttered, gently squeezing Jehan’s hand again. “You won’t be made to choose. He won’t want that for you, and I know this because he sent me to you. Yeah? He just made a momentary dick move, due to being emotionally incapacitated by my bigger dick of a best friend.”

Silently, Jehan nodded. Then, he leant against Courfeyrac, resting his head on his shoulder. “I’m going to steal every single bottle of alcohol he has and throw them into a dumpster,” Jehan
muttered. “And I’m going to dye all of his jeans pink.”

Courfeyrac snorted. “I can offer you asylum for when he finds out?”

“Thank you.”

“But thinking slightly more immediately... what do you want to do, now? I mean, I’d offer that you could come back to mine, get some sleep after a long night, but...” Courfeyrac pursed his lips, looking down along the Thames to the horizon. “Well, I think the sun’s going to come up soon.” He tilted his head so it was resting on Jehan’s. “Lazy day in bed?”

“No,” Jehan said calmly. “I want... I want to go and get breakfast at MacDonald’s, hash brown and Egg McMuffin. Then I want to go to a park, some bookshops to see if I can find a nice collection of Robert Browning, to eat lunch by the riverside. Perhaps go to the cinema, perhaps to see Despicable Me 2. And finally, I think I want to watch the sun set from Westminster Bridge so I can quote Wordsworth.”

Courfeyrac lifted his head up, thought, then nodded. “You know what,” he said, pushing off from the balustrade and pulling Jehan with him, swinging their hands between them as they headed down the riverside, “That actually sounds like a damn good day.”

*

“Good morning starshine!” Bossuet sing-songed, bursting through door into Marius’ flat. “The sun says hello!”

Marius chewed frantically at his Crunchy-Nut Clusters, shaking both his spoon and his head as he said around a full mouth, “It’s ‘the earth says hello’.”

Bossuet frowned, kicking the door shut behind him as he ambled further inside. “Is it? You sure?” Marius nodded. “Huh. But good morning! Also do you have a Sharpie because I’m finding I need a way of distinguishing between the key to yours and Courfeyrac’s flat. Do you know how long I was stood out there, trying to figure out which it was? They look so similar!”

Confused, Marius stared at Bossuet over his cereal bowl. “Um,” he said, gulping down his chewed cereals, “Courfeyrac and I live in the same flat. This one. We both live here. We’re flatmates. They’re probably the same keys. Which would explain why you can’t differentiate.”

Bossuet blinked confusedly at him, before looking down at the keys in his hands with wide eyes. “That little shit,” he breathed.

Setting his bowl on the side and hooking his toes behind the stool’s legs, Marius grinned. “You can behead Courfeyrac later. What can I do you for, in the meantime? If you’re looking for a sofa to crash on, I’m afraid ours is already taken...” he wafted a hand to the back corner of the huge room, where Enjolras was lying across the sofa, still fast asleep. And snoring.

“Psh, no,” Bossuet chuckled, flapping both hands. “Nah, I have a house now, and everything.”

“Wait, have you started paying your part of the rent yet?”

“No?” Bossuet grinned too innocently. “But never mind, c’mon, we gotta go.” He beckoned Marius, who willingly slid off the stool onto his feet. “We gone be late, at this rate. Ha! That rhymed...”

“Where are we going again?” Marius asked, distracted, as he mentally ran through the list of things
he needed to do before leaving the flat, which Courfeyrac had made him memorise; check the windows, turn off taps, turn off electricals, make sure those straighteners you deny you have are turned off, make sure the fridge is shut, make sure that there’s food and water for any miscreants that have nicked our sofa, make sure you have your keys on you, etc, etc...

“Uni! We have a seminar in like, fifteen minutes, c’mon chop chop, geronimo, mush-

Marius was halfway through tying the laces on his second shoe before his brain kicked into gear. “No, we don’t,” he said, stopping and glaring up at Bossuet.

“Yes, yes we do, Joly and ‘Chetta both reminded me, so hands off-”

“No, we don’t,” Marius reiterated, starting to smile. “Joly, it’s Sunday. There are no seminars on Sundays, or lecture, or anything else."

Bossuet gaped mindlessly at him for a long while. “Those bastards!” he gasped out eventually, “That’s – but they – they’re meant to like me!”

Marius couldn’t help but laugh. “I’m sure they do. But you are annoyingly chipper after long nights.”

Bossuet narrowed his eyes at him. “Did you just call me annoying?”

“You spent the entirety of the last lecture throwing bits of Blu-Tac into my hair then left me to stutter an apology to the professor and mumble and blush as I tried to excuse my behaviour,” Marius retorted, feeling entirely guiltless. “You know I can’t deal with situations like that!”

Enjolras picked that moment to groan. On autopilot, Bossuet and Marius looked at each other in fear, then looked around, as if a less clutzy member of their group would miraculously appear and make their lives better. “Um, are you waking up, Enjolras?” Marius asked hesitantly, as he and Bossuet slowly approached the back of the sofa.

Enjolras groaned again, a hand rising and rubbing his face.

“Is that a yes?” Marius asked.

This time, he got a middle finger raised in his direction. Bossuet laughed loudly, which caused the one finger to be changed to two, the V directed at Bossuet.

“What?” Bossuet chuckled, leaning forwards and resting his forearms on the back of the sofa. “You’re hung-over. It’s funny.”

“I hate you all,” Enjolras grumbled, pressing his palms against his eyes. “Oh, god...”

“Water?” Marius offered, “Paracetamol?”

“Please...”

Bossuet was still chuckling as he followed Marius over to the kitchen cabinets. “Man, I love seeing Enjolras hung-over,” he said wistfully, leaning against the side as Marius fetched all the stuff. “I usually like seeing him drunk, too, but not so much last night... ah well. Oh, oh, hey, you done anything about that girl? Someone said you’d found her?”

Marius felt himself starting to blush, and he bit his lip to stop himself grinning like the loon he couldn’t really deny he was. “I. Um. Yeah?”
“And?”

“I. Um. Went to the shop she worked at and stared at her through the shelves for about three quarters of an hour before she came and asked if she could help me and I had to text Courfeyrac to come and save me?”

With a wicked grin, Bossuet elbowed Marius in the stomach. “That’s my little stalker!”

Something started to chime really loudly, a sound swiftly followed by Enjolras swearing and saying furiously, “For fuck’s sake, someone turn that off!”

“Sorry!” Marius stuttered, all but dropping the glass of water and packet of pills into Bossuet’s hands – who narrowly avoided then dropping them to the tiled floor – and ran over to his phone. One new text. “It’s Combeferre;” he explained, unlocking his phone to read the message.

All noises, even from shuffling or breathing, conspicuously ceased from the direction of the sofa.

“Oh – sorry, am I not meant to be... mentioning him, or... sorry,” Marius trailed off, an embarrassed blush covering his features again. Bossuet was no help, just grinning, amused, from where he was still leaning against the counter-top.

Thankfully, however, Enjolras didn’t seem too murderous, as he sat upright, no longer hiding under pillows but visible and looking far more awake. Marius hated morning people. “No, don’t be childish,” Enjolras said, rubbing the back of his hand against his stubble and frowning. “What’s he said?” he asked, nonchalantly, as he got to his feet.

Nervous, unsure and scared, Marius turned to Bossuet for help. Bossuet just shrugged. “Um,” Marius said to pass the time as he read the message. “He says... he says you can go back to the flat, now?”

Nodding to himself, Enjolras crossed the flat, taking the water and pills from Bossuet and downing both without a word. He headed to the door just as wordlessly, running a hand through his hair in a futile attempt to flatten it, saying nothing until he’d slipped his feet into his brogues. “Thanks for the loan of the sofa,” Enjolras said, not sounding entirely grateful but not sounding cold either, so it wasn’t a complete loss.

After he’d left, Marius looked across to Bossuet in amazement.

“Well, that went well,” Bossuet said, sounding ever so slightly stunned.

“He didn’t hurt me, physically or emotionally,” Marius said, disbelieving. “I mean – I think we’re starting to get on!”

Bossuet quirked his lips. “Yeah, that’ll be the day,” he chuckled, turning and absently going through Marius’ cupboards.

“So... uh, you gonna go back and yell a bit at Joly and ‘Chetta?” Marius asked, no, not hopefully, as Bossuet started to pull out the Nutella and hundreds and thousands.

“Nah,” Bossuet said, spinning around with a grin and holding a precious box in his hands. “I’ve just found Poptarts!”

Marius considered his plans for the day, considered Courfeyrac’s reaction the last time Marius had accidentally eaten some of his poptarts, and with a smile slid back into place on his stool. “Put one in for me, would you?”
Two shadows loomed over where Grantaire was slumped over a table in an all-but empty Costa. He groaned. “How did you find me?” he mumbled into his arms.

“I have eyes everywhere,” Feuilly said. “Come on, get up, let’s get you home and looking less like a homeless man...”

Hands grabbed his arms, looping under each shoulder and lifting him upright. Vaguely realising this meant there was a second person, Grantaire looked with bleary eyes first at Feuilly, then to his left, at Bahorel. “What the hell are you doing here?” he muttered, blinking his eyes in an attempt to get them to work better. He hadn’t had enough coffee. Or sleep. Or perhaps alcohol.

“Stayed with Feuilly overnight,” Bahorel said, deadpan, pulling Grantaire to his feet and looping and arm around his waist to prevent him falling right back down into his chair.

“Really?”

“No, you idiot,” Feuilly sighed. He’d released Grantaire in favour of grabbing the remains of the three quarters of uneaten millionaire shortbread still on Grantaire’s plate. “Jeremy saw you asleep through the cafe window and called me, and then I called Bahorel because I figured I’d need someone big and burly to carry you. You might be short, but you’re still too stocky for my wiry frame to be able to support you.”

“I think he just called me fat,” Grantaire said, the words coming out just as much as a blur as the world seemed to be right then. “Did he just call me fat?” he asked, rolling his head to look at Bahorel.

“Hey genius,” Bahorel asked, apparently ignoring Grantaire’s question in favour of speaking really loudly into Grantaire’s ear. “How’s your head?”

And suddenly, the world came back into focus, simultaneously with the sensation that he’d swallowed a toilet and that his forehead was between a hammer and an anvil. “Oh, fuck you,” Grantaire moaned, closing his eyes and right then deciding that he’d never open them again. He must have done some serious drinking to get... “Oh, god...”

“I think he’s starting to remember,” Bahorel said, over his head.

“I think you’re right,” Feuilly agreed. If Grantaire had had any strength left, he would have used it to swear at the two of them. “Let’s get him to the car before he starts wailing and making a scene.”

“Fuck you, I don’t wail,” Grantaire muttered, trying to be helpful and trying to get his legs to at least work a little bit, to stop Bahorel having to do all the work for him.

“Yes, you do.”

“I’m still impressed he got himself to a Costa, and ordered breakfast.”

“I’ve had a lot of practise,” Grantaire said, lifting a hand to rub his face, get the blood flowing, or something. “Jehan...”

“Yep, he’s remembering,” Feuilly sighed, fishing around in pockets, presumably for car keys.

“He hates me. God, of course he does-”
Something hit his stomach, but lightly. Good thing, or else Grantaire would have probably vomited over Bahorel. “He’s fine, and he doesn’t hate you,” Bahorel said, hefting Grantaire up to reposition his grip on him, making Grantaire mutter an apology about being so heavy, which Feuilly laughed at. “Got a text from Courfeyrac, he’s found him, he’s fine, but does think you are a huge dick.”

“Which you were,” Feuilly added, “But the only way Jehan would hate you would be if he saw how much you drank last night.”

Grantaire groaned again, and didn’t complain as Bahorel all but threw him against Feuilly’s car, just flopped against the side and grabbed at the roof to stay upright. “And...”

“Yeah, Enjolras probably does hate you,” Bahorel said, quite carelessly, “But, quite honestly, he’s feeling a lot of things right now that he doesn’t actually feel, if that makes sense.”

Grantaire shook his head as much as he dared. Still hurt like fuck. “Not at all,” he muttered, pressing his forehead the gloriously cool metal of the car.

There was a pause, where, presumably, Feuilly and Bahorel were exchanging heartfelt pitying glances overflowing with concern for Grantaire. “Right, get him in the car,” Feuilly said, tugging open the driver’s door and sliding in. Bahorel roughly manhandled Grantaire onto the backseat, which was not appreciated. “Let’s get you back to the Corinthe,” Feuilly said, clicking on the ignition as Bahorel inconsiderately slammed shut the passenger seat door. “And you can read either Civil War, or watch Gladiator, and we’ll have nachos and beer and you can sob all your man-pain out, all healthy-like and shit.”

Grantaire groaned in appreciation. He really didn’t deserve these friends.

*

The most embarrassing part of it all was how Enjolras didn’t have his keys.

So he had to wait outside his flat, like a stranger, hoping that Combeferre would be in and would open the door for him.

He did, eventually. Without a word. He didn’t even stand still long enough for Enjolras to read his expression, or lack of it. He opened the door, and immediately stepped away again, leaving Enjolras to enter the flat and close the door himself.

The flat was still clean, quiet, and empty. “Where’s your girl?” Enjolras asked, tonelessly.

“Had a paper she needed to hand in today,” Combeferre replied, just as tonelessly. He was searching beneath a blanket on his side of the sofa. “She borrowed one of my books, though, so I’ll be seeing her again.”

Enjolras nodded absently, thinking that was good, but not saying. Usually, he’d be mocking Combeferre over this.

They’d fought a bit, in the decade they’d known each other. Not enough for Enjolras to know how to behave just then.

He was saved from having to say anything by Combeferre turning back to face him, holding out Enjolras’ phone.

Momentarily confused, Enjolras frowned at the phone, before raising his gaze to look at Combeferre. His gaze was held for a few seconds, before Combeferre looked down at the phone,
and shook it. “Aren’t you going to take it?” he asked, tone slightly warmer than it had been before, but not by much. “You’ve been moaning about the lack of it enough, the past day.”

Slowly, Enjolras reached out and took back his phone. Turning the screen on, he saw a few missed messages from Courfeyrac, Bahorel – and one from Joly. And he understood. “You took this, didn’t you?”

Combeferre shifted his weight slightly, settling into a solid stance. His sleeves were rolled up, leaving his tattoo sleeve visible, and he’d lightly hooked his thumbs in his belt loops. “I did, yes,” he said calmly.

Enjolras clenched his jaw, fingers moving with a bit too much force as he clicked through each of the texts. “Are you going to explain why?”

“If you calm down,” Combeferre told him, nodding slightly. “You need to calm down, Enjolras.”

In response, Enjolras just held him his phone and scowled. “You hid my phone!” he bit out, enunciating each word.

“I know,” Combeferre said, nodding calmly again, “and I’m not just talking about that.” Before Enjolras could open his mouth to retort, Combeferre raised a hand and continued, “You can’t tell me, in full honesty, that you don’t regret some of the things you said last night.”

Clenching his teeth together, Enjolras looked away from Combeferre, eyes not really focusing on anything as they darted over the flat. His fingers were moving without conscious decision, clicking through the texts he’d missed, not really reading them. “Is... has anyone...”

“I’ve not heard anything recent, last I heard Bahorel had been called out by Feuilly to help find him,” Combeferre said, coolly and unflinchingly blunt. “And yes, that’s your fault and something you need to fix.” There was a pause, as Combeferre took in a deep breath. “But, I will step up like a man and admit that I’m not exempt of blame.”

Enjolras’ head jerked up, eyes wide.

Combeferre rolled his eyes, as if amused, but mainly annoyed by Enjolras’ surprise. “I am capable of admitting my faults,” Combeferre protested lightly.


“Are you going to listen to my apology or not?” Combeferre cut across, and Enjolras fell silent. “I’m sorry. I should not have kept that text from you. It was... a misguided attempt to try and help you... recover. I know you needed a distraction from Lemarque’s death, needed time to accept the loss and I erroneously thought that by letting you believe you had the NHS cause to fight for, for a bit longer, that would provide that distraction, and an outlet. After that, you would be mentally recovered and we could return to normal. But I was wrong. I didn’t factor in Joly letting slip the news whilst you were under the influence, nor did I factor the impact that your feelings for Grantaire would have on your... quite frankly, on your everything.”

It was as if Enjolras’ emotions couldn’t decide what he should be feeling. His mouth opened and closed a few times, eyes either frowning or trying to keep from crying, he couldn’t actually tell. “No, I – I guess...”

“None of that excuses you from your behaviour which, really Enjolras, was completely abominable,” Combeferre said, but his stance was relaxing now, hands out of his pockets and crossing over his chest. This Combeferre, this disapproval Enjolras knew, and, strangely, it was
comforting. He felt like a teenager who’d fucked up, and it was nice to know that Combeferre was still there to kick his ass back to common sense. “You’ve got a lot to make up for.”

“I know,” Enjolras muttered. “I know...”

“But,” Combeferre interrupted again, “I’ve got to make up for stuff, too. I said some stupid shit last night too. So, yes. I’m sorry.”

Enjolras nodded, accepting the apology. He shifted his jaw from side to side as he thought. “Okay,” he said slowly, considering each word before he spoke. “My turn. I’m sorry I’ve been a grief-driven, thoughtless, insensitive, illogical dickhead the last few days. I have royally fucked up in many ways. Will you please help me rectify the problems that my idiocy has caused?”

Smiling, finally, Combeferre gave Enjolras a very slight, formal bow. “It would be my privilege,” he said.

“Well, you’re the only one qualified enough,” Enjolras pointed out, attempting a smile himself. The action didn’t feel as disastrous as he’d anticipated. “Uh,” he said, feeling vaguely awkward, “this is where we hug, yes?”

He looked up, to see Combeferre chewing his lip as he thought, considering the proposition as seriously as business proposition. “Yes, I think so,” he said, nodding. As Enjolras only nodded back, still slightly too confused, shocked, and guilt-stricken – yes, he could admit that now – to move, Combeferre rolled his eyes and stepped forwards himself, tugging at Enjolras’ coat sleeve. From there, Enjolras moved on autopilot, wrapping his arms around his childhood friend, a man he definitely couldn’t have lived without. He let his eyes rest on the cashmere of Combeferre’s jumper for a few seconds as they both gave manly pats on the back.

“I’m a dick,” Enjolras muttered into Combeferre’s jumper. Gods knew how many concessions to his pride he’d confessed in the same way.

“Yes, believe it or not, I am aware of that,” Combeferre replied, patting Enjolras’ back a bit more. Enjolras half laughed, half sobbed against his shoulder. “Oh, shush. It can be fixed. It is, undeniably, the biggest shit creek you’ve got yourself up, though, and you’re going to have to swallow your fucking pride indefinitely.”

Starting to pull back, Enjolras groaned. “Oh, please, no, anything but that,” he said, and Combeferre’s lips twitched into a smile.

“Well you could always be miserable for the rest of your life?” Combeferre offered instead, hand lingering on Enjolras’ shoulder for one last comforting pat, before stepping back and slipping his hands into his jeans pockets once more.

Enjolras groaned again. “Oh, I hate you.”

Combeferre smiled smugly. “You keep telling yourself that.” Enjolras rolled his eyes at that, causing Combeferre’s smile to widen that little bit. He turned away, heading to the sofa. An open laptop and selection of books indicated that, prior to Enjolras’ interruption, Combeferre had been working on a paper of some sort. Enjolras watched him return to his studies for a second, before turning his focus back to his phone, scanning the few texts he’d missed.

After a while, Combeferre spoke again. “Are you still determined to attend this illegal protest Bahorel keeps mentioning?”

Enjolras glanced up, eyes narrowed, before looking back down at his phone. “How did you know I
"It’s another outlet," Combeferre said calmly, eyes scanning a line from a textbook. “Not to mention a cause you’ve always felt strongly about. And you are, aren’t you?”

Unsure as to where Combeferre was going with this, still feeling vaguely unsteady, Enjolras hesitated, fingers hovering over the keypad of his phone before he answered. “It’ll be dangerous, and yes, illegal, but also very... loud. So yeah, I am.”

“Then you’d better find me details, hadn’t you?” Combeferre said lightly, wriggling his nose to push his glasses higher up as he turned to look up at Enjolras.

Enjolras raised his head and narrowed his eyes at Combeferre. “You’re not going to talk me out of it?” he asked cautiously.

“Apparently not,” Combeferre replied dryly. “I mean, it’s still a nightmare idea that’s likely to get us all arrest records and possibly even end up in court, and Bahorel will be in there with us so there’ll really be no hope, but, as is my duty, I will support you if you decide to take part in it.”

Grateful, so fucking grateful to have this man as his friend, Enjolras started to smile. “You will?” he checked.

Combeferre rolled his eyes. “God help me, but yes. I said... last night, I said what was possibly the stupidest thing I’ve said since I was twelve, and I asked that teacher that question about cats. I said that the government won’t listen to students. I shall correct that statement now – they don’t want to listen to a group of young men. I guess it’s down to us to show them why they should.”

For a moment, Enjolras smiled. Then he dropped his phone onto the table and moved to collapse on the sofa beside Combeferre. “You’re starting to sound like one of Courfeyrac’s TV shows,” he warned, leaning over Combeferre’s shoulder to read the word document visible on the laptop screen.

“You shut your mouth, and I might let you help me as I utterly destroy Berkley in under 2,000 words,” Combeferre said. And an offer like that was something Enjolras would never be able to refuse.

* * *

“Aw, you fucker! You fucker!”

“Ha! Take that! Suck on second place, you German bastard!”

It had taken seventeen laps before Feuilly had given up and slid to the floor, surrendering the small sofa to the combined stocky muscle mass of Grantaire and Bahorel. He was now sat on the floor between the legs of the two of them, which, actually, suited him better. He had more room to flail around when the drivers did something as atrocious as Webber had done just then. “No way. No fucking way,” Feuilly protested, taking a hearty swig from his beer before swallowing and continuing, “He knocked Vettel’s rear wheel, he wasn’t even fucking subtle about it. Steward’s Enquiry, watch this fucking space, enquiry.”

Bahorel laughed and reached forwards to ruffle Feuilly’s hair. “Just ‘cause you’re a sore loser. Nah, c’mon, stop your whinging, you know Vettel’s still miles ahead on points. But we’ve got to have a home boy winning Silverstone!”

Grantaire snorted, spinning to brandish his bottle at Bahorel. “Webber’s Australian, dumbass.”
“He lives in Milton Keynes, cocksucker. Adopted local boy. Good enough for me.”

Feuilly jabbed his elbow against Bahorel’s knee. “You disloyal, fickle twat. There’s still a good fifteen laps, he could still lose this.”

“Webber’s out in front, and you think someone’s going to overtake him?” Bahorel shoved Feuilly’s head to the side. “Fat fucking chance.”

Reluctantly, Grantaire nodded. “The devil himself would have to rise and burst his tires, to get him out from first place now,” he sighed, taking a commiserating gulp of beer.

Feuilly didn’t seem so willing to give up hope. “Alonso’s on form though,” he protested, waving the bottleneck towards his TV. “And he takes no shit from the Red Bull team. Watch this space.”

Grantaire started to laugh as Bahorel grabbed Feuilly’s hair to tilt his head back, to meet his eyes. “You’d rather Alonso won than Webber?”

“I’d rather fucking Red Bull stopped winning every fucking race!”

Grantaire just roared with laughter as Bahorel spluttered on his beer in his rush to explain why, precisely, Feuilly was being an ignorant cock. Watching the trained lawyer and stubborn Scot go up against each other, debating the Formula One, was the funniest thing Grantaire had seen in years.

He kept grinning as his phone buzzed in his pocket, barely looking away from them as he pulled it out. Text from his network saying his monthly bundle had been renewed.

Not Jehan checking in, then.

Continuing to grin as Feuilly mercilessly attacked Ferrari’s pit-stops, Grantaire slipped his phone away again and moved to take a sip of beer, entirely out of reflex. The glass had touched his lips before he paused, and changed his mind, setting it on the floor beside the sofa.

He didn’t usually watch the Grand Prix, had only watched it with Feuilly a few times. But he was enjoying it. He was finding it distracted him from how shitty his life was just then.

*  

Jehan smiled as he peered over his shoulder, absently watching Courfeyrac through the glass of the cinema foyer doors. His hand was moving on autopilot, moving strawbs and cola bottles from the sharing size pick ‘n’ mix bag into his mouth.

He didn’t actually know who Courfeyrac was speaking to on the phone, as Courfeyrac had only had time to swear very wearily, wave the buzzing phone apologetically at Jehan before diving to the quieter outside to take the call. Jehan would take a guess at Combeferre, perhaps. There were only a few people whose calls Courfeyrac would feel so compelled to answer, and he was being too polite – that is, seeming to actually listen to the person on the other end, and replying with minimal smirking – for it to be Enjolras.

Courfeyrac’s flickered over, and caught Jehan’s gaze. He smiled upon seeing him, then rolled his eyes. Jehan grinned and nodded sympathetically, before Courfeyrac spun away to rant some more. Jehan turned his own attention back to the bag of pick ‘n’ mix, flicking through the contents until he found a cube of fudge he could chew on.

It was lucky that they’d arrived with plenty of time until the film. That tends to happen when you
just go there, without planning ahead. Gives you plenty of time to chat, people watch, and make a
start on the snacks.

It wasn’t very long until Courfeyrac returned, pulling grumpy faces at his phone before shoving it
into the pockets of his very tight, quite possibly designer and definitely well fitting jeans.

Jehan liked those jeans.

“Sorry, sorry,” Courfeyrac said, swinging himself around and onto the plushie bench beside Jehan,
stretching over and sticking his hand into the pick ‘n’ mix. Jehan just tilted it towards him to give
him better access. “Mother dearest. Can’t exactly hang up on your own mother, now, can you?”

His mum? Jehan grinned. “I thought you might be talking to Combeferre,” he confessed.

Courfeyrac snorted, before throwing a jelly bean into his mouth. “I see why you might have
thought that, but no. Mother. Twenty-two years old, and she still believes I need a fortnight’s
forewarning for my dad’s birthday, when, in fact, I am so super organised that I not only have a
present for him, but also have picked out a card that Enjolras and Combeferre can give to him,
too.”

Jehan smiled at that. “You’ve really been friends for a long time, haven’t you?”

“For our sins, yes,” Courfeyrac said, grinning, relaxing back into the cushions of the chair,
wriggling himself closer so their shoulders were pressed lightly together. Not really caring, Jehan
tilted his head so it rested on Courfeyrac’s shoulder, and Courfeyrac paused his talking to press a
quick kiss to Jehan’s temple. “Those two for even longer before I came along, too. I met them both
at the start of GCSEs, so... just over six years ago, wow, that’s a long time... And my mum’s the
kind of mum that will adopt any stray creature, so put Enjolras in front of her, what with his errant
ways and rebellious ways – he wore eyeliner back then, did I tell you? – and his less than attentive,
workaholic parents, and she decided that I must be friends with him.” Courfeyrac was embellishing
his tale with dramatic use of his hands, as he always did, and a remarkable range of facial
expressions, each and every one of which could make Jehan laugh. He was finding himself
chewing on the straw of the slush puppy as he grinned and listened attentively. “Thankfully, of
course, I did get on with him, otherwise mother dearest inviting him around for family dinners
would have been very awkward.”

Jehan laughed, and Courfeyrac grinned at him. “And Combeferre?”

“Oh, that smooth talker,” Courfeyrac said, rolling his eyes and accepting Jehan’s prompt with
gusto. “As if any mother could resist that cashmere jumper wearing, Antiques Roadshow watching,
stamp collecting A* student. All bollocks, of course, he was just as rebellious as Enjolras in reality,
if sans the eyeliner and occasional fag. But, though his parents weren’t quite as conservative as
Enjolras, they still weren’t as liberal as mine, so he’d perfected the star son act. Which, of course,
just paved the way for his younger siblings to go insane when they hit the teenage years... if you
get invited to a Combeferre family meal, say no.”

“Will do,” Jehan promised, grinning. Courfeyrac seemed to calm down, hands resting on his lap
and smile softening as he watched Jehan. Content in the silence for a little while longer, Jehan just
smiled back.

Eventually, Courfeyrac reached out, slipping his hands around Jehan’s on the plastic cup as he tried
to take the slush puppy from him. “And your parents?” he prompted carefully, wrapping his lips
around the straw and slurping as he watched Jehan attentively.
Jehan chewed his lip, considering for a second. “They sound more like your parents than Enjolras’. Though perhaps not as...”

“Forceful?” Courfeyrac suggested tactfully, with a wink, and Jehan laughed.

“Yes, that. Um. Mum’s Scandinavian, Swedish, but she’s lived in London for just over twenty years now, so... she works for a publishing company, came here for business, met dad, stayed.”

“All very romantic, and worthy parentage for a poet,” Courfeyrac conceded, toasting the tale with the slushie before resuming slurping.

“Well, my dad kind of breaks the literature theme – he’s a civil engineer, and no, I’m not quite sure what that is either,” Jehan cut in before the standard question could be asked, grinning as Courfeyrac chuckled around the straw. “Uh... I guess my parents are conservative in some ways – books versus eBooks, that type of thing – but, thankfully, they’re, uh, a bit more progressive in more important areas.” Courfeyrac frowned, and, realising he’d have to clarify a bit more, Jehan sighed and added, “My dad laughed when I came out. In a good way, of course,” he added hurriedly and Courfeyrac’s eyes turned huge. “In a kinda of, ‘yes we know you dramatic sod’, way,” Jehan said, momentarily attempting his father’s deeper voice, and triggering Courfeyrac to laugh again.

“Actually, that’s the one thing about Enjolras’ life choices his parents don’t give a shit about,” Courfeyrac said, when he was able to speak again. “The rest of it – his political stance, preference for music with more screaming and less lyrics – they elect to ignore. Though they don’t mind so much, now that he’s thrown away his eyeliner.” Courfeyrac smirked at the end, probably at some memory.

“Shame,” Jehan said lightly, innocently, hiding his own smirk well. “I think Grantaire could dig a bit of guyliner.” Courfeyrac snorted into the slushie, and Jehan laughed at him. “And my mum didn’t have a thing for strays, but she did have a thing for talent, so the neighbour’s kid who spent most his time sat in the street, drawing stunning sketches? Used the pretence of hiring him as a baby-sitter for me. I’m pretty sure he’d seen right through it from the start, but I like to think I was good enough company to make him stick around,” Jehan finished cheerfully, snatching back the slushie before Courfeyrac finished it all.

“Babysitter?” Courfeyrac echoed, frowning as he thought. “So you must have been quite young, then, when you met?”

Jehan nodded. “He was my neighbour since I was about seven, I can’t really remember, but mum started ‘hiring’ him – a.k.a giving him free art equipment – when I was about... twelve? He was fifteen, I think.”

“And... Grantaire’s parents?” Courfeyrac asked, hesitantly, as if he was almost too scared to ask.

“A workaholic mother, and a father who ran away when he was eight. His sister was – still is – sent off to boarding school,” Jehan said tonelessly and without preamble. He tensed in the silence that followed. Reactions to Grantaire’s family could be... upsetting.

But of course, he needn’t have worried. Courfeyrac simply frowned with combination of sadness and anger which caused Jehan felt a flash of warmth for him. “I guess that explains a lot, actually,” Courfeyrac muttered.

“Yeah,” Jehan sighed. “A lot of people say that.”
Though the conversation had taken a distinctly sombre route, it didn’t take long before Courfeyrac had Jehan laughing again. By the time the screen they were waiting for was opened, Jehan was blushing with happiness as their entwined hands were swung between them enthusiastically by a laughing Courfeyrac, who lead them straight to the empty back row of the darkened room.

* 

“Your phone, it is buzzing.”

“Is it? Good for it.”

“It is buzzing loudly.”

“Mm, it does that.”

“Joly. It is on my piano.”

“Then move it?”

Musichetta resisted the urge to throw something at the grumpier half of her two boys. This was made easier by how the only things really in reach were her violin, a few thick music books, a metronome, and the piano. And though most of the listed objects would cause a good level of damage to Joly, they would, unfortunately, receive some damage themselves, and Musichetta wasn’t willing to risk that. Also, she didn’t think she’d be able to lift the piano.

“Actually, could you pass it over, I need to Google something.”

“You are on the other side of the room.”

“Mm?”

Then again, Musichetta mused irately, there was also Joly’s phone within reach. “Very well,” she said, snatching up the phone, “Here!”

She spun on the piano stool to face where Joly was slouched on the couch, where he had been since he’d got out of their bed a few hours ago, watching various documentaries about nothing in particular and dozing in and out of consciousness. Joly didn’t deal with hangovers well.

The phone flew from Musichetta’s hand, arched across the room, and made Joly yelp pleasantly as it landed on his stomach. “There you go, cariño!” Musichetta said sweetly, in a sing-song voice.

There were some vague grumbling sounds from the direction of the couch, and Musichetta smiled affectionately.

“Oh, it’s a snapchat!” Joly called over, shuffling upright and beckoning Musichetta over. “From Bossuet.”

“What has our lovable Calamity Jane done, this time?” Musichetta asked wearily, pushing herself upright and holding her skirt up slightly as she walked, so it didn’t catch on the many books, shoes, or unidentifiable broken pieces on the floor. She’d only tidied up the other day. Her pair were impossible to housetrain, it would seem.

Joly didn’t reply, instead waiting until she was leaning over his shoulder to click on the snapchat. It revealed a badly taken selfie of Bossuet and Marius, both grinning, both holding poptarts, and the caption ‘hate u 2 running away w/ M he has poptarts!!! xoxo’.
They both watched, until the picture vanished ten seconds later and Joly said, “Do you think we were a bit too cruel, telling him-”

Musichetta shut him up by lightly slapping the back of his head, entirely affectionately. “Don’t be so silly,” she chastised, tutting. “As if you, and all your hungover grumpiness could have dealt with him this morning without committing murder. No, it was a kindness. And besides, he will return.”

Joly paused again, tilting his head as he thought. Eventually, he tilted his head back to look up at her, and suggested, “Pouts?”

Musichetta grinned proudly down at him. She leant forwards to peck at his lips quickly, before echoing in confirmation, “Pouts.”

Chuckling lightly, Joly shuffled upright, and Musichetta crouched into position, her chin resting on Joly’s bare shoulder. Joly raised his phone, and, in unison, they both pouted at the camera. They both checked the photo, deeming it cute enough, showing just enough ‘Chetta cleavage and how Joly was still topless, and sent it back to Bossuet without caption.

It was barely a minute later when they got a reply; a picture of a half-on pair of scuffed trainers and the desperate caption ‘ON MY WAY!!!’

Joly’s head fell right back as he laughed, and Musichetta took the opportunity to kiss her ridiculous, grumpy, hangover idiot soundly.

* 

“Where do you keep the flour, again?”

Combeferre shot upright, book falling off his chest and bouncing off the coffee table onto the floor. “You what?” he asked, panic seeping into his tone.

“The flour,” Enjolras repeated, voice coming from behind the kitchen counter. “I could have sworn the last time I found it back here...”

He’d had plans to nap on the sofa. Well, he hadn’t, he’d had plans to re-read the Meditations, refresh his memory, but reading the Meditations always turned into a napping session.

No chance of a nap now.

“The last time you found the flour was over a year ago,” Combeferre muttered, rising to his feet and striding around to the kitchen as fast as he could without attempting parkour. “Because it was after finals week. You were baking away your stress. Please tell me you don’t plan on stress baking.”

Enjolras snorted. “What? No. I just... got the urge.” There was a victory cry as he finally found the flour. He surged upright, grinning at the box. “And what’s wrong with my baking, anyway?”

“I don’t think our insurance will cover it!” Combeferre said, trying to keep the hysterics at bay. Deep breaths. Deep breaths. “What are you thinking of trying to cook?” he asked calmly, hands clenched together behind his back and eyes darting over to his precious non-stick pans.

“I don’t know, I was thinking cookies? They’re simple, aren’t they? I was just seeing what we have in, first,” Enjolras muttered, setting the flour on the side and crouching to look in Combeferre’s cooking cupboard again. “We have chocolate, yeah? Or I could just put raisins in them...”
Combeferre made a non-committal noise, and backed away. When he felt he was a safe distance away, he rushed over to where his phone was. He grabbed it, and sent out a mass text message.

*The time has come for desperate measures. Enjolras has started stress baking.*

Bahorel’s sudden and unexpected booming laughter – especially so as Webber’s team had just cocked up a pit stop – made Feuilly jump so hard he almost spilt his beer. “What?” he demanded furiously, turning his head to glare up at the bigger man.

Grinning in a way that was a little terrifying, Bahorel held his phone for Feuilly to read the text from Combeferre. Feuilly sniggered and, in unison, the two of them glanced down to the other end of the sofa, where Grantaire was slouched, holding firmly onto his second donut, and around his third bag of crisps.

Under Feuilly’s muttered directions, Bahorel took a sly photo of the moping man, and sent it back to Combeferre.

*Everyone’s favourite street artist, stress eating. Do we need more proof they’re soul mates?*

The reply, a few minutes later:

*If they don’t get an abhorrent and disgusting happy ever after, I will snap and kill many, many people.*

The two Thernadier siblings arrived at the flat just in time for lunch, and the coincidence was lost on no one. Eponine greeted Bahorel by insulting him and punching his ear lightly, whereas the younger avoided all human contact entirely and headed straight for the fridge.

It seemed food wasn’t as important for Eponine, however, and she just jumped over Feuilly’s head, landing on the sofa in the far too small space between Grantaire and Bahorel and subsequently causing Bahorel to start cursing her for nearly breaking his hand.

“I need that hand, you blind dick!” he kept yelling, waving the reddening hand in her face. “This is my best punching hand!”

Feuilly started to laugh at Bahorel’s misery, making Bahorel demonstrate his punching by knocking Feuilly upside the back of his head, meaning Eponine could snort and point out how his hand couldn’t be hurting that much, and Gavroche was yelling across the room to ask where Feuilly kept the Irn Bru these days and if he had any Pringles and Grantaire...

Grantaire was starting to get a headache.

He loved these people, he really did, even the big dude was a new addition to the team but, it wasn’t – he couldn’t – they didn’t – they weren’t –

He wasn’t in the mood for them, and the noise and rough physical affection that came with them all.

If anyone noticed as he quietly rose to his feet, set down the drink he was holding and left the room, they were kind enough not to say anything.
Combeferre knew Enjolras would prefer to be left alone, and was quite happy to oblige. He was in
his room, Bring Me The Horizon playing quietly from his speakers as he worked on one of the
more recent assignments from his class. More onerous than the articles he got to write for the
university’s magazine, but still something that had to be done.

He was just under the three thousand word target when he heard the inevitable crash from the
kitchen.

This wasn’t entirely unusual. The huge, half-choked yelled swearing that followed it was.

Suddenly concerned, Combeferre shoved his laptop to the side and slipped off his bed, half-jogging
to the kitchen. “What happened?” he asked, before he could take in what was before him.

Enjolras was leaning on the island counter unit, palms pressed onto the wood, arms locked straight
and head hung down. His hair had fallen down to cover his face, but the muscles in his arms were
shaking and he wasn’t breathing as steadily as he should be. As Combeferre cautiously stepped
closer, he saw the floor was littered with shards of glass and ceramic.

“Drop a bowl?” Combeferre asked, having to walk on his tiptoes to avoid the shards that
surrounded Enjolras.

“How did you guess?” Enjolras replied wryly, hands clenching and unclenching rhythmically on
the edge of the counter. Combeferre stood a few paces away, waiting, until finally Enjolras let out
a long breath, and raised his head. He smiled faintly at Combeferre. “Tried carrying the tray of
cookies and mixing bowl at the same time. Dropped them just before I got to the sink.”

“You plonker,” Combeferre said affectionately, taking those final steps around the counter to
Enjolras’ side. Sure enough, at the floor by his feet, there was a pile of small, slightly too brown
cookies. He bent to pick one up, but something red caught his eye. Frowning, he flicked a finger at
Enjolras’ ankle, making him lift up his foot so Combeferre could get a better look. Sure enough,
there was a small cut just below his little toe. “You’re injured yourself,” he tutted, picking up a few
cookies before standing upright again. “Budge, budge. Let’s get to safety, please.”

Enjolras obliged, and the two of them moved to a clean area of floor, walking vaguely like failing
acrobatics. Having reached the other side of the counter, the two of them slid down to the floor,
leaning back against the cupboard doors. Apparently either too tired or too fed up to bother playing
the tough guy, Enjolras winced as his arse hit the tiled floor, and he immediately went to check his
foot.

“Stings?” Combeferre asked, proffering one of the cookies.

“It’s fucking tiny, of course it stings,” Enjolras muttered, but he set his foot back down and took
the cookie anyway.

Combeferre smirked at him, before biting into a cookie. “Huh,” he said, “you haven’t actually
fucked this up.”

“I added almost twice as much sugar,” Enjolras muttered in admission, but a smile was tugging at
his lips.

“Luckily for you, I like sweet things.”

“Ironic, for someone with such a sour nature.”
“Shut up, and be grateful I’m eating your damned cooking at all,” Combeferre ordered, and Enjolras laughed.

They finished off their small cookies in silence, sat on the clean part of the kitchen floor.

Combeferre thought, as Enjolras licked crumbs off his fingers. “It’s late in the afternoon, yes?”

“Mm. Why?”

“Just thinking,” Combeferre said, “It’s late enough, we could summon the others here to discuss the protest, and if we’re lucky they might just offer to help clean up that mess, too.”

Enjolras turned his head to catch Combeferre’s eye. He smiled, and Combeferre knew that he’d caught everything that Combeferre hadn’t said. As always. “Good idea,” Enjolras said. “Let’s do it.”

“Though we possibly shouldn’t try and use them to get rid of the cookies, that’s just too cruel. Joly would just start panicking about food poisoning again—”

“Hey!”

* * *

The painting had started off, like the remake of Dicksee’s *Belle Dame*, as a recreation of a Pre-Raphaelite classic. He couldn’t have told you when he decided to switch the flowers in the lake for pages from beauty magazines, the petals for flashes of red... and with the way her wrists were raised in the original, it was too easy to draw a bleeding red line across them.

Nor could he have told you when the figure turned from a woman to a blonde-haired male.

He’d never been able to capture the clear detail that was so central to the artwork of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. His artwork was a lot more smudged, smooth lines and indistinct shapes, blurred figures – except for the faces, the faces were always clear. But, he thought – okay, hoped, he hoped – that his style suited the reinterpretations, making the changes less obvious, more subtle.

He stopped drinking once the background was complete and once he understood what he was doing.

Something Feuilly said once, in one of his rare moments of genuine anger, came back to him, and he smiled. It was after one of the first times Feuilly had had to carry Grantaire home after a night out, the first time he’d carried the student up to his rented room, had helped carry him into his room and had seen the careful paintings neatly propped up against the walls. *You respect these paintings more than your respect yourself,* he’d yelled.

*Of course I do,* Grantaire had said back, too drunk to be able to filter out things like feelings and emotions. *They’re worth more. And they’re far more beautiful.*

He’d drink to get an idea. He’d drink and paint, sure, he did that all the time, get drunk and stick a paintbrush in his hand and he’d be a happy man. Or simple things, block shapes and block colours, templates for street art, touch ups on other things, posters that would last for just a few days, sure, hand him a beer and he’ll do it in a few hours, max.

But he’d never paint and drink. A small distinction, but one that he stuck to.

Gavroche popped into the back room to say goodbye at one point, he’d lost how much time had
passed since then as there was no clock in the room. However, he did remember he’d been working on the basic tones of the background, and that had been a fair while ago.

“Have you eaten anything since you snuck oh-so subtly away?” a voice said suddenly.

Grantaire glanced up from mixing reds to see Bahorel standing in the doorway, leaning against the frame and grinning down at him. “What time is it?” he asked, returning his attention to his paints.

“’bout five-thirty, six?”

Genuinely surprised by the answer, Grantaire’s head turned sharply to look back at Bahorel. He didn’t seem to be lying. “And you’re still here?” he asked, amused.

Bahorel shrugged. “What can I say. So many surfaces to fuck upon, so little time...”

There was a very long pause, as Grantaire processed the comment. “You and Feuilly have been fucking?” he echoed in disbelief.

“No,” Feuilly said, voice seemingly coming from nowhere until Bahorel was pushed forwards, out of his position in the doorway, and Feuilly appeared. “We fucking definitely have not been fucking, he’s just being a... shithead.”

“You were going to say fucker, weren’t you?” Grantaire asked him, amused.

“Maybe,” Feuilly replied, sounding mutinous. “We just popped by to say we’re off – you’re the last person left in the building.”

Grantaire tried not to think of how that meant Jehan was still out. “Both of you? Together?”

Bahorel shrugged. “Ran out of surfaces-”

He didn’t get any further, before Feuilly elbowed him hard enough to make him cough.

“Separately. Bahorel got summoned, and I’m going to the pub with Theodule-”

“That’s the ex-army lieutenant that does those really emotional gritty war paintings, yeah?”

“Yeah, that dude, I’m going to see if I can him to use my place to hold another showing again, because we got so much traffic the last time he was here.”

Grantaire nodded, but Bahorel scowled. “I think my explanation was a lot more interesting,” he said. Feuilly stamped his heel onto Bahorel’s toes that time.

“You don’t need to worry about the shop, it’s been shut all day anyway so opening it now would probably be a bit fucking stupid,” Feuilly said, and Grantaire rolled his eyes.

“Are you ever going to stick to sensible opening times?” he asked, smirking.

Feuilly glared at him.

“Well, I’m off,” Bahorel cut in, and pointing a thumb over his shoulder at the door. “See you later, bud,” he called to Grantaire, giving him a mock salute. Knowing full well that Grantaire was watching, then proceeded to wink at Feuilly and say, “Call me, baby.”

That punch Feuilly gave him was definitely going to bruise.

And yet, the larger man was still roaring with laughter as he left the back room, and walked
through the shop to the exit.

Feuilly winced, shaking his hand out and flexing his fingers. “This for your course, or for pleasure?” he asked, stepping forwards to look at the painting.

“Not sure,” Grantaire muttered. “Possibly both. I mean, I can fit it into the syllabus, vaguely, but…”

“I get what you mean,” Feuilly muttered. He reached out a hand, fingers tracing the shapes starting to form but not touching the canvas. It went without saying that he’d recognise the Pre-Raphaelite influence instantly. After his hand dropped back down to his side, he started to nod slowly. “Yeah, I like it. You might want to modernise the surrounding bushes as well, though, make them brambles and thorns, add some litter, otherwise the contrast of eras might come across too sharp. You’ve got the lighting down to a T, though. And it suits your style perfectly.”

Grantaire tilted his head to the side, considering his painting and the advice, before sighing and shaking his head. “Why can’t you be one my professors, rather than the stuck up twats at the university,” he muttered, setting down the paintbrush he was holding and picking up a tube of a grey.

“Because I have fuck all qualifications, and for some reason, hands-on experience counts for shit in learning institutes,” Feuilly said, sounding rather cheerful about his lot. He gave Grantaire a friendly pat on the back and turned to leave, but the still not quite finished painting from the day before caught his attention before he’d taken so much as a step. The one with Bahorel and him in the place of the knight and the Belle Dame.

Seeing him turn towards it, Grantaire bit back a smirk and tried to hide behind a facade of seriousness and busily painting. It was highly doubtful that this would stop him getting a bollocking, but it might lessen Feuilly’s wrath slightly.

Feuilly narrowed his eyes at the painting, pointed at it, gaped, and finally turned to Grantaire and asked, “Is that...?”

Shrugging, Grantaire held up both hands as if in surrender. “Hey, it’s not my fault you’re a stunning ginger Pre-Raphaelite beauty,” he said.

Feuilly glared at him for a bit longer, before turning and striding out of the room, leaving a trail of curses and complaints behind him.

Watching him over his shoulder, Grantaire smiled faintly. Then he turned back to his painting, picking up darker colours as he started to work on the polluted background.

* *

“You summoned me, Dark Liege?” Bahorel asked, bowing when Combeferre opened the door.

Combeferre’s lips twitched, but he stepped aside to let Bahorel enter anyway. “You need to stop watching those Historical Fantasy shows.”

Bahorel just grinned at him. “You need to get yourself more cultured, my friend. My house, lots of beer, lots of popcorn, and season one of Game of Thrones. Just name the date.”

“I’ll let you know when I actually start to give a damn,” Combeferre dryly retorted right back.

Five steps into the flat, Bahorel spotted Marius, Joly and Musichetta cleaning up glass and ceramic from the floor, and spun straight back around to walk out of the flat. “Hell no, I am not helping you
“Sit your ass the fuck down, Bahorel,” Enjolras called across the flat from where he and Bossuet were leaning against the furthest wall from the skin slicing shards. Most probably more for Bossuet’s benefit than Enjolras.

Bahorel threw a middle finger in the direction of the smirking Enjolras, but did as instructed, flopping onto the sofa. “You got any crisps?” he asked, rolling his head around. “I haven’t eaten since lunch, I’m starving-”

“We’ve got cookies?” Marius suggested, leaning back on his feet and pausing scraping up glass for a second.

Grinning, Bahorel beckoned at him. With surprisingly good aim, Marius chucked one of the cookies at him. He caught it neatly in one hand, and lifted it to eye level to inspect it carefully. Having realised the cookie did not meet his required standards, he looked back across to Enjolras. “You made this?” he asked, brandishing the small brown disc of supposedly edible material. Enjolras shrugged an affirmation.

Sometimes, Bahorel was offended by how gullible his friends seem to think he was. He shook his head in disappointment at their poor efforts, before chucking the cookie to back from whence it came. “If you think,” he drawled, “that you can use me to get rid of those cookies...”

“Was worth a shot,” Marius said, only yelping slightly as he dodged the cookie.

“So if we’re not here to catch food poisoning,” Bahorel sighed, slumping further down into the sofa and resting his arms along the back rest, effectively taking up the whole thing, “why have we been summoned?”

“No idea,” Bossuet contributed who, impossibly, but then also perhaps typically, was munching his way through one of Enjolras’ cookies. “We were told we had to wait for you.”

Feeling it’d be a bit too ‘Captain Obvious’ for him to point out that he was now here, Bahorel just looked from Bossuet to Enjolras, and raised an eyebrow.

“The protest for student fees,” Enjolras said calmly, not so much as shifting his weight or moving his arms, just standing there. “I was wondering if you could tell us more about it?”

Bahorel had survived through too many shocking revelations in courtrooms to let his shock show through anything more than a blink. He turned to look at Combeferre. The second in command did nothing more than nod ever so slightly, and, if anything, that was what stunned Bahorel the most.

But it was a permission and instruction in one, so – though something in his heart was ridiculously reluctant, and he wasn’t even sure he believed in the ‘heart’ – he got his thoughts in order, and began to relate everything he knew about Montparnasse’s plan.

* 

She found him crouched in front of his painting, rocking slightly, and rubbing his hands through his hair. There was paint on the floor, over his clothes, his skin, and a large percentage of his usually black hair was stained grass green or blood red. The only thing paint-free was a glass near his feet, and while it had, presumably, held a drink at one point in the day, it was now bone-dry.

“How long until you’ve had something to eat or drink?” Eponine asked, closing the door softly so not to startle him.
Rather than reply verbally, Grantaire just groaned into his hands.

Laughing slightly, Eponine stepped up behind him and looped her hands under his arms, pulling him upright. “C’mon, you need to get some food, and some mindless relaxation,” she said, hefting with all her strength as he slowly unfurled upright. “Let me guess, getting a headache?”

“Nothing I can’t handle,” Grantaire muttered, rubbing his head again. “I thought you’d gone? Feuilly said—”

“Left stuff behind,” Eponine explained, brushing the question aside. “Have you finished it?”

Grantaire seemed to find the question amusing. “No, not at all.”

She shrugged. “Well, it looks good, anyway.”

When he didn’t reply, just rubbed paint-wet hands through his hair and stared at the painting, she wrapped her arms around his waist. “You’re a dipstick,” she muttered, resting her chin on his shoulder.

He laughed, and she smiled. “Where’d you hear that word?”

“Jehan,” Eponine admitted, regretting it instantly as Grantaire tensed. She squeezed his waist again. “Go to your flat,” she suggested, “Put something really bad on the TV, eat something that’ll make your arteries clog up, and then get some sleep.”

Moaning as if in surrender, Grantaire turned to face her, wrapping his own arms back around her, one around her shoulders and clinging to her upper arm. “I probably should,” he admitted, pressing a light kiss to her forehead.

Eponine let him hold him for a few long moments, taking some comfort from the hug herself. But before long she came to her usual realisation that she was feeling far more emotion than she deemed safe, and she punched him lightly in the stomach. Grantaire laughed, and the emotion of the moment shattered. Eponine continued to lightly pummel his stomach until he had let her go. “You stupid sod, get upstairs before I have to drag you up!”

But he paused, his head tilting to the side as he considered her, and frowned.

Suddenly feeling self-conscious, she narrowed her eyes back at him. “What?”

“Nothing,” he said, dismissing her concerns with a smile. “I just... got an idea.”

“Well, deal with it upstairs,” she grumbled, grabbing the end of a sleeve splattered with grey paint and tugging him forwards. “Your canvases will still be here tomorrow.”

He followed willingly and she led him every step of the way, through the shop, up the staircase until they were outside his flat. “Rest, and eat,” she ordered him again, and he chuckled.

“Yeah, yeah,” he muttered, before unlocking the door and letting himself in. He turned back and smiled at her once more, before shutting the door and leaving her alone in the corridor.

For a few more minutes she stared at the door, chewing her lip. There was never any guarantee that Grantaire wouldn’t try and sneak back down to the escapist safety of his artwork, rather than tend to basic human needs such as nutrition, and sleep. When she finally deemed it safe, she turned and headed back down the stairs, back out onto the street, reaching for her phone.
She clicked on the message she’d received half an hour ago.

_I’m staying out a bit longer. Make sure he eats something?_

Eponine sent back a quick reply before she climbed into her car.

Done.

*  

“It’s illegal.”

“Well-”

“No I’m actually pretty certain about that. I do actually _do_ my homework, unlike some of you. It’s _illegal_. We’re going to be arrested!”

“Now hold on-”

“No, no, scratch that, we’re going to end up in hospital. Under _police_ supervision!”

“Marius-”

“Actually, no, I tell I lie – this is Montparnasse we’re talking about. Forget hospital. We’re going to end up in _graves._”

“That’s a bit-”

“We’re going to die! We’re actually going to die!”

No one tried to respond that time. Bossuet bit his lip and exchanged a glance with Joly and Musichetta. Bahorel looked down at his twiddling thumbs. Combeferre had actually pulled out his phone. Everyone, save for Enjolras, was avoiding Marius’ gaze as he looked around at them all, trying to make sure that everyone was _listening._

When he caught Enjolras’ eyes, he refused to let it go, eyes half begging, half resigned. “Marius,” Enjolras said quietly, “are you going to join me – us – in this, or not?”

The question astonished him. Marius stared up at Enjolras for a long time, mouth hanging open limply. “Well, of course,” he said after a while, shaking himself back into motion again, head falling down and hands flapping. “Of course I am.”

“You don’t have to,” Enjolras said softly. “I won’t hold it against you.”

This all felt weird. And not just because Marius was actually _talking_, and not getting laughed at. “First off, you’re being nice, and it’s kinda freaking me out a bit,” he said nervously. Next to him, Bahorel snorted. Even Enjolras smiled slightly. “But, yeah, I said I’m in, and I’m in. I mean, I’m pretty certain it’s going to go tits up, but perhaps we need something like that? I mean, nothing else has worked, right?”

He looked around at the others again, feeling slightly mollified by the respect on Bahorel’s face. Bossuet looked proud. And he had a right to; he’d been the one to drag the socially-inept, homeless student from their first shared lecture to the cafe, where he’d met his subsequent roommate and this bunch of kamikaze, brilliant people.

“No, nothing else has worked,” Enjolras echoed, muttering the words as if to himself. Combeferre
looked up from his phone at the sound, and frowned at him. “Look,” Enjolras continued, “I’m not going to make you all do this. Hell, I probably couldn’t if you didn’t want to, but I don’t want all of you going into this with romanticized ideas of what we’re doing.” He raised his head and looked around the room, eyes widening when he saw how everyone was watching him, waiting on him. As if they doing so was something new, or as if he’d thought he’d lost them in his wild behaviour of the last few days. Marius smiled at how ridiculous his friend could be. “I’m doing this because I am **angry**, and I need to do something about all **this**,” he confessed, gesturing wildly with his hands and with a gaze more honest than Marius thought he’d ever seen before. “I am under no illusion that I will come away from this unscathed, no illusion that I’ll be walking away from this without a criminal record. I don’t want to force any of you to do this, don’t want you walking into this thinking you’re doing me a favour, anything like that. Joly – I don’t want to lead you into a situation that sends you into a panic attack. Bossuet, you’re brilliant but you can’t throw a punch to save your life, Marius-”

“I’ve said I’m in,” Marius cut in. It wasn’t the first time in his life he’d interrupted Enjolras, but, hopefully, he might come away unscathed this time. “I mean, I get why you keep thinking I **wouldn’t** be. Because, yeah, it’s taken me some time, and at the beginning I was a bit-”

“Noo, no no no, no, let’s, let’s not mention you at the beginning,” Bossuet said, shaking and hiding his head comically. Bahorel laughed, and Marius grinned at his own folly.

“Yeah, exactly – and I can’t fight for shit, it’s true, but, well, I can scream pretty loud and it’s the attention we want, right?” He pointed at Bossuet. “He can yell **really** loud, we’ve all heard that,” he said, lightly, and he heard some people chuckle at the comment. Bossuet grinned. “As for Joly, he’s scared of illness, not fists.” Sat next to Bossuet, squeezed onto the other end of the sofa, Joly nodded once sharply, smiling and confirming Marius’ comment. “And I don’t know if you were going on to address Bahorel and Combeferre as well, but I can tell you right now, that’s pointless.”

“It was my fucking idea in the first place, mate,” Bahorel pointed out, with a lopsided grin.

“It’s nice of you to give us an out, and all,” Marius continued, shrugging, “But also not needed? I mean, we’re coming to this thing anyway, so... yeah.” He finally trailed off, glancing around nervously. “Right?”

Everyone was looking at him, which felt weird, considering he was guy usually tucked away out of the limelight. But perhaps most shocking was Enjolras smiling at him. “Thank you,” he said, and he sounded like he meant it.

There was silence for a few more seconds, as if no one quite knew how to break it.

That was, until Marius spoke up again. “One of you will validate this story when I tell Courfeyrac, yeah?” he checked, glancing around at them all. “’Cause, well, he’s never gonna believe that I did and said all that and didn’t majorly fuck and get myself thrown out – yet again – if one of you doesn’t back me up.”

Bahorel laughed again at that, rocking forwards where he was sat. “Ah, I think I can do that,” he chuckled, rocking back and slapping Marius on the back. Marius tried not to cry out in pain. “I feel proud – you’re almost a man, now, Marius!” A traitorous blush started to blossom on his cheeks and the tips of his ears. Oh well. The burst of self-confidence was going to have to run out at some point.

“Where is Courfeyrac?” Enjolras asked Marius, his smile turning back into the more familiar frown. “This isn’t like him.”
“I’m not getting any texts back, either,” Combeferre said, raising the mobile he’d been glancing at throughout the meeting.

Something started to twist at Marius’ stomach. Confusion or concern he wasn’t sure, but he definitely wasn’t liking it. “I... I thought you would know,” he said, looking between Enjolras and Combeferre. “He hasn’t been at the flat at all, all day, so I thought he’d been with you guys.” The confusion twisted into a definite concern when Enjolras and Combeferre exchanged indecipherable glances.

“Okaaay,” Bahorel said, leaning back into the sofa, “Who has seen him today?”

No one spoke up.

“No one’s seen him since last night?” Enjolras asked.

“He went off after Jehan,” Musichetta chimed in, from where she was sat on the back of the sofa behind Joly. “I think it likely that he’s still with his love.”

Marius chewed the inside of his cheek, mentally steeling himself for the outburst that he was sure was going to come from Enjolras any second. The only time he’d ever let anyone off for missing a meeting for ‘romantic reasons’ was when Joly and Bossuet had finally got their act in gear.

And yet, surprisingly, Enjolras only sighed. “Well, I’m sure a few of you have Jehan’s number – have you tried texting him?”

“Already done it,” Combeferre muttered, checking his phone on the off chance he’d missed something. “Again, no reply.” Shrugging as if it was no big deal, he slipped his phone back into his pocket and looked up at Enjolras. “We know where Jehan lives, anyway,” he said.

Hope springing up, Marius looked up, first at Combeferre’s half smile, then across to Enjolras. Who, suddenly, seemed frozen in place, and more panicked than concerned. “Well,” Enjolras said, looking like he was desperately trying to sound normal. “Perhaps, uh, you, or Bahorel, could-”

Combeferre’s smile spread into something far more sinister. “Oh, yes,” he said, his tone implying a change in topic, and he turned from Enjolras’ terrified face to the rest of the group. “Now for the other reason I summoned you all here...”

Marius saw Enjolras bury his face in his hands and slide down to the floor, before turning back to listen to what Combeferre was saying.

Ten seconds in, and he was already grinning.

*

Other legal guardians might get a bit pissy if they found out their charges were walking around the darker streets of London at some absurd time at night, but Gavroche knew Eponine wouldn’t mind, as much. He’d survived worse areas than this when he’d been a lot younger and lot more defenceless.

‘Sides, he had a message to deliver. He’d already wasted time, having spent last night in that bar with the older guys.

He whistled as he strolled, and as it sometimes did, the sound caught the attention of the orphanage’s cat. Soon enough she was twisting herself around Gavroche’s legs and trying her damnedest to trip him up.
Chuckling, he leant down and scratched under her chin. “You ain’t ever changing, you ain’t,” he muttered to her. As if affronted at his comment, the cat turned her nose up at him and strolled away. Or perhaps she’d realised he didn’t have any food.

Whistling again, Gavroche followed her down the street to the small unassuming building that was, unofficially, known to many kids as ‘Hell’. Sometimes they even meant it affectionately.

He didn’t go up to the front door, hell no. As everyone of a certain moral disposition knew, you always had to know how to break into your own nick. And even though this place hadn’t been Gavroche or Eponine’s nick for a good many years now, it hadn’t changed much.

Down the gap between the orphanage and the next building was a tall wooden gate which lead to the small excuse for a back garden. The bins were kept in front of this gate. Gavroche climbed on top of said bins and over the gate as if it was second nature, neatly climbing down the supports on the other side.

They’d had a repaint since his last visit. Huh. Looked cheap.

Praying to whatever god there was for ragamuffins like him, Gavroche grabbed a handful of gravel, and picked out the window that, hopefully, still belonged to the Magnon kid.

It wasn’t long before the small, pudgy face of the brown-haired kid appeared in the window, scowling until he picked out Gavroche in the garden below. He gasped, grinned, then slammed his window shut so loudly half the house must have heard it.

Rolling his eyes, Gavroche leant back against the old, withering apple tree and waited...

Barely a minute later the kid came flying across the garden, still in Ben-10 pyjamas, and flung his arms around Gavroche’s waist. It said something, that the kid was short enough in comparison to Gavroche to do so without bending down. “Hey, mignon,” Gavroche chuckled, patting the kid’s head.

“Gav!” the boy said, scowling suddenly, having a moodswing as fast as only young children could. “Stop calling me that! We found out what that means in French the other day!”

“Oh, yeah? You paying attention in class? Good boy, you stick to that, you’ll do well.”

“But you-”

“Do as I say, not as I do,” he said, wafting aside the protests with a phrase he wished he’d heard more as a kid. “Just came to say, I got your pet.”

The kid’s eyes widened to the size of saucers. “Soup!”

Gavroche nodded. “Yeah, some bloke owed me a favour. Got him out of the shelter for you. He’s at mine. Can’t bring him here, ‘course. But I’ll keep him safe ‘til you get out. They’re near immortal, those things, ain’t they?”

For the shortest moment, mignon Magnon looked sad, but then his eyes lit up with an idea. “I was thinking,” he said, bobbing up and down with excitement, “I could run away! You did! An’ I could come pick up Soup an’ an’—”

“Nah, you don’t need to run,” Gavroche said, shaking his head. “They’re tarting this place up real nice. Saw they’d painted it up a bit down there. ‘Sides, me and my sis, we got lucky. You don’t wanna risk it.”
As he’d known the kid would, Magnon pouted. “But we got a runaway in the house, now!”

“Oh yeah?”

Mignon nodded frantically. “She could show me what to do!” he said, still trying to push his idea.

“If she’s back in the house, clearly she ain’t all that good,” Gavroche pointed out, thinking of how to make a careful exit. He’d delivered his message, he’d checked up on the kid, he could come and chat with more people another night. And he really wanted sleep.

“But they say that she was living by herself for six years!” Mignon told him, like it was the most impressive piece of information in the world. Taking into account how rumours grow in houses populated mainly by kids, Gavroche reduced that down to two years, at most. “She’s not even meant to be here, as she’s sixteen, but they can’t find space in a halfway house in such short notice…”

Sixteen? Something long forgotten, a long abandoned hope started to push through Gavroche’s rib cage. “Yeah? What’s she like?” he asked, question forming before he could be certain he really wanted to know.

Magnon shrugged. “Well,” he said, chewing his lips and tilting his head side to side as he thought, “I haven’t seen her around much, she doesn’t seem to like people all that quick. But she’s, like, about this much taller than you, and she’s got the dusty blonde hair of your sister, and her eyes are really dark brown, like, well, I guess she looks a bit like your sister, really-”

“Her name,” Gavroche cut in, voice breathless, but his body completely still. “Mignon, d’you know her name?”

Mignon beamed proudly, and Gavroche wanted to hug the kid. “She was keeping it real private, like, but I found it out. I was listening in when she was in Mrs Jondrette’s office, and it’s Thelma.”

No. Not quite. But close, too close for it to be anything but...

He was shaking as he sent Magnon off to fetch her, shaking as he pulled out his phone and stared at it, not knowing if sending a text to Eponine, saying that he’d found her would jinx it and it wouldn’t be, it’d be some strange girl called Thelma and that she would still be out there, somewhere, hopefully still above the ground and not below it...

Gavroche was still staring at his phone when Magnon returned, but he looked up when she called his name.

Azelma ran at him before he had chance to react. She had always been taller than him but now he was almost level with her shoulder, and hair barely reached her jaw, and her eyes were red and had huge shadows beneath them but it was her. He hadn’t seen her since he was seven, since his parents had been locked up and he and Eponine had gone to one orphanage and Azelma another, but it was here.

Years of searching through the orphanages of the city with no result, and it turns out she’d done the same thing they had, she’d run away, and she’d survived, just like them, but it didn’t matter now, because he’d found her.

Even an over-excited ten year old Magnon jumping up and down and clapping his hands couldn’t ruin the moment.

*
“You’re a fucking idiot.”

Bossuet laughed, as Enjolras shot Joly as scathing look. “If you’ve got Joly swearing, you’re really being stupid,” Combeferre said with a smirk.

To prove Combeferre’s point, Bossuet bowed his head and pointed back at Joly, who enunciated clearly, once again, “You’re a fucking idiot.”

Groaning, Enjolras led his head fall back against the wall. “It wasn’t—”

Joly counted his next words off on his fingers, to make them even clearer. “You. Are. A. Fucking. Idiot.”

“Yes, okay, I think we’ve established that!” Enjolras yelled, waving his hands to get them to all shut up. “I made someone very very upset, I get that, it was quintessentially a dick move, I don’t get why me being the one to go to his flat to ask about Courfeyrac will make anything better!”

“Well, you gotta start seeing him round and about casually before the two of you can move on and apologise,” Bossuet explained, like it was the most obvious thing on the world. But Enjolras dismissed his opinion, he was eating one of Enjolras’ cookies, clearly he wasn’t in his right mind.

“You’re forgetting,” Enjolras told them with a moan, “He kind of punched me last night, I doubt he’ll want to see me any time soon. Why can’t I just... surely it’d be easier, if we just stayed out of each other’s way!”

Silence, inexplicably, followed his comment. He’d hoped they’d keep joking about it, then he could keep protesting and grumbling like this wasn’t something serious. But it was, and apparently they weren’t letting him forget that.

“He’s a good guy, Enjolras,” Bahorel said, running a finger over a bruise starting to form on his jaw. “Why is it so hard for you to see that?”

“Perhaps because he insults me and everything I stand for, whenever we see each other!” Enjolras suggested furiously. Bahorel turned to look at him, and raised one eyebrow. “He’s, he’s utterly absurd!” Enjolras continued, starting to pace because he was shaking with an utterly inexplicable energy, “he’s clever, but he doesn’t use his intelligence, he’s lazy and a drunk and doesn’t seem to think of helping anyone aside from those he knows well, and he’s funny but he uses it to avoid anything serious, he seems to use his wit as a way to block himself off from responsibility and it—”

Enjolras stopped walking, pressing shaking hands over his eyes, letting out a low, frustrated scream. “It makes me furious that he can match me in an argument and then go back to making the most inane pieces of artwork to stick on public walls!”

Everyone else had fallen silent again. Musichetta, inexplicably, was smiling softly at him. Everyone else seemed too stunned to react.

“Dude,” Bossuet muttered under his breath, “You’ve got it bad.”

“Got what bad?” Enjolras yelled at him, taking a half step forwards. He stopped moving again when Bossuet seemed to flinch where he was sat. With his anger bubbling just below the surface and shaking hands slowly closing into shaking fists, Enjolras’ gaze flickered over to Combeferre. He was leaning against the wall, watching Enjolras with a clear warning in his eyes. These are your friends, he was saying. It’s not their fault you’re emotionally fucked up. In fact, if you listen to them, they might be able to fix you.

Enjolras twitched his fingers a few times, tapping them against the side of his leg, half turning
away, turning back, before he stared down at the people on his sofa and finally yelled out, “Help me!”

Apparently, that last desperate plea for assistance was exactly what they’d been waiting for. The four on the sofa, and Musichetta on the back of it, all exchanged grins. “It’s Mr Darcy syndrome,” Bossuet supplied, and Marius nodded knowledgeably.

“…Mr Darcy syndrome,” Enjolras echoed blankly.

“yeah!” Bossuet continued, grinning. “Y’know, where all that boiling sexual tension and burning, desperate love gets mistaken for hatred. Mr Darcy syndrome!”

For a few seconds, Enjolras gaped like a god damn goldfish while Bossuet grinned, Marius continued to nod wisely and even Bahorel shrugged as if to say, ‘eh, he’s got a point’. Eventually, he found the breath to stutter out, “No, I – no, it’s, it’s not, I don’t -”

“Even if you don’t, he sure as fuck does,” Bahorel said, reaching for his phone. “The dude spent the day either curled up on the sofa or locked away in his little artist’s room.”

“And how would you know that?” Joly asked, leaning to look at Bahorel over the back of Bossuet and Marius.

“I was at Feuilly’s most of the day, wasn’t I?” Bahorel said, grinning at Joly whilst holding his phone out for Enjolras to see.

It was a picture of Grantaire sat on the sofa, feet tucked under him and huge sharing bag of crisp on his lap. Black curls were falling down over his eyes and he was smiling at something he, presumably, was watching on the TV. It was a tight smile, though – he was distracted, he wasn’t happy.

“It’s my phone, not his face, cradling the fucking thing is going to do fuck all,” Bahorel pointed out like the ruthless, merciless bastard he was. Clearing his throat awkwardly and shifting his weight a bit, Enjolras moved his hands so he was holding the phone in one hand, and not, like Bahorel had so kindly notified everyone, cradling the image in both his hands.

“Look at that,” Combeferre said, speaking up for the first time, “And try telling us, honestly, that you wouldn’t mind not seeing him again.”

He couldn’t. Of course he couldn’t. “But… he hates me,” he muttered, telling himself that he should probably be handing Bahorel his phone back some time about now. He didn’t do that, either.

“Nah,” Bahorel said carelessly, stretching his arms and leaning back, as if the important bit was over. “Well – maybe. A bit. Eh, you can push through that, only a small issue.”

Only half listening, Enjolras started to nod. “So I… I just have to go there, and just ask after Courfeyrac, yeah?” he muttered, frowning at the photo still. Grantaire usually grinned, smirked, laughed, even if angry. Seeing him with such a small smile felt... well, it hurt.

“Just that,” Joly confirmed.

“You might not even see him, Jehan might open the door,” Bossuet pointed out.

Enjolras nodded again. He glanced up from the phone when he felt a hand on his shoulder. “You think you’ve finally sorted it all out, then?” Combeferre checked in a low voice.
“Yeah, I think so,” Enjolras told him, matching his best friend’s smile. Combeferre pat his shoulder once more, before collecting the now empty coffee mugs from the table and heading over to the kitchen corner.

Apparently deciding that the evening was over, Bahorel surged to his feet, giving Marius room to sprawl out across the sofa rather than be squashed between him and Bossuet to the thickness of a pencil. “Great,” Bahorel said, snatching his phone back from Enjolras’ hands and leaving him feeling vaguely shocked back to reality. “If you see Feuilly while you’re there, tell him I think I left a sock at his, yeah?”

Finally, Enjolras smiled, and Bahorel waited to see it before laughing his usual, ridiculously loud laugh, and turning to head to the door.

“So are you going to go now, or put it off a bit?” Combeferre asked over the clattering of washing up.

“Warning you, we’re about start interrogating Marius about that dudette of his,” Bossuet said from the couch, and Marius groaned. “So unless you’re really interested in Marius’ love life, you might wanna go sort out your own?”

“No, no, I’ll get it over with,” Enjolras muttered, starting the search for his own phone and keys. He’d long learnt that procrastination tended to make his situation worse.

“Good boy,” Combeferre called over. He’d started to pull out a frying pan, and peppers and packets of chicken were now on the side.

“Shut up.”

“Yeah, keep talking like that and you won’t be getting dinner.”

“I hate you,” Enjolras lamented, grabbing his coat and opening the door.

He had just enough time to hear Combeferre echoing his thoughts before the door shut behind him. “No, you don’t.”

*

“...Do you think we were clear enough?”

“He knows what he’s gotta do, right? It’s not hard.”

“It’s not like he’s even going to step into the flat. He can’t fuck this up, can he?”

Combeferre sucked on his finger, the majority of his brain power going on the tasting of his stir-fry sauce. “He’s a grown man now,” he said, picking up the soy sauce. “I’m sure he’ll be fine. And do you guy seriously think you’re staying here for dinner?”

He spoke with annoyance, but when he got four muttered excuses, he just smiled, and mentally made a note to buy more noodles.

*

He was better than this. He was braver than this. So why in god’s name had he been staring at this door for over ten minutes, because really.

He could have been heading home by now, if he’d just knocked the instant he got him. How hard
was it? ‘Hi, is Courfeyrac here?’ ‘No.’ ‘Do you know where he might be?’ ‘Yeah, he’s at blah-blah.’ ‘Okay thanks bye’ and out. That’s all! Five sentences!

And yet, he’d been staring at this door for over ten minutes.

*C’mon, you stupid fucker, just get this over with, and perhaps you can even progress onto making small talk next time you meet.*

Having to bite his lip hard enough to draw blood to push himself into acting, and mainly to give his adrenaline something to do, Enjolras raised his fist and knocked on the door, praying with each millimetre his hand moved that Jehan would be in and would be the one to open the door.

Or no one in at all. That’d work.

Grantaire opened the door.

Enjolras froze.

*C’mon just ask just ask that’s all you have to do where’s Courfeyrac have you seen Courfeyrac – “Uh, hi.” Wow. How did you even get into University.*

After the stuttered greeting, Grantaire blinked at him once, rolled his eyes and shut the door in Enjolras’ face.

And, somehow, that was all it took for Enjolras to get control of his limbs again. Rolling his eyes, too, he slammed his palm on the door a few times. “I’m not even here to speak to *you*!” he yelled through the wood, palm still pressed to it.

He almost fell forwards when the door swung back open again, revealing Grantaire standing there with one eyebrow raised. “And that’s meant to make me feel better, is it?”

Fuming – and gods how hard was it to keep his blood pressure down around this guy? – Enjolras clenched his jaw, before swallowing, breathing deeply, unclenching his fists and saying, “Yes, I *am* very sorry for my behaviour the previous night.”

Other eyebrow rising, too, Grantaire leant on the door frame and smirked, in a clear ‘this should be good’ kind of way.

Groaning very audibly, Enjolras took a second to try and figure out how to get through this in the least painful way. “Look, I am sorry. Genuinely, from the depths of my heart sorry. I was a dick. But you weren’t exactly innocent. But I didn’t come here to apologise, I came here to see if you knew where Courfeyrac is.”

Grantaire’s eyebrows dipped momentarily, with something akin to concern. “You’re looking for Courfeyrac?” he checked.

“Yes, we’ve lost him,” Enjolras said shortly.

Grantaire snorted with laughter. “You’ve ‘lost him’? What is he, your pet puppy? He’s a grown man, he’ll show up.”

Yes, but this isn’t *like* him, Enjolras wanted to rage, to convey that Grantaire’s friends might be independent but Courfeyrac *needed* his friends, he was a social creature through and through, and if no one had heard from him all day then something wasn’t right. Or at least, something was different than how it usually was. “Is Jehan in, does he know where Courfeyrac is?” Enjolras
asked, looking away from Grantaire to look over his shoulder, trying to see into the flat.

Grantaire stared at him for a second, eyes narrowing.


“You’re actually worried?” Grantaire asked, sounding vaguely surprised. Enjolras resisted the urge to roll his eyes again. Grantaire sighed out, sagging against the door frame momentarily, before pushing himself upright. “No, Jehan’s not in,” he said, “But I’m pretty sure I know where they are.”

And before Enjolras could say anything else, Grantaire shut the door on him again.

Stunned, Enjolras blinked at the door, at the peeling paint and fading door number, too shocked to even feel angry. What the hell was Grantaire playing at? But of course he was playing something, why hadn’t Enjolras expected this, Grantaire was always playing something, and most of the time it felt like Grantaire was playing him. Eventually Enjolras shook his head, and started to pound on the door again. “Could you at least tell me?” he yelled.

The door flew open once again. Grantaire was shrugging at the door, at the peeling paint and fading door number, too shocked to even feel angry. What the hell was Grantaire playing at? But of course he was playing something, why hadn’t Enjolras expected this, Grantaire was always playing something, and most of the time it felt like Grantaire was playing him. Eventually Enjolras shook his head, and started to pound on the door again. “Could you at least tell me?” he yelled.

The door flew open once again. Grantaire was shrugging his arms into the sleeves of a heavy cotton khaki jacket. “Move,” he muttered as a sleeve got twisted, and for one absurd second Enjolras started to reach forwards to help him get untangled. Thankfully, he had the common sense to drop his arm before he touched Grantaire. He obediently stepped back, giving Grantaire space to exit his apartment.

“Where are you going?” he asked, exasperated.

“I’m taking you to them,” Grantaire said, simply, making a strange happy noise as he finally managed to get his jacket on properly, and immediately spinning around to lock the door.

Enjolras’ mouth fell open. He’d only wanted a fucking yes/no answer before he could flee back to the safety of his own apartment and Combeferre’s cooking. “Couldn’t you just tell me?” he asked, his voice raising a few octaves in annoyance, exasperation, and a touch of fear. More time around Grantaire meant more time to fuck everything up even worse.

Grantaire snorted at the suggestion, not looking at Enjolras once as he headed down the stairs, clearly just expecting Enjolras to follow. “Nope,” he said, lips popping on the ’p’. “I am not letting you go and drag those poor boys away from their date.”

“A ‘date’? They’ve been off-radar for a whole day!”

“You know what your problem is, Enjolras? Well, one of the many. You lack whimsy.”

“...That’s not even a word!”

“You’re just proving my point, you know. Whimsy. You lack it.”

“You’re just making up words to annoy me, aren’t you?”

“I’m not, as it happens, but that’s a good idea.” Grantaire pushed the door to the shop open with his foot, apparently reaching around in his jacket pocket for something. “Now, are going to be able to sit in the passenger seat, or are you going to need to sit in the back of the car, like how your chauffeur drives you around?”

“I don’t have a chauffeur,” Enjolras muttered, shutting the door behind him with more care than
Grantaire had used in opening it, “And I really don’t care, and-”

“That’s third ‘and’ in one sentence, careful, your grammar’s slipping-”

“And,” Enjolras bit out with heavy emphasis, which seemed to make Grantaire laugh, if bitterly. “Should you be driving? Haven’t you been drinking?”

They’d reached the front of the shop by then. Seeming to ignore Enjolras’ question, Grantaire held the front door open for him, obviously and deliberately not looking to him. “As much as your concern is appreciated,” Grantaire muttered, and there was a darker edge to his voice that made Enjolras flinch, “I haven’t actually been drinking today. So yes, I can drive.”

“Why are you driving me anywhere?” Enjolras asked, letting the door shut behind him and instinctively stepping out of Grantaire’s way as he turned to lock the shop up.

“Because it’s slightly too far to walk,” Grantaire said simply.

Enjolras glared at the back of Grantaire’s head and pictured himself wrapping his hands around Grantaire’s neck and just shaking him. “Well, yes, aside from that,” he sighed irately, “I’m surprised you can stand being in my presence for this long without punching me, why not just tell me, and I can be gone? I can’t understand why you can stand looking at me!”

Grantaire spun to stare at Enjolras so fast that Enjolras couldn’t help but take a step back. “That, that punching comment, was that an invitation?” Grantaire asked blandly, staring blankly at Enjolras. “Because I’d quite happily deck you, if you want?” When Enjolras remained silent, Grantaire sighed, pushing his breath out between lips in a way reminiscent of smoking. Enjolras suddenly felt a craving he hadn’t had for years. “And I wasn’t looking at you,” Grantaire pointed out under his breath, looking away from Enjolras again as he fiddled with his keys, dropping the house key and instead grasping at the car key. “Until you mentioned it just then. You just keep making this worse, don’t you?”

“I don’t-”

“Get in the car, Enjolras.”

His heart was beating too fast and his palms were sweating and he wanted to say so many things that wouldn’t seem to fit on the tip of his tongue, but all Enjolras could do was step up to the passenger door of a small, battered car that Grantaire was sliding into. It was so old that he had to stand and wait for Grantaire to lean across and manually unlock the passenger door for him.

When he was safely inside, Grantaire continued as if there’d been no pause. “And I’m driving you because I know what you’re going to do the instant you find them, and I’m not going to let you. Just because you don’t approve of me doesn’t mean you can stop Courfeyrac seeing my best friend.” Resolutely not looking in Enjolras’ direction at all, Grantaire pushed the gearstick into first, and pulled out into the road.

The thought that Grantaire thought this of him shocked Enjolras to his core. “I don’t think that, at all,” he muttered.

Grantaire just hummed, merely an acknowledgement that he’d heard Enjolras, nothing more.

He looked serious, Enjolras noted. There were even creases forming between Grantaire’s eyebrows, and the very existence of them felt wrong. That wasn’t what Grantaire was. He was misspent laughter and grins, bad jokes at Enjolras’ expense, making others smile and caring more about having a good time than anything else. But this, this Grantaire that cared about his friend’s
happiness, and who would leave himself to worry if that was what it took to make others happier – just when Enjolras thought he could figure out this insane character, could get him pinned down and know what to do about him, all Grantaire did was... something new.

“You never do what I expected, do you?” Enjolras said, under his breath. He doubted Grantaire could hear what he was saying. “I was only meant to be standing outside your flat for five minutes...”

“Are you still talking?” Grantaire groaned, fingers tapping on the steering wheel as the car got stuck in traffic.

“Sincerest apologies,” Enjolras said, barely managing to refrain from being sarcastic. “I shall be silent.”

“How about we put on music,” Grantaire suggested, reaching across to turn on the stereo, probably the only piece of the car that had been made after the turn of the century. “That might stop us killing each other before we get there.”

“Yes, because music was so good at stopping us from killing each other last time,” Enjolras said, lips threatening to curl into a smile at the memory of them bickering over Frank Turner. If he dared to hope, from the way Grantaire turned to look down, away from Enjolras, he, too, was trying to hide a smile.

Neither of them spoke as the stereo juddered and whirred awake, crackling for a few seconds before it finally started to play music. Biffy Clyro started to blast through the car, and Enjolras groaned. “My life would be so much easier if you had shit taste in music,” he said before he could stop himself.

Grantaire snorted. “You know, I could say almost the exact same thing... but if makes you feel better, this is Feuilly’s car, it’s his CD.” Eyes still on the road, Grantaire reached down to grab the CD case from the tray beneath the stereo. “See? Scottish rock.” His eyes flickered to the case, and he smirked. “No wonder you like it.”

“And what,” Enjolras sighed, “makes you say that?”

His smirk widening, Grantaire just held out the case. Even though he’d seen it before – he had a copy of this CD – Enjolras obediently took the case from him. “‘Only Revolutions’,.” Grantaire said, echoing the title of the album.

It took a few seconds for Enjolras to get the joke, staring blankly at the blue and red flags, until he realised how Grantaire could connect ‘revolutions’ to him. He groaned at the poor joke, dropping the case back into the tray, and Grantaire, finally, started to laugh.

Inexplicably consoled by the sound, Enjolras sunk into the uncomfortable, hole-ridden upholstery. Not caring to hide it anymore, he started to smile.

* * *

“We could have walked it in less time,” Enjolras said, climbing out of the car. He was also amazed at how the car hadn’t broken down and literally fallen apart in the journey, but he felt that saying that might be rude.

“I didn’t want to waste time, and there’s not usually that much traffic, okay?” Grantaire grumbled.

“It’s a Sunday evening, there’s always traffic on a Sunday evening,” Enjolras pointed out.
“Shut up.”

Enjolras grinned as Grantaire caught his eye, before he rolled his own and turned away. Enjolras had to jog around the car to catch up with him as he started to walk down the road. “So, we’re finally ‘here’,” he said, drawing level with Grantaire. “Are you now going to tell me where ‘here’ is?”

“We’re in Soho,” Grantaire said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Have you never been to Soho before?”

“I gathered we’re in Soho, I was thinking a bit more specifically,” Enjolras retorted, scowl lifting into a smile as Grantaire smirked.


At the end of Grantaire’s finger was a gaudy, American style diner. And it looked suspiciously empty. “You think they’re in there?” Enjolras asked sceptically. “And why do you think this?”

“Because Jehan needs comforting, meaning he needs comfort food, meaning he needs stuff that’s very greasy, cheesy, processed, comes in huge portions and is somewhere familiar,” Grantaire said, idling to a stop. “Whenever he’s stressed, or going through a rough patch, he drags one of us out to this place. I couldn’t even tell you how he found it.”

“Well done, Sherlock-”

“Thank you, Watson.”

Enjolras levelled a blank stare at Grantaire. He just got a grin back. “But it looks empty,” he said, gesturing at the diner and starting to stride down the street to get closer to it.

“It’s nine o’clock on a Sunday evening, you think many people are going to be out for dinner?” Grantaire hissed back, reluctantly running after him. “Look, just – what are you doing?”

“Getting closer, to get a better look to see if your genius logic was correct!” Enjolras hissed back, ignoring the hand whacking at his arm and starting to peer around the windows’ edges to try and get a look at all the tables.

“Could you just – for god’s sake would you stop?”

A hand finally managed to wrap around Enjolras’ upper arm, dragging him to a stop. “What?” Enjolras hissed at him, raising his own arm to try and knock off Grantaire’s grip, but he was stronger than Enjolras had guessed and Grantaire’s fingers stayed put. They were going to leave bruises.

“They’re in there, okay?” Grantaire said, eyes burning into Enjolras with a brand new determination. “You don’t have to check.”

“Well, I’m ever so sorry that I feel the need to check on my missing friend,” Enjolras said through gritted teeth, fingers still working at Grantaire’s, trying to get him to let go.

“He’s been gone for a day, that’s nothing!” Grantaire all but growled back, fingers tightening on Enjolras’ arm. “He’s fine, but if you go sauntering up to the huge windows-”

“I don’t saunter-”
“-and watch him having his date, that’s not only really creepy, but you’ll also be the worst cockblock.”

“I’m not going to fucking stare-”

“Fucking good-”

“I just need to make sure he’s okay-”

“One fucking day, Enjolras-”

“Why is it so hard for you to get that that’s not normal-”

“Perhaps because it is?”

Tapping on the glass next to them caught their attention.

Both of them jumped, but only Enjolras made a really embarrassing noise that would no doubt come back to haunt him later. They spun to face the window, wide-eyed. A really smug Courfeyrac and innocent looking Jehan both waved at them.

In a joint moment of embarrassment and clarity, Enjolras released Grantaire’s fingers and Grantaire let go of Enjolras’ arm, and they stepped apart. Grantaire, the adorable fool he was, lifted a hand and started to wave awkwardly back.

Rolling his eyes, Enjolras nodded a greeting at Jehan and, turning to glare at Courfeyrac, pulled his own phone out of his pocket and waved it at him. Frowning, Courfeyrac reached into his own pocket to tug out his phone – only to have his face drop as his phone didn’t respond when he pressed the on button.

Out of battery.

He’d been missing everyone’s frantic texts because he’d run out of fucking battery.

Enjolras’ jaw clenched almost by itself, as he shoved his phone back into his pocket with what was probably a bit more force than was necessary. He could see Grantaire turning to look at him from the corner of his eye, but he was too focused on Courfeyrac’s sheepish grin and the curses he was going to spew at him when he got him without a pane of glass between them.

“Right, time to go,” Grantaire muttered. This time his fingers grabbed a handful of the red wool of Enjolras’ jacket in order to tug him away from the window, and down the street. Enjolras swore he saw Jehan and Courfeyrac starting to laugh before he spun around to stare, more shocked than angry, at his would-be kidnapper.

“Would you mind letting go of the jacket, please?” Enjolras demanded, whacking at Grantaire’s hand.

“What, is it designer?”

“No, I just really like it – oh for heaven’s sake, stop!”

Grantaire instantly halted, causing Enjolras to almost walk into him. “You had to ask about his phone, you’re so awkward,” Grantaire was muttering, as he released his hold on Enjolras and turned to face him. He was shaking his head, as if he couldn’t believe Enjolras was even a thing that existed. “But has your concern abated, now, at least?”
“Yes,” Enjolras said. Realising that had come out rather sharply, he added, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Grantaire said in a mock serious tone. As Enjolras scowled, he just continued to grin. “Now, d’you want a lift back?”

Another twenty minutes to half hour in a car with Grantaire? Enjolras looked out into the street, and glanced at the sky, as if rain clouds had somehow miraculously appeared to give him an excuse. “It’s not—”

“Not walking distance, that’s what it’s not,” Grantaire cut in. “You took the tube to get to Covent Garden, right?” Enjolras nodded reluctantly. “Well I’m not letting you waste more money to sit on a tube with the creepy late-night lot when I have a car,” Grantaire said, shifting his weight to settle into a fighting stance. Apparently, this wasn’t up for argument.

And, yeah, when Grantaire walked over to the car, Enjolras was following him. “You know, usually, I’m the one who gets to make the decisions,” he said, not sure if this change made him annoyed or just amused.

“Perhaps a change will do you good?” Grantaire suggested, somehow managing to sound utterly serious. Once again, Enjolras pictured himself wrapping his hands around his neck and shaking. “Just get in the car,” Grantaire said, leaning against the driver’s door and waiting rather impatiently. “If you’re good, I might even let you sing along this time.”

Enjolras flipped him two fingers as he slid around to the other side of the car. Grantaire laughed.

*

He didn’t sing along to Biffy on the way back.

Grantaire did. Started off humming softly along to _God & Satan_, before belting out the next tune.

But Enjolras was quite content to just listen to him.

*

They were arguing by the time they got back to Enjolras’, of course. Congestion charge zones, this time. And there was a touch of the routine about the argument, Enjolras almost enjoying himself as he tore apart George Osborne’s arguments, and Grantaire cheerfully playing devil’s advocate.

“It’s being exploited—”

“I mean, and then if you consider how it can be used to lessen the amount of CO2 spewing cars—”

“But that’s _clearly_ not Osborne’s focus. He’s just using it to chuck money into his coffers—”

“Your stop.”


Grantaire grinned at him, and pointed out of the window. “Your stop, I believe.”

The car had stopped without him noticing. “Oh yeah,” he said.

“What, were you expecting me to get lost or something?” Grantaire asked, sounding seconds away from laughing at Enjolras.
“No, I just – I guess I was expecting the journey to last longer, or something,” Enjolras muttered.

Grantaire just nodded at him, smirking and eyes wide and expectant. “Do you... need help getting out of the car?” he asked teasingly.

“I think Combeferre’s making stir fry, you’re welcome up if you want.”

He hadn’t meant to say that.

Enjolras froze, then tried to swallow, as if somehow that’d let him take the words back.

He’d only meant to ask one question, then leave... but the ‘leaving’ part of the plan seemed harder than he’d anticipated...

Grantaire looked as if Enjolras had just attacked him with a tazer. “You what now?”

“Stir fry,” Enjolras repeated, trying to sound as if this was his original plan. “Uh, some of the guys stayed around for dinner, and Combeferre’s a good cook... look, you’re just going to go back to an empty flat? I know the others would be happy to see you’re okay.”

Grantaire’s face fell ever so slightly, but Enjolras saw it, and silently swore at himself for making such a stupid slip-up. Yeah, sure, remind him of all the crappy stuff you yelled at him the other day... And yet, inexplicably, Grantaire still smiled and said, “Sure. Stir fry. Sounds better than anything I could cook up.”

Enjolras smiled at him then, an honest smile. He didn’t really have an excuse for it, other than... he wanted to smile. He couldn’t have said if he just couldn’t have been bothered to try and hide it, was tired of hiding smiles from Grantaire, tired of pretending that Grantaire didn’t make him smile, or what, but he smiled, and after a second’s shock delay, Grantaire smiled back.

“You sure you don’t need help with that door?” Grantaire asked again, and Enjolras swore at him. Laughter followed him out of the car and down the path. As did Grantaire’s voice, as he talked inanely about something that Enjolras didn’t really care about, something to do with that scrapheap car, but he was talking and Enjolras was starting to see what the others had been talking about.

He and Grantaire, they hated each other. He fully wanted to strangle Grantaire sometimes, and he had no doubt that Grantaire would happily do the same to him at a moment’s notice, but, simultaneously, Enjolras desperately needed Grantaire there. He didn’t fit in Enjolras’ planned-out life and that was half the draw. He was different. ‘Insubordinate’, if Combeferre liked. And what did it matter if he didn’t have the same views? Enjolras had spent too long cushioned by people who followed him, he needed this, needed someone who would challenge him.

And, almost high on this sudden moment of clarity, Enjolras stood by the door and waited for Grantaire to catch up with him. He was jogging lightly, and still talking about MOTs and cars having ‘character’ and more stuff Enjolras really didn’t give a damn about, but he was content to let him talk. Because when he talked, Enjolras was free to just watch.

A slight discolouration on Grantaire’s cheekbone caught his eye. Frowning, Enjolras lifted a hand to gesture at it, his fingertip barely millimetres from Grantaire’s skin. “Where’d you get that?” he asked.

Grantaire froze with his mouth open – Enjolras hadn’t even realised he’d cut him off mid-word. “This?” he asked, his own fingers brushing over the newly forming bruise. “From you.”

Of course. Enjolras had punched him, hadn’t he? Only last night. But it was hard, now, to
understand where all that rage had come from... “I really am sorry, you know,” he muttered, unable to take his eye of the bruise.

Grantaire started to reply, haltingly and his face starting to flush red, but Enjolras shut him up by taking Grantaire’s face in his hands and pulling him into a kiss. Because Grantaire could misunderstand Enjolras’ words but, surely, he couldn’t misunderstand this.

Absurdly, Enjolras’ first thought was how short Grantaire was. He hadn’t noticed it before, because Grantaire was the type of person who didn’t seem short, he seemed *there*, he stood out, but he was short, and Enjolras was having to lean down to press their lips together. He could feel how Grantaire was having to stretch his neck to push back. It wasn’t perfect, the height differencebordered on awkward, but at the same time, perfect was *exactly* what it was.

Grantaire’s lips were rough and chapped, his breath was heavy and hot against Enjolras’ softer lips and it was different, and fierce and *so* *tangible*, every movement Grantaire’s lips made he could feel, and he doubted this was a feeling he’d ever forget. He could feel stubble under his palms where he held Grantaire’s face. He could *smell* him, all dried paint and a faint scent of beer, taste him, the salt of his skin, and they were breathing together, open mouths pressed and locked together.

Their tongues brushed together and it wasn’t clear who’d moved first, but Enjolras could feel Grantaire’s tongue stroking against his and it made him groan, hand slipping around the back of Grantaire’s head to hold him closer, running his tongue over Grantaire’s teeth and the roof of Grantaire’s mouth and needing to *be in* him, to memorise every sensation of him, how their tongues looped together and how Grantaire ran his tongue over Enjolras’ lower lip, lightly touching him before brushing their tongues back together.

It was warmth, heady breathing and hearts beating out of control, Enjolras’ fingers clenching in Grantaire’s black curls, leaving them panting into each other’s mouths, standing there still but for how their lips shifted against each other. It had stopped being a kiss, but Enjolras was unable to let him go.

Grantaire’s hands slipped onto Enjolras’ waist, under his jacket, and Enjolras’ heart thudded as he leant into the touch. He was bending his back so much, desperate to stay in contact with Grantaire’s hands that he didn’t first realise that Grantaire was pushing him away. It took Grantaire pulling his face back and lowering his head for Enjolras to realise that this wasn’t right.

This wasn’t how their kiss was meant to end.

“No,” was all he could say, all he could breathe because his lungs hurt from how heavy his breathing was, and his brain couldn’t process this.

Grantaire’s hands wrapped around Enjolras’ wrists, only pulling lightly but Enjolras didn’t resist as Grantaire made him drop his arms, made him let go. “This isn’t going to-”

“No,” Enjolras echoed again furiously, his heart still thudding but from fear, because this *wasn’t how it should go* –

But no matter how many time he repeated that simple, two-letter word it had no affect because Grantaire was shaking his head, was stepping back. “You can’t do that, Enjolras, you *can’t*, because I can’t deny you and I *should*—”

“You don’t, you shouldn’t, you really don’t have to, *please,*” Enjolras begged, and he hadn’t begged in ages but he had to, because this – he couldn’t lose this.
“Don’t say that!” Grantaire asked, and he was begging, too, finally looking up at Enjolras but he was more than an arm’s reach away now and that felt wrong. And he was crying, eyes shining in the light from the lamp-posts, and those frown lines that Enjolras had hated earlier were back in place and he wanted to reach up to smooth them out, something so cliché, but Grantaire flinched when Enjolras raised a hand. “Don’t beg, please, I can’t say no to you because, because, fuck-”

“Don’t say no,” Enjolras whispered, lungs still hurting, chest hurting so much.

“But I have to because you made me cry last night!” Grantaire said, voice not raising but sounding breathless, in so much pain. “And now you’re kissing me? And you think this is going to work? You might be able to come back from a fight like that but I can’t, Enjolras. I don’t need someone to belittle me, I can do that fine by myself!”

Enjolras was good with words, in protests, in speeches, and presentations. He’d never been good with emotions. He’d never hated himself for that more than he did right then. “Grantaire, I–please-”

“Think realistically, Enjolras! We don’t fit!” Grantaire said, blinking furiously to push back tears. He was shaking with the effort of keeping his voice steady. “All we do is argue, remember? And that might work fine in TV shows and films and shit like that, but this is real life, and this – this – we can’t work like this! Love doesn’t work when you end a night exchanging blows and crying, alone!”

It felt as if Grantaire had punched him. It would have been better if Grantaire had punched him, rather than this.

“And whatever this, insane thing is,” Grantaire said, pointing between them as if it hurt to do so, “It’s just – some remnant of whatever idolised image I had of you, whatever misguided view you have of me because it can’t be right, you can’t be with someone like me.” A tear slipped past Grantaire’s defences, falling onto his cheek and lasting only a second before Grantaire brushed it impatiently away. “I’d meant to avoid you until I’d got over this insane crush,” Grantaire muttered. “I’d be grateful if you’d let me.” Stumbling back, Grantaire shook his head, his voice sounding raw, barely more than a whisper. “You can’t yell abuse at someone and then kiss them, Enjolras. Relationships don’t work like that.”

He started to turn away, walk back down the path, away. And Enjolras wanted to chase after him, to do something desperate and romantic and get Grantaire back, because that was what they did in movies, that worked in movies, last minute confessions. But as Grantaire had said, this was reality. And all he managed to do was choke out Grantaire’s name one last time.

But he was already too far away.

The noise the car made as Grantaire drove away seemed almost invasive, after the sound of Grantaire’s voice.

But the silence seemed worse, and it was eventually this which managed to push Enjolras upstairs to the cold comfort of his flat.

*

Jehan and Courfeyrac had laughed for at least ten minutes at the sight of Grantaire and Enjolras on the street outside. They’d gone back to their meal, taking their time eating their burger and hotdog, sharing the food, their milkshakes.
After, they’d gone back to Combeferre’s and Courfeyrac’s, Courfeyrac joking about teasing Enjolras, finding out the gossip.

So they’d entered with smiles on their faces, completely unprepared to see Enjolras curled up on the floor in front of the sofa, face buried in his hands, looking as if he was too shell-shocked to cry. Combeferre was sat next to him, arm around Enjolras’ shoulders and face pressed against him, a desperate attempt at comfort. Joly was sat on the sofa behind them, a hand on Enjolras’ shoulder, Bossuet tucked in to Joly’s side. Marius and Musichetta were in the kitchen, cleaning.

All of them looked up at the sound of the door opening, even Enjolras. They looked between the couple, no one saying a thing.

Eventually, blinking wearily, Enjolras had looked at Jehan and said, “I think he needs you.”

He hadn’t needed to clarify any further. Jehan had nodded, shared one final look with Courfeyrac, before turning and rushing home.

Feuilly was still out. Eponine and Gavroche rarely stayed this late. So no one stuck their heads out of doors to ask what he was doing as he ran up the stairs, two at a time, as he all but knocked the door down rather than unlocking it.

Grantaire’s wasn’t on their couch. Wasn’t in the kitchen. Jehan didn’t look at either anyway, just headed straight through into Grantaire’s bedroom.

He was in a very similar position to Enjolras. Sat on his bed, elbows resting on his legs, face resting in his hands. Quietly as he could, Jehan stepped through the room to sit beside him. “I’m sorry,” he muttered, tilting his head to rest it on Grantaire’s shoulder. “I’m really sorry.”

Grantaire nodded, but didn’t speak.

They sat there, like that, for a while. When it started to get cold, when they heard Feuilly finally stagger home from whatever night out he’d had, Jehan wrapped a gentle arm around Grantaire’s waist and tugged at him, pulling them both down onto the bed. He curled himself around Grantaire and held him as he silently fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I'd apologise, but my beta's threats on my life as she finished this were the funniest thing and I couldn't stop laughing at her pain so yeah, I'm really not sorry.

If I'm right, and I don't go overboard with writing every little details, there should only be one chapter and an epilogue left....
Chapter Notes

I am so, so sorry for how long this took to write. I don’t really have a sufficient excuse. I can only thank everyone who sent me comments asking me to continue - Honestly, without you lot, I probably would’ve given up the ghost a long time ago.

I only hope that this final instalment will be worth the wait.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Grantaire made a mental note to never, not ever, go out with Bahorel again. At all. His self-esteem was crap enough anyway, he didn’t need to suffer through this shit as well.

“Sorry, ma’am,” Bahorel said, the full picture of modern-day chivalry with his black shirt and red waistcoat and grey suit trousers and fucking tattoos and ponytail of dreads and fucking lifting a woman’s hand to his lips. “But, unfortunately, I am an honest man – I am taken.”

The woman giggled – giggled, for fuck’s sake, she was in a skimpy black dress and giggling – and made puppy dog eyes at Bahorel once more, before tottering back to her friends at the other end of the bar. Who were, also, giggling.

Shoving his pint to the side, Grantaire slammed his head onto the bar, for the moment ignoring the dubious stickiness of the wood for dramatic effect. “This is not happening again, okay? Next time, I can wear the fucking suit, and you the paint-stained, whiskey soaked old hoodies, okay? No more of this ‘just come from the office’ shit, it’s not fair, dammit!”

“Sorry, dude,” Bahorel said, patting Grantaire’s back absently and not sounding remotely close to being sorry enough.

“This was meant to be a night for me,” Grantaire muttered in commiseration, words muffled by how his face was buried in his arms. “For me.”

“Sure thing,” Bahorel said, still patting. “You’ve had a hard life. You needed to get out. I get it. I just can’t help sheer animal magnetism, man.”

With great – and most probably unappreciated – effort, Grantaire lifted his head up, and glared at the bastard.

Surprised at Grantaire’s rage, Bahorel blinked and put a shocked hand to his chest. “It’s not like I can help it, man!” he protested. As if to callously prove his point, yet another shockingly attractive woman walked past their space on the bar and winked at Bahorel, who, very respectably, nodded in acknowledgement before turning away.

Grantaire glared at him. Bahorel pretended to start back with affront. “What?”

“And what is it with this whole ‘taken’ bullshit?” Grantaire continued moaning, as if Bahorel hadn’t spoken. “You’re not fucking taken! Though you could very well be fucking about now. And don’t try that ‘being a good friend’ bullshit, because we both know.”
“Yeah, if I thought it could get me a decent fucking, I’d drop you in a heartbeat,” Bahorel admitted quite freely. Grantaire shrugged – fair enough, after all. “But,” Bahorel continued, waving his pint in Grantaire’s face to insure his attention, “I wasn’t lying. I am – believe it or not – and honest man.” And smirking the slyest motherfucking smirk Grantaire had ever seen, Bahorel sipped his drink.

Now this was interesting. “You mean... you have a girlfriend?”

Bahorel laughed, shaking his head before taking a swig from his bottle of Stella. “Yeah, a girlfriend,” he paused to say, before going back to his beer.

Grantaire blinked at him. “What kind of woman would have you?”

Bahorel spluttered on his drink, turning on his chair to glare with shock at Grantaire. “Th-thanks!”

“No, seriously,” Grantaire said, part of him realising he should probably explain before he got decked. “I’m trying to picture it, the kind of woman who’d actually be able to stay in a stable relationship with you – like, is she another lawyer? No, I think you’d fight too much. Strong willed, definitely though, can’t imagine you’d be able to last with a woman who couldn’t hold her own – into BDSM, I’d say, too-”

“Hey, watch it-”

“Good cook... have to be okay with cleaning, if she’s gonna be spending much time with you – oh, and she’d better have a good sense of humour...”

“Hey, are you suggesting dating me would be a joke?” Bahorel asked, pointing his bottle at Grantaire in what was, presumably, a threatening way. But Grantaire was too amuse by the whole situation to care (part of him was also curious as to whether he and Bahorel would be equally matched if it came to a bar brawl, but he was pretty sure 90% of that part of him was alcohol). Apparently realising that Grantaire wasn’t going to back off the subject, Bahorel smirked again, and said in a voice layered in sarcasm, “Yeah, never stops laughing.”

Grantaire nodded, a reflex action. Then he paused, suspicions growing – growing even more when he saw the shit-eating smirk. “It’s not Feuilly?” he asked. “It is, isn’t it? For fuck’s sake, just fucking tell me!”

Bahorel blinked innocently at him.

“I’m right, aren’t I? C’mon, mate, you could win me fifty bucks here – it’s fucking Feuilly, isn’t it?”

“What’s fucking me?”

Grantaire almost fell off his chair, as Feuilly – utterly silently, mind – appeared behind Grantaire and walked around to the free stool the other side of Bahorel. Who was roaring with laughter at Grantaire’s attempts to not fall off his stall as he completely lost his balance.

Resentful, Grantaire shuffled back into position and grumbled, “You took your fucking time.”

“I was stuck doing fucking paperwork,” Feuilly muttered grimly in return, barely even needing to lift a hand to get the attention of the barman. To call him and Grantaire ‘regulars’ would have been putting it mildly. “Trust me, if I could have got away earlier, I would have.”

“These the custody papers?” Bahorel asked.
“Mm. First lot finally came through.”

Grinning with genuine happiness, Grantaire leant on the bar to look around the well-groomed bulk of Bahorel to see Feuilly. “Aww, Feuilly’s gonna be a dad again!”

Feuilly rolled his eyes. “I’m not going to be a dad again – oh, cheers, Brian, stick it on that guy’s tab would you-“ Bahorel scowled, but said nothing as the barman set a whiskey in front of Feuilly, “-I’m going to be a legal guardian for the two years it takes Azelma to become an adult, and then she can fuck off. I wouldn’t be doing it at all, if it weren’t-”

“-weren’t that they were doubtful single 19 year old Eponine would be allowed to adopt her as she’s already guardian to one young kid, yes, yes, we’ve all heard that line a thousand times,” Grantaire finished for him, waving the sentence away. “And it’s a lie, we all know it’s a lie. You’ve been missing Gavroche and Eponine-”

“-how have I been missing them, they’re in my bloody shop and flats almost 24/7-“

“-and you’re happy because you’re gonna get to play dad again. Just accept it,” Grantaire finished with a grin.

Feuilly shook his head, avoiding Grantaire’s gaze. “Bullshit, is what it is.”

Grantaire laughed at him outright. “Where’s Jehan? He should be here to back me up.”

“I was expressly told by Courfeyrac we were not to disturb him,” Feuilly said, comically quick to grab onto the new subject, “As they were to be spending the whole day stuck in bed fucking. Except, well, he obviously said so in a more flowery language.”

“Which means they’re probably gonna have a few rounds of vanilla, possibly one kinky, before retiring to bake cookies and watch Disney movies,” Bahorel added. “Knowing them.”

“That’s knowing too much about them, thank you very much,” Grantaire muttered, shuddering and downing his glass. “Where is the new kid, anyway? Still tucked up in your bed, while you’re relegated to the floor?” Grantaire asked, with a grin. Bahorel met his gaze, and snorted into his whiskey.

Bristling, Feuilly set his bottle down heavily. “Look, I wasn’t going to let her sleep on the couch. You can’t just adopt a kid and then shove them onto a fucking couch, or sleeping bag – no, she’s having a bed, so if you would kindly stop mocking me over it, you ignorant little shits?”

Sometimes, you forgot that Feuilly was an orphan. Feeling thoroughly stupid and abashed, Grantaire muttered an apology before turning back to his empty drink.

“Besides, she’s out with her brother and sister. Eponine’s treating them to a movie and dinner out. Nandos.”

Grantaire smiled affectionately. Couldn’t go wrong with Nandos. As long as you didn’t let Gavroche get his hands on a bottle of extra hot.

“Where’s the papers, then?” Bahorel asked, changing the topic. “Sent them off?”

There was a pause as Feuilly swallowed, and Grantaire tried to think what he’d like to drink next. “Nah – I just dropped it off at Enjolras’. He said he’d look it over for me, make sure there’s nothing hidden – it was a pretty shitty orphanage, don’t want them pulling anything. I want her safe, dammit.”
It was remarkably unsubtle, how Bahorel’s eyes darted across to Grantaire at the mention of Enjolras, but Grantaire ignored them. It had taken him a week to get to the stage where he could hear his name, and not react.

He didn’t react to anything for another fifteen minutes after, but still. No response at all was definitely an improvement.

*

“Never have I ever... fucked a guy with dark hair.”

“Hm... probably, yeah.”

Enjolras entered the kitchen in time to see Courfeyrac down a shot of something purple. Several things were wrong about this image. For one thing, it was *his* kitchen, not Courfeyrac’s. Another, it was 2pm, far too early for such drinking games.

For a third, the person he was playing with was barely fifteen.

Blinking furiously, Enjolras strode forwards, brandishing his folder towards Gavroche.

“Courfeyrac, what the fuck?”

Courfeyrac paused to slam his shot glass back on the coffee table before tilting his head back to grin at Enjolras upside-down. “Ah, hello!” he said cheerfully. “I was wondering when you might emerge.”

“And who let you in?” Enjolras hissed, scowling, and not lowering the folder.

“We have a key, you know,” Courfeyrac replied, pouting.

“Oh, you’re using the royal ‘we’ now, are you?” Enjolras retorted snidely, reluctantly lowering the folder. “Or are you saying this kid now, also, has free reign in *my* flat?”

A hand from a fourth party suddenly appeared over the edge of the sofa, waving in Enjolras’ direction. “Hello!”

Having the feeling that he already knew what he was going to see, Enjolras strode around. And, sure enough, sprawled the full length of the sofa and with his head in Courfeyrac’s lap, was Jehan. He didn’t seem to be playing the drinking game. Rather, he was holding a well-worn and clearly well-loved edition of *Some Anatomies of Melancholy* above his head.

“Hey, Jehan,” Enjolras replied absently, before returning to the matter at hand. “But none of this explains why you’re playing *Never Have I Ever* with a fourteen year old!”

“Fifteen in three days,” Jehan and Gavroche said in unison.

“And un-knot your fire-truck-red panties, O Captain my Captain,” Courfeyrac said, grinning, and proffering a shot. “It’s only Ribena.”

Still, Enjolras eyed the glass suspiciously. “Doesn’t lack of alcohol kind of negate the point of *Never Have I Ever*?” he asked.

Courfeyrac turned to look at him with a *serious expression*. “Not as long as you both keep to the rules,” he said in an ominous voice which, coupled with Gavroche’s wide grin, set alarm bells ringing. “For example, I’ve already discovered-”
“I really don’t want to know,” Enjolras muttered, holding up a hand to cut him off. “I’d like to be able to plead plausible deniability in court, if that’s okay.” Struggling in the face of so much wrong to remember why he left the safety of his room to begin with, Enjolras cast about him, hoping for a sign. “Why are you infecting my flat, anyway – weren’t you meant to be hiding away from civilized people and going at it like rabbits?”

“Nah, that was yesterday. Today we’re resting, getting our strength back. Marius wanted the flat, because he had company, the hopeless bastard. Oh, and we promised Eponine we’d entertain Gavroche while she does girly things with Azelma.”

“And you thought teaching him drinking games would be a productive use of his time?” Enjolras asked. Law book. That was it. Referencing.

“Well, the kid’s gotta learn some time. And it’s better that he learns the tricks from someone responsible, like me, than some creepy pervert.”

As much as it annoyed him, Enjolras had to give Courfeyrac that. He scanned the room one last time, before he sighed, put his hands on his hips and glared down at Courfeyrac. “You’re sat on my textbook,” he said, the order to move clear in his tone.

Courfeyrac blinked innocently back up at him. “Oh? Why do you want your law book for, Enjolras? You told me you’d finished your work for the weekend.”

Enjolras ground his teeth together. “I have. Piss off. And give my book.”

He was regretting asking nicely, as Courfeyrac’s smile split into a grin. He should have just shoved him off the sofa. But no, Jehan had done nothing to deserve it. Just this twat. “But, Enjolras, I can’t do both!”

Getting desperate, Enjolras resorted to the tried and tested method of glaring. And hoped that Courfeyrac wouldn’t –

With a truly, terrifyingly wicked grin, Courfeyrac blinked up at Enjolras and asked, “Oh, is this the adoption papers you’re checking as a favour for Grantaire?”

“Feuilly,” Enjolras corrected, with only minor hesitation and barely any heart palpitations. “It’s Feuilly’s, not Grantaire’s.”

As Jehan stifled a chuckle badly, Courfeyrac raised an eyebrow and smiled condescendingly. “Are you sure?”

“Very much so. Book.”

“Because, you know, as far as methods of impressing possible love-of-lives go, helping orphans is really cliché-”

“Can you not just give me my fucking book?”

“Also very pathetic, tiresomely so, I mean, I really thought you were better than this.”

He wanted to explode righteous vengeance all over Courfeyrac’s pestering arse, he really did. But all he could manage, watching his friend in domestic bliss and with that name ringing in his ear, was feel his skin start to burn with the oddest combination of fury and fear, and mutter, “Fuck it. I’ll use Google,” before turning and leaving the room.
He’d only gone to fetch some fancy food to treat the Thénardier kids with, and Jehan a bit, too.

But then he’d seen a blonde head – not even his – and a flash of red, and then heard a sonorous voice, sarcasm, Frank Turner –

And Grantaire turned straight around and headed to the wine stall.

Borough Market sucked, anyway. He’d stick to Covent Garden in the future.

*  

Some time had passed – about ten minutes, maybe half an hour, who really gave a damn – before Courfeyrac slipped into Enjolras’ room, the door barely making a sound.

Enjolras raised his gaze from the blank Google homepage, and then proceeded to raise an eyebrow, not only at Courfeyrac’s visit, but at the law book he’d brought with him. “What’s this?” he asked dryly, “You’re actually being nice to me?”

Courfeyrac pouted at him, and carefully set the book down on the desk by Enjolras’ left hand. “I can do that, occasionally,” he protested.

Enjolras didn’t answer. He just settled for smiling slightly, and leaning back just enough to bump Courfeyrac’s side with his shoulder.

“For what it’s worth,” Courfeyrac said softly, resting a hand on Enjolras’ shoulder, “I hope it works. He’d be perfect for you. And I think you could do him some good, too, if you got your act in gear.” He pressed his lips to the top of Enjolras’ head swiftly, before squeezing his shoulder lightly and stepping away.

“Thank you,” Enjolras replied, as Courfeyrac grinned at him before leaving him to his work.

*  

“Food! Food is served!”

A young woman’s voice drifted through from the tiny room that served as a living room. “Aw, Uncle Feuilly, can’t it wait just one more minute? Jehan’s only got a little bit left to do!”

Feuilly sagged momentarily, before setting the plates on the dinner table. “He’s still going to be there after dinner, Azelma,” he called back, sitting in his own chair and picking up his knife and fork. “Come eat.”

With an unmistakable air of perfected teenage sulking, Azelma entered the room, half her hair done up in beautiful medieval style braiding. “Why do adults never let you do anything fun,” she grumbled, not so much sitting on her chair as collapsing grumpily onto it.

“Jehan’s an adult,” Feuilly pointed out, gesturing towards the door with his knife just as Jehan strode happily through, all but skipping. His own hair was done up in its usual hard-working plait.

“Only on paper,” Jehan corrected, pulling out the final chair and spinning it around, so he could straddle it and therefore rest his chin on the backrest. “And I still don’t think that’s right.”

“I hope you’re not expecting food,” Feuilly muttered, stabbing at a sausage with his fork. “This isn’t a B&B, you know.”
Jehan just laughed, before snatching a few potato slices off Feuilly’s plate. “Thank you, Feuilly,” Jehan said sing-song, grinning widely as he ate his stolen goods.

“Yes, thanks Uncle Feuilly,” Azelma said, mouth only *slightly* overflowing with food. Feuilly let her off this once.

“No need to thank me, you’re my guest,” Feuilly pointed out, wiping up some of the onion gravy with a chunk of sausage. “‘Sides, if I didn’t feed you, your sister would have my testicles as Christmas decorations.”

Azelma snorted into her forkful of sausage and onion. Jehan just sniggered for a little while. “You need to get yourself a lass,” he said eventually, leaning forwards slightly to tap a finger once beside Feuilly’s plate.

Feuilly chuckled. “You been reading Robbie Burns again?”

He managed to dodge Jehan’s swipe. “*Not* the point,” Jehan protested, settling back down again – *after* pinching a few more potatoes. “You need to get some kids of your own.”

That made Feuilly snort into his food. “You *what*? When I have you lot to babysit? Speaking of, where’s the other one of you two? He better not be covering my walls in paint again.”

“That,” Jehan said snootily, “was an amazing modernist mural, and you should have kept it. But no – he’s gone to a gig with a mate, he said. Won’t be back until late. So I thought I’d keep you company!”

“How kind,” Feuilly said wryly. He moved to finally enjoy his sausage, but paused. “Hang on – *what* mate?”

“He *does* have friends, you know,” Jehan said, pouting at Feuilly with slight disapproval. “We’re not the *only* company he keeps.”

“Yeah, but-” Feuilly stopped himself with a sigh. “Never mind. I guess he could use the distraction.”

The clatter of cutlery on crockery drew his attention, and he looked up. Azelma was smiling at him benevolently, over a completely empty plate. “Finished!” she said. “Can Jehan finish plaiting my hair now?”

With a groan of defeat, Feuilly dropped his fork and first piece of sausage back on his plate.

* 

“You’re going to fall, and then you’re going to break something, and then Joly is going to get annoyed at me for bringing people for him to fix when he’s on a shift again.”

Grantaire laughed, shoving Combeferre aside lightly and giving himself a second to stand upright. “Nah, you underestimate my ability, man. I ain’t tripped ’cause of alcohol in *years*.”

Seeming not to believe him, Combeferre wrapped a hand around Grantaire’s upper arm anyway. He didn’t try and brush him away that time. Instead he frowned, thinking. “P’rhaps not over a year... but that time is *behind me*. Behind, way behind. Jehan would turn my guts into a flower crown if I went that bad again...”

“Or a nice feather boa, perhaps,” Combeferre suggested. “Don’t worry, we’d help him.”

Combeferre smiled. “Just me being that awesome friend that looks out for everyone. Nothing new.”

It was a warm night, for winter – or was that the alcohol? – there’d been awesome music, lots of cool people, lots of cheap drink, and, strangely, Grantaire wasn’t feeling quite alone. “Yeah, thanks, man,” he said again, is hand taking perhaps a few too many attempts to rest on the hand Combeferre still had holding his arm. “Good company. Wasn’t aware that was your kind of music.”

“The Editors? Mm, a bit soft for me,” Combeferre admitted. Grantaire slipped, but an arm looped around his waist before he hit the floor. “But they’re not bad, the roommate said he’d be working all evening, and Jehan sent a text saying you needed company.”

Grantaire didn’t know why he was surprised. He might as well start paying Jehan for babysitting. “Ah, so you were on duty, were you?”

“Do you see me taking payment?” Combeferre asked him, raising an eye before hefting Grantaire up, putting Grantaire’s arm around his own shoulders. “Tonight was a genuine pleasure, my friend. In fact, Bahorel, Enjolras and I have got tickets to see Asking Alexandria in a few weeks – I think there’s some tickets spare if you want to come along? Should be a good –”

But Grantaire was shaking his head before Combeferre had even finished, his head falling to the side so his hair brushed against Combeferre’s shoulder, his collar. “No... no, I can’t...”

Combeferre nodded. “Yes, I know. But it was worth a try.”

Neither of them said anything else as Combeferre helped Grantaire walk to the nearby bus stop. There, Grantaire tried to pull himself away from Combeferre, only to find the other man keeping a tight grip on him and lowering him onto the wonky bench. “I know it’s pointless to say he didn’t mean it,” Combeferre said with a sigh, sinking himself down beside Grantaire and keeping an arm draped casually over his shoulders. “And I’m not going to make excuses for him, lords know that never works... but I hope I’ve done enough that you’ll trust me, when I say his heart truly is in the right place.”

Feeling more like he was risking a glance than checking on a friend, Combeferre turned his head only slightly to look across at Grantaire. His head had fallen back against the glass, eyes closed, and he was breathing steadily. He was probably asleep. “Why are people always asleep when I actually attempt to be vaguely emotional?” Combeferre mused, copying Grantaire’s posture and leaning back against the shelter. “He is a good man, though. He cocks up a fair bit, but doesn’t everyone? And he means well, he always means well... perhaps too much... by you, he only means the best. He doesn’t understand you, he’s never understood anything that doesn’t parade around with a ‘down with the government’ placard, not really. But you, you are the complete opposite... which is why, I think, you two fit so well. You complement and complete each other. And it’s a very bizarre relationship, but beautiful, I think, in a psychologically aesthetic way.”

He snorted once in laughter, both at his own absurdity and the absurdity of the whole situation. He rolled his head to look across at the least likely asleep Grantaire once more. “It’s a shame you’re not conscious to appreciate this. Even if you two get married, I’m not going to make such an emotional speech. This is it, my friend.” He narrowed his eyes to examine the relaxed, bland features of the drunk man once more, before chuckling under his breath, and turning away again. “This blasted bus better arrive, before I start talking of childhood memories and hopes and dreams, et cetera. Jehan would be proud, would he not?”
He left the drunkard to his silence after that.

The bus finally arrived 15 minutes later. Combeferre roused Grantaire, who blinked up at him in confusion, but managed to get onto the bus without much need for help.

*

There was never any peace and quiet anymore.

“You know,” Grantaire said with a sigh, dropping his art stuff by the door, as he couldn’t actually get any further into the backroom. “This used to be my space.”

“‘Used’ being the operative word there,” Bossuet pointed out cheerfully, from where he was sprawled carelessly out on the floor. “I’d say sorry, but I’m actually quite liking this little area, so... not sorry.”

Grantaire snorted, and stepped over a prone Marius to try and get to his easel. Which was, thank god, untouched in its usual place in the corner. “I hope you’re paying rent.”

“Not at all,” Bossuet replied jovially. “We’re getting refreshments, too. Making friends with Feuilly was the best thing I think I ever did!”

There was a ‘thwack’ sound.

“Aside from meeting Joly, obviously,” Bossuet amended. Grantaire looked back over his shoulder, grinning with amusement, to see Joly tangled under a few of Bossuet’s limbs and reading some kind of journal.

Joly whacked Bossuet’s side again, making Grantaire snort. “And meeting ‘Chetta,” Bossuet added. “That it?” he asked, still grinning, tilting his head awkwardly to look down at Joly. “Or do you want me to mention the pets and stuff too?”

He got a third whack for that, but Bossuet was laughing too hard.

“Why are you here, anyway?” Grantaire asked, patting down his various pockets for his pencil.

“Test in a few days’ time,” Marius said, his voice muffled by the carpet. “Revising.”

“And lying face down in the carpet counts as revising?”

“It’s worked the past few times.”

Bossuet chuckled again, twisting himself in a seemingly impossible way to look at Grantaire. Upside down. “Marius would never admit it,” he said in a stage whisper, “But he’s a secret genius. Scholarship boy. Don’t think he’s failed a test in his life.”

A disgruntled groan drifted across from the other side of the room, and Joly sniggered. “Shut up and enjoy your virtues,” he said, taking about three attempts to turn the page on his journal.

“I have no virtues,” Marius groaned, head sliding onto its side so his words could be heard without the impairment of the carpet. “Ask Courfeyrac. Enjolras. Bahorel. Anyone.”

“I’ll confirm it, if you want?” Grantaire suggested.

“That’ll be much appreciated.”
Laughing as much as Bossuet now, Grantaire finally found his pencil caught up in his knotted curls behind his ear, and started to chew the end as he considered what to draw. “Uh, not to say that I’m not grateful for the company,” he said suddenly, half turning to look at the three on the floor again, “But – kind of wondering what the fuck you’re doing on my floor? I don’t know if you noticed, but you’re in the residence of a guy who left school after GCSEs to get work, an art student and a poet. The only way you’d find any of us in a law court is in the docks.” He frowned. “That’s the right term, isn’t it? Docks?”

There was a moment of silence, before Bossuet said, sounding very uncertain, “I think so.”

“Yes, it is,” Marius confirmed, rolling back down into the carpet again. “And we’re here because Bahorel is here, and Bahorel is our guardian angel.”

The lead of the pencil touched the paper, and started to sketch out a curve. “Bahorel’s here?” Grantaire echoed, eyes darting over the line he was drawing and the rest of the empty canvas, shapes starting to emerge in his thoughts. “Again?”

As if he’d been outside, listening for when his entrance would be the most dramatic, Bahorel burst through the door – almost slamming said door into Grantaire’s brand new bag of brand new art products, mind – and boomed, “Right, are you kids playing nicely in my absence?”

With some self-preservation instinct remnant of high school, Marius scrambled and grabbed the nearest textbook, flicking it open to a random page and buried himself in it.

“That’s one of mine, genius,” Joly told him, smirking.

“Yeah, also,” Grantaire said, continuing from a conversation which had ended about five minutes ago, “Joly, you don’t even do law. What’s your excuse?”

Simultaneously, Joly pointed at Bossuet and Bossuet pointed at himself. Grantaire had to admit that that had been pretty obvious. “And you, why do you live here all of a sudden?” he asked, pausing sketching to scowl at Bahorel.

Bahorel looked at him like he’d gone mad. “I don’t live here.” Leaving Grantaire scowling at him, he turned away, dropping wads of typed pages on top of Marius and Bossuet. “You’re both idiots, but you’re both gonna get a 2.1 at least if I have any say in it. Marius, you’ve improved, but don’t ever quote me on that. Bossuet-”

“It doesn’t need saying,” Bossuet said, holding up both hands in surrender. “I promise to actually try and pass this year.”

With a snort, Bahorel lowered himself to an empty patch of carpet between Marius’ feet and Bossuet’s shoulder. “What, you getting bored of the first year modules?”

“The slope of a shoulder and two enfolded hands had started to take shape in the pencil lines. “Hold up,” Grantaire said, tilting his head as he considered his sketching. “Bossuet – have you not passed first year?”

With no preamble, Bossuet went straight into the defensive. “Look,” he said, pushing himself onto his elbow and dislodging Joly slightly, “You try and pass seven different modules whilst being on about four different committees-”
“Three,” Joly muttered.

“-several part-time jobs on campus-”

“Two.”

“-volunteering in various charity shops-”

“Just the one.”

“-and at far too many youth groups for cerebral palsy and the like with this fool-”

“You go to three weekly, I only go to one, don’t blame me.”

“-as well as helping Mabeuf out on occasion,” Bossuet finished, smirking proudly. “I’m a busy man. That’s all I’m saying. There are more important things than getting a degree.” He paused, thought, then added, “But I think I’ll pass this year, I think Marius would collapse without company in lectures.”

Again, moaning echoed from the corner, this time muffled by the medical textbook Marius was hiding behind.

“Then read my notes,” Bahorel cut in, picking up the wad of typed paper – presumably an essay Bossuet had written – covered in red, scrawled handwriting, and whacking Bossuet around the head with it. “But on the topic of Mabeuf – coming tonight?”

“Like I could leave you to pester that dear old man without my supervision,” Bossuet scoffed, but he dutifully took the essay and held it over his head. Whether he actually read it or not was another question entirely.

“I’m in too,” Joly said unnecessarily. It might only be near a month since he’d met the guys, but it was already painfully obvious to Grantaire that if Bossuet was going somewhere, Joly wouldn’t be far behind. Especially if there would be alcohol.

A grunting suggested that Marius would be going, too.

There was silence for a few seconds, which Grantaire took advantage of to sketch the outline of a hand.

“Uh, R, buddy?”

Stunned out of his thinking, Grantaire spun around, shoving the pencil into his black tangles of hair momentarily. “Hm?”

“You coming?” Bahorel asked, slumped against the wall with crossed arms and a raised eyebrow.

‘Yes’ was on the tip of his tongue, but it moved no further than that. “Who’s going to be there?”

Bahorel’s one raised eyebrow moved higher. “Everyone.”

“Which means he will be, which means you won’t, right?” Joly asked, sounding almost sad. The Lancet was lowered to let Joly peer at him with large, woeful eyes. “Please come anyway?”

“Yeah man, there’s going to eight other people there, more if Eponine and ‘Chetta come, which they probably will, so you can easily dodge him,” Bossuet added.
Not quite sure what to say in response to that without destroying the mood of everyone in the room, Grantaire just stared blankly at Bossuet, until the cheerful man looked down and away.

“Everyone will want you to be there, man,” Joly said softly.

Then, with a voice of naive doom, Marius chimed in with, “Yeah, even Enjolras!”

In the deathly silence which followed, Marius must have realised that he fucked up, because without even looking up, he tried to bury himself even deeper into the textbook.

Bahorel cleared his throat. Joly raised his journal again, Bossuet concentrated on his paper.

For a second, Grantaire wasn’t sure whether to cry, yell, or collapse. Then, he just smiled wryly, and turned back to his sketching.

“You don’t have to come, we’ll have drinks another time,” Bahorel said tiredly, after time had passed.

“That sounds good, yeah,” Grantaire muttered. His pencil ghosted over the paper, resting where the face should be. He chewed the inside of his lip for a second, before calling over his shoulder, “Hey – d’you lot think Courfeyrac would mind modelling for me at some point?”

No one answered for a second. “Uuuuhhm, I guess he wouldn’t mind...” Bossuet mused. “I mean, he’s not too self-conscious, is he?” Joly started to snigger. “Marius, would you say I’m right?”

“Sound about right to me,” Marius said, coming out of his textbook cocoon slightly.

Bossuet sighed with put-on affection. “Quiet little thing, our Courfeyrac, your attention to his looks will probably do the poor little fellow’s confidence some good...”

Bahorel snorted, and Marius started to giggling into the book. Joly was poking Bossuet’s side.

Grinning, Grantaire nodded. “Yeah, I guess you’re right,” he said, tip of his pencil gracefully turning to outline where Courfeyrac’s curls would fit into the picture. “Suggest the idea to him tonight for me, would you?”

*  

“Good, you’re here with perfect timing for once,” Joly said, grabbing Bossuet just as he strode into the entrance for A&E.

Bossuet gulped, and reluctantly let himself get pulled along the corridors, looking at the baffled people sat with various embarrassing wounds waiting for attention from a doctor or nurse. “I never arrive anywhere on time, so clearly you want me for painful and nefarious purposes,” he protested, lightly tugging his arm free and following Joly. He was wearing mismatched scrubs again – lilac top with yellow trousers. The long sleeved t-shirt he was wearing underneath was grey, so it wasn’t so much of a fashion disaster. “For which procedure am I your crash test dummy this time? Hey, Darren.”

He waved at the man walking past in colour-coordinated green scrubs, who looked at him, looked at the focused Joly, grinned, and said hi back before turning into the radiology department.

“Nothing painful,” Joly said, changing direction so suddenly that Bossuet had to skid to a stop to follow him quick enough. “And only slightly nefarious.”
“Ah, well, that’s a relief,” Bossuet said, slipping his hands back into his pockets and relaxing immensely. “My day’s been okay, by the way, thanks for asking—”

“Good,” Joly muttered, probably without really listening.

“Bit chaotic, managed to break a bottle of salsa in Tesco Express, and some poor granny thought I’d cut my hand off—”

“What, again?”

“Only a little bit.”

“You only dropped it a little bit?”

“Yeah!”

“Right...”

Joly dove left through an unmarked door. As ever, Bossuet followed, things starting to make a bit more sense. “Ooh, I remember this place. Supply room, yeah?”

The room wasn’t much of a room, more an overgrown closet, several meters wide and deep and lined with shelves of various things, from towels to syringes to bedpans. “Yep,” Joly said, scanning the shelves before turning to grin at Bossuet.

Bossuet followed his gaze around the place, before saying, “It’s a bit late for us to go back into the closet, isn’t it?”

With a scowl of disappointment which probably hid a grin – Joly was always upsettingly mature when in his scrubs – Joly lightly whacked Bossuet’s arm.

“And I’ve just had a huge lunch, not sure I’m up for a good old bit of ding-dong woo-hoo in this small a place, not got the energy really—”

That earned him another whack, and a shoulder bag thrown at his face. He scrabbled to catch it, managing to get a finger caught under the strap before it fell. “Shut up, you prat,” Joly said, sounding definitely slightly amused, “Just hold that open, would you?”

Bossuet let out a weary sigh, but did as he was told. “Bit disappointed, not going to lie,” he muttered, trying to find the zip on Joly’s bag. “I feel like the excitement’s gone from our relationship sometimes, y’know.”

Before he had time to prepare himself – before he’d even found that damned zip, even – Joly grabbed his collar, tugged him forwards, and planted a big, badly-aimed wet one on him.

“You daft twit, hold the bloody bag open,” Joly said affectionately, unzipping it for him and handing it to him, open.

Grinning like a fool – a bit pathetic, after two years of a steady relationship, really, but that was Bossuet for you – he held the bag still while Joly grabbed rolls of stuff from the side. “Not that I mind, you know me – but what, exactly, are we stealing from the NHS?”

“Supplies,” Joly muttered, picking something up and examining it. Looked like cotton wool. “If there’s going to be this big bust up, this not-quite-legal protest, then I’m rather sure we’re going to need supplies. When is it again?”
“There’s no ‘if’ about it,” Bossuet corrected, shaking the bag a bit to give Joly more room to cram stuff into. “And the coming Monday, I think. As if people needed any more reason to hate Mondays...”

“And thus even more reason to top up my supplies,” Joly replied resolutely, throwing bottles of antiseptic into the bag with perfect aim.

Behaving himself, Bossuet stood in perfect silence as he waited for Joly to finish. “It’ll look suspicious, us two, emerging from a supply closet,” he pointed out, all halos and innocent eyes. “...Not even a quick blowjob?”

Joly scowled, raised an arm ready to chuck whatever was in his hand at Bossuet – before pausing, shrugging, and going, “Yeah, alright then.”

Bossuet threw the bag to the side without a second thought for breakables.

*

Enjolras’ nose was bleeding, probably more than was good for him. Bahorel had given him his spare towel to hold against it, but it was still dripping a little bit. It didn’t feel broken, which was good, but the bleeding aspect was starting to concern him. And a man in sports gear holding a bloody towel to his face tended to draw unwanted attention on the bus – but even more walking through the streets, so he’d risked it, and tried not to look like a teenage hooligan. It might’ve been better, if he didn’t have the long blonde hair and soft features of a damned fifteen year old, but still.

Now, the challenge he faced was how to hold his bag open and root around in it for his front door key whilst keeping the towel pressed to his nose. Five minutes he was crouched over it, fumbling, before he heard laughter echoing through the door. Giving up, he all but threw his bag to the floor with severe hatred, and slammed his palm against the door.

The laughter stopped immediately. It took a few minutes, however, and some muttering, before the door opened to reveal a hesitant Courfeyrac. “Hello?”

Scowling at him around the bloody towel still pressed to his slightly leaking nose, Enjolras feigned a curtsy and said, heavy on the sarcasm, “If his majesty would kindly let me in my own flat?”

Courfeyrac’s eyes were wide and fixed on Enjolras’ nose. Or rather, the red-stained splodge of material that was hiding it. Enjolras kicked his shins. “Oh! Yes, of course, sorry – what the hell happened to your nose?”

“Bahorel got violent,” Enjolras said by means of explanation, rejecting picking his gym bag back up in place of kicking in into the flat instead. “I think I did something to piss him off, god knows what.” He kicked the bag across the wooden floor to its usual place beside the shoe rack (impulse buy at Ikea, Bossuet’s fault), and shrugged off his jacket.

Only when that was carefully hanging up did he realise the only sound he’d heard since entering was the quiet click of Courfeyrac closing the door.

Frowning with confusion, he turned to look around his flat. A gathering of six people were squished into the space around his sofas; Joly, Bossuet, Marius and Courfeyrac – the usual suspects – along with the now-familiar sight of Jehan and Eponine. Several were looking down and to the side with shifty eyes and growing blushes, others were staring at him with badly disguised fear.

He narrowed his eyes at them. Before addressing them, he lowered the towel to reveal his bloodied
nose for full affect. “What,” he said coolly, “are you all doing in my flat?”

Enjolras had to give them credit, there wasn’t a second’s hesitation before he got a response. The problem was, he got two responses.

“What,” he said coolly, “are you all doing in my flat?” Courfeyrac said.

At the same time, Bossuet said, “Combeferre said he was making fajitas, thought we’d make an evening of it.”

There was a second where the hope and innocence lasted on everyone’s faces. Then Eponine muttered a curse under her breath, Bossuet winced, Courfeyrac buried his face in his hands and Joly turned to Bossuet and hissed, “Never say anything! You know the rules!”

Marius just started to laugh nervously. Jehan grinned, utterly unapologetic.

Enjolras gave them all a look of disappointment for a moment, before shaking his head. “One, it’s still October. We haven’t even had Halloween yet. Two, Combeferre made fajitas last week.” With a weary sigh, he turned away from them and started to make his way to the bathroom for a shower. “If you’re going to talk about me, I at least expect you to have put in the effort to have come up with a believable lie.”

Courfeyrac yelled at his back, “I hope your nose is broken and mends crooked!”

Enjolras’ last parting communication was a middle finger waved back to them, before he shut the door.

Stripping his blood-stained clothes and craving a warm shower with every cell, he heard Eponine’s weary comment echo through the shut door. “Wouldn’t matter. Grantaire would still obsessively love him anyway.”

If he slammed the door to the bathroom forcefully enough to make the thin walls shake, he hoped the others wouldn’t make anything of it. It was a futile hope, he knew. But he hoped anyway.

*  

Grantaire frowned, chewing the end of the pencil and probably eating some of the rubber. He never used it nowadays anyway, just rubbed at the paper with the pad of his thumb.

After several minutes intense concentration on what was wrong, Grantaire raised his head slightly – eyes still fixed on the canvas – and called to his model, “You need to tilt your head about five degrees further down.”

“You presume to instruct me on how to model?” Courfeyrac asked, sounding appalled. “How dare you! I have sheer talent.”

“But not several years of studying art and art history,” Grantaire pointed out, grinning, “So tilt your fucking head down.”

Laughing, Courfeyrac did as instructed, instinctively curling the hand holding the packet of weight loss pills closer to his chest as he bowed his head over it. Grantaire tilted his head, looked between Courfeyrac, the canvas and the reference painting he’d printed out, using Feuilly’s resources. “Perfect.”

“Of course.”
“Yeah, yeah, you fucker. Now, stop moving or I’ll give you a big nose.”

“You wouldn’t!”

“And spots.”

Courfeyrac didn’t reply, and Grantaire chuckled. There was silence as Grantaire sketched his profile onto the canvas – starting simple before moving onto the fingers first clasped around the pills, then around his wrist. He was finding his respect for the old masters growing as the term went on. He was starting to figure out why paintings such as this had managed to last and still be worshipped near two hundred and fifty years after their creation. These were being buggers.

One of Courfeyrac’s fingers twitched – one of those holding his wrist – and Grantaire was about to yell at him, but Courfeyrac spoke first. “You’re aware what’s happening on Monday, I’m guessing?”

“I’ll only credit that with an answer if you put your finger back where it was.” Courfeyrac obediently shifted his finger back the millimetre. With a concerning sense that he’d regret answering this question – and hoping his friends’ attempts to match-make would end soon – he replied to Courfeyrac’s question. “Yes, unfortunately, I am. This non-protest, right?”

“Yes, that. Do you know who’s going?”

Courfeyrac clearly knew – he was asking if Grantaire knew. “Ahh,” Grantaire said, moving to roughly sketch the contours of Courfeyrac’s face – well, he says roughly sketch, but he generally ended up leaving it as it was anyway. “Is this where you subtly try and get my permission for Jehan to join you lot?” he asked, working on the nose first. It was annoying – Courfeyrac had the nose you’d expect to find on a bust of Alexander the Great. It’d be nice if one aspect of him was less than beautiful. Grantaire really needed less pretty friends, he could hardly come across any better in comparison. “Not that he needs my permission,” he continued to mutter, sweeping his pencil up to the outline of Courfeyrac’s brow. “He’s a big boy now...”

“He was scared of how you’d react,” Courfeyrac admitted. “Not that you’d be angry, or anything – more that you’d do that sorrowful puppy-eye, burying-yourself-in-tattered-plaid, curl up on the sofa abandonment routine, which he seems to find emotionally upsetting, rather than absolutely adorable.”

“Your compassion, as ever, is appreciated,” Grantaire said, glancing over the top of the canvas to see Courfeyrac grin and flash him a wink. “Shoulder forwards slightly.”

Courfeyrac complied. “Please don’t go into that whole abandonment routine, by the way, because for one thing, we’re not, and for another it’d make Jehan sad, and Sad Jehan is worse than upsetting a kitten.”

Grantaire made a general noise of agreement, starting work on Courfeyrac’s blue cotton jacket. “You’re not what?”

“What?”

“You said ‘we’re not’. You’re not what?”

“Abandoning you, you silly tosspot,” Courfeyrac said, with a scoff. Grantaire glared at him, and Courfeyrac shifted his shoulders until they were back into position. “You’re welcome to come. You have full invite. Our doors and hearts are open to you. The choice not to come was yours, and yours alone.”
“Well-”

“No, no,” Courfeyrac said, quite softly and with no trace of his usual exuberance. “Enjolras wants you there as well.”

Grantaire almost wanted his pencil nib to snap, for dramatic effect. But then again he didn’t, because that pencil was far more expensive than a piece of wood around a stick of graphite had any right to be. “Just shut up and be quiet, there’s a good model,” he settled on saying, forcibly keeping his tone steady.

For a stunning ten minutes, Courfeyrac obeyed him. Grantaire made solid progress on shaping the creases and folds of his jacket, and was just about to move onto going over the positioning of Courfeyrac’s arms when his model spoke again.

“I do love the bastard, but Enjolras is very bad at motivating people to do better, the poor sod.”

Drawing in a deep breath, Grantaire paused, lifting the pencil off the canvas for the first time in a while. “Look, I can shove this pencil where-”

“I’m sure you could, sweetie, but shut your cute little gob for a short while could you?” Courfeyrac said, again in that soft, calmer tone he’d used earlier. It was a voice that showed it cared too much. As much as Grantaire wanted the topic changed, before that dull ache he was just about managing to fool himself was going away came back again – he couldn’t.

“As soon as his parents realised they had a little blonde haired prodigy on their hands, they decided that was all they cared about,” Courfeyrac continued, staying perfectly still and in position. “Pushed him, but without much encouraging. Usual tale, won’t bore you with it, sure you’ve heard it before. It’s quite common really, the whole ‘Ninety-eight percent? Why not one hundred?’ issue. Of course, he figured it out by the time we reached GCSEs, and that was when the heavy rock music and lipstick and long hair and political activism started to kick in. Rebellion against what society deems ‘good’ and ‘productive’ behaviour. But damage done – he now believes the way to make someone do better, to reach their potential, is to point out all the ways they’re doing wrong. Trust me, I used him as a profile when we studied learning in A Level Psychology.”

Here he paused, clearly indicating that he desired a response of some sort. Grantaire replied with, “Hmph.”

“Now, I didn’t learn much from GCSE maths,” Courfeyrac said wryly, “But I did learn that two negatives make a positive.”

This did garner a response from Grantaire. “If you’re going to try and tell me that my fucked-up-ness and Enjolras’ fucked-up-ness will come together to make one perfect happy soul-”

“If you wanted, darling, I could quote you one of the forty studies I had to memorise concerning personality matches from my Relationships module, again, A Level Psychology, AQA exam board,” Courfeyrac shot back, and yeah, Grantaire should have figured Courfeyrac was the type to use endearments when angry. “I just thought that the maths made a better metaphor. Might I continue?”

Grantaire chewed the inside of his cheek, but let Courfeyrac carry on uninterrupted.

“Yes, you’re a little bit fucked-up. Mainly because you seem to have all these unnecessary self-esteem issues, you adorable fucker. Enjolras is fucked up too. So much of what he does is an act to cover a heart that really doesn’t know how to deal with humanity except shout at it and shoot out
snarky comments. Perhaps a joke every now and then. Society, now, that’s a system he understands, a system he can wrap around his little finger. Individual humans? He’s lost as a newborn babe. Why d’you think he needs Combeferre and myself? But we can only do so much.”

Something lightly touched Grantaire’s sternum, and he jumped, blinking and raising his head. Courfeyrac was standing right in front of him, smiling with affection. Grantaire hadn’t even registered that he’d moved. He’d been too focused on what Courfeyrac was saying.

“But you,” Courfeyrac said, touching the tip of his finger to Grantaire’s sternum once again, “You might be able to fix him. You’re funny and tough and don’t suffer fools gladly. You counter him, make him question stuff. And don’t you think that, when you’ve taught him that not all encouragement is the verbal equivalent of a kick up the arse, he might be able to start fixing you too? So if you’re still scared that there’s no possibility of a good outcome from this... well, perhaps you now see that you don’t have to be.”

As Grantaire stood there, open mouthed and wide eyed and utterly silent, Courfeyrac’s smile grew into a joyful grin. “Five o’clock,” he said, tapping his watch face. “My contract’s up. Same time tomorrow, yeah?”

Before Grantaire could respond, Courfeyrac leant forwards and down slightly to press a quick and noisy kiss to the top of Grantaire’s head, before grabbing his satchel and bounding from the room.

Grantaire blinked a few times. He turned back to the sketch, blinked at it. He looked back at the door, still swinging from Courfeyrac’s exit, and frowned.

*  
The quiet knock came at some point late into the afternoon. Enjolras’ curtains were shut and his clock was on the other side of the room, and between doing mindless work and watching TV shows, he’d long lost track of what time it was. Could be midnight for all he knew.

“Come in,” he yelled, not moving from where he was slumped back in his desk chair, gently spinning from side to side.

Courfeyrac’s head appeared around the edge of his door. “Hey boi, you done?” he asked, eyes flicking around the room for any signs that he shouldn’t be interrupting.

“Yeah, finished a while ago,” Enjolras admitted. He watched as Courfeyrac’s eyes finally landed on Enjolras’ computer screen, and took in the sight of what was unmistakeably a scene from Downton Abbey. At Courfeyrac’s look of shock, Enjolras smirked and raised an eyebrow. “You’ve caught me doing worse,” he pointed out.

“I know,” Courfeyrac protested, pouting slightly, before slipping into a mischievous grin. “I was just wondering how you could betray Combeferre by watching it without him.”

In a moment of careless immaturity, Enjolras stuck his tongue out.

“Blackmail material I have on you aside, are you able to come out of your little cave and socialise like a good boy?” Courfeyrac asked, for once being the mature one.

Casting one final forlorn look at his computer, Enjolras sighed, and leant forwards to press pause. He ignored Courfeyrac calling him a ‘good boy’. “I hope you realise the sacrifice I’m making for you,” he said, rising to his feet. Within seconds, Courfeyrac’s arm was wrapped around his shoulders, pulling him to the door.
“Oh, totally,” Courfeyrac said, pressing a sloppy kiss to Enjolras’ temple. He made exaggerated retching noises, which, of course, only made Courfeyrac do it again.

“Excuse you,” Combeferre called as they entered the main room, carrying a glass bowl of nachos in oven-gloved hands. “No public displays of affection in my house, thank you very much. Especially when there’s work to be done.”

Laughing and letting Enjolras go, Courfeyrac skipped over to Combeferre, pinching a nacho drowning in melted cheese. “But ‘Feeerrrrrrreeee...”

“Just sit down and eat your fajita,” Combeferre ordered, attempting to lift the nachos out of Courfeyrac’s reach and failing, and stifling a grin.

“Work?” Enjolras echoed, falling down onto the sofa, Courfeyrac followed soon after. “And fajitas? You’re spoiling me.”

Combeferre smirked at him, setting the nachos very distinctly on his side of the coffee table before squeezing into the end of the sofa beside Courfeyrac. “I know, it’s just like the good old days.”

Courfeyrac dropped a plate and wrap in Enjolras’ lap as he leant over to pick up the paper folder which was stuck under the bowl of salsa. Clearly from Bahorel – no one else they knew had access to such fancy stationary. “Details of the protest?” he asked, taking the bowl of chicken Combeferre was offering to him.

“Yup,” Courfeyrac confirmed through a mouthful of nachos and depositing far more guacamole onto his chicken than was necessary. “We got a few final things to sort out before we put dates and meeting info up on the ABC Facebook group, Twitter etc, and the masses get rallied.”

Carefully rolling up his minimalist wrap – Courfeyrac had made many arguments in favour of the over-stuffed wrap, but five years later and Enjolras’ eating habits hadn’t changed – Enjolras flicked through the folder. “Do we have any beer?” he muttered, taking in the facts and figures, a plan already starting to solidify in his head.

One was already on its way down to him, courtesy of a smugly smiling Combeferre.

“Oh my god, you two are so slow at constructing your wraps. C’mon, get eating already,” Courfeyrac said, mouth again full, and he swung from side to side to whack both of them with his shoulders. “We’ve got work to do!”

Leaning forwards to grab a handful of nachos, Enjolras caught Combeferre’s eye. Combeferre grinned, and Enjolras was unable to stop himself snorting with laughter as Courfeyrac continued to witter about most effective times for Monday.

He hadn’t realised he’d missed this until now. It was a good feeling, to be reminded that no matter how wrong things felt, he’d always have this, these nights, waiting for him when he needed them.

*  

“Oi, fat ass, budge up.”

Gavroche looked up at him with sheer disbelief on his little face, but shuffled closer to Eponine all the same. “I’m the smallest one here!”

Perching in the too-tiny space created, Grantaire snorted. “Who said my insults had to be logical. Here, pass the popcorn along to your sister, would you?”
And yet, the freshly-made batch of popcorn was lifted on Gavroche’s lap and moved no further.

“How long have we got ‘til it starts?”

“About five minutes. Feuilly better – ah, speak of...”

The front door swung open as Grantaire was speaking, Azelma trailing behind him. He stopped short when he saw the three of them already wedged onto the sofa. Jehan relegated to the spot by Eponine’s feet. “Where the fuck am I meant to sit?” he asked, sounding terribly indignant.

Grantaire exchanged glances with the others. “Azelma, we can probably squish on the sofa. You’ll have to sit on the floor.”

Azelma grinned, running right past the scowling Feuilly to jump onto the sofa between her siblings, pushing Gavroche partially onto Grantaire’s lap. “Who owns this bloody space, that’s what I want to know,” Feuilly muttered, stomping over and sliding down with many, many groans until he was sat on the floor, leaning against Grantaire’s armrest.

“ Forget owning the place, you’re not going to be living much longer if you don’t shut up soon,” Eponine said, waving a hand at the TV as the BBC’s red spinning circles appeared, announcing the imminent start of the monumental event which was *The Great British Bake-Off* finale.

“All I want,” Jehan said, leaning back so Azelma could play with his braids, “is some form of technology that lets me reach into the TV and pull out objects in it.”

“You just really want fancy cakes,” Feuilly said dryly, a statement Jehan affirmed with a grin.

“Just tell me what you want, I’ll make it,” Grantaire offered thoughtlessly. He realised his mistake when Gavroche suddenly perked up. “Not you.”

Jehan paused, head tilting as he considered. On the screen, Mary and Paul were in deep discussion about what standards they were expecting from each of the finalists. “I appreciate it,” he said eventually, very carefully, “But... you’re not Mary Berry.”

Grantaire threw popcorn at Jehan’s head – and, of course, it went flying past without so much as bouncing off him. “You take that back.”

“It’s true! Harsh, but true!”

“Then I’ll accept that challenge,” Grantaire said, sniffling in his pride. “Go on. Set me a challenge. I’ll bake it when you’re out doing your little rallying thing, make sure you have some motivation to come back again and don’t run off into the sunset in a revolutionary fervour.”

Oblivious of the Mel and Sue sassing on the TV, Jehan turned sharply to look at Grantaire, before smiling widely. “Like a victory cake,” he said, beaming.

Grantaire’s smile faltered, but only for a second. “Yeah, something like that.”

“Well I’m not going to go riding off into any fucking sunset,” Feuilly muttered. “You all seem to keep forgetting that this is my damn house.”

Laughing, Grantaire reached down and shoved Feuilly’s head to the side. “What, not even if Bahorel offered to sweep you off your feet like the delicate princess you are?”

No doubt Feuilly had a long chain of insults to retort with, but he was cut off before he could start.
by Gavroche shouting, “Are we going to watch this or not?”

As everyone aside from the irate twelve year old muffled sniggers, Grantaire caught Jehan’s eye and winked, sending Jehan into an extreme bout of giggles. Knowing he still had the power to make his best friend choke on popcorn with uncontrollable laughter made him feel happier than he’d been in a long time. Perhaps not perfect, but better.

*

Theoretically, it was stupid to try and get the papers to Feuilly today. It’s not like he’d be able to do anything with them for a few days. It was Sunday, nothing was ever open on Sunday. Every sensible person was still in bed at this time anyway.

And yet, here he was. Sat in the car he’d borrowed from Combeferre, clutching the file of annotated documents, staring at the flickering digital clock in the dashboard for a solid ten minutes now.

He was such a fucking coward. He wasn’t even here because it’d make Feuilly’s life easier. More like because he’d screwed up enough recently and when he’d said that he’d get the documents to Feuilly before the protest, he damn well meant it.

If only he could get the courage to get out of the car and get into the fucking shop to give it to Feuilly. What was he so scared of, anyway? From what he’d learnt about Grantaire, he probably wouldn’t be awake. He was probably the type for long lie-ins, curled up and hogging the duvet –

Someone knocked on the front window, completely terrifying Enjolras and making him jump so hard he almost hit his head on the roof.

Grantaire was bending down and peering through the driver’s door window with an unimpressed expression and raised eyebrow.

Furiously trying not to blush, Enjolras wound the window down (yes, Combeferre’s car was that old). When the glass had completely vanished, he blinked up at Grantaire and stuttered, “I thought you’d still be in bed.”

Grantaire’s eyes widened a bit in surprise, but he didn’t smile. “Joke’s on you, I’m on Gavroche duty today, so an early start. Please tell me you’re not here with the intention of watching me in my sleep, because as you should know, what with all the Law studying and all, that’s illegal levels of creepy.”

Enjolras retained enough of his wits not to grace that with an answer. Instead, he stared back at Grantaire with a firm ‘you’ve got to be joking’ glare, before holding up the file. “For Feuilly. Could you give them to him?”

Without protest, Grantaire took the folder, absently flicking through it. “Delivering it yourself? Why not use one of your lackeys, Bahorel or Courfeyrac?”

“They’re not my lackeys,” Enjolras sighed, running a hand through his hair, torn between driving away as quickly as possible and staying for as long as Grantaire would let him. He deliberated his next words for a long time, before finally confessing, “And I guess I just couldn’t stay away.”

It was like poking a wound, he didn’t want to see how Grantaire would react, but at the same time he couldn’t not. His eyes flickered for a moment, looking everywhere before finally landing on Grantaire.
He seemed breathless, but at the same time he was looking at Enjolras as if he understood exactly what Enjolras had meant. Willing to take this, any window he was given, however slightly, Enjolras opened his mouth to say anything, apologise, explain, anything, but before he could get the words out Grantaire nodded once, and turned to walk away.

Mouth hanging open, Enjolras watched Grantaire until he entered the art shop, before slamming his head against the steering wheel.

Next time, he’d give it to Bahorel.

* 

Grantaire was working in the back room when Feuilly walked in. He didn’t look up, so Feuilly didn’t call out, but his curiosity got the better of him – he’d never been able to stop himself when Grantaire was working on something new.

Tons of photos of Courfeyrac had been taped to the white walls – something Feuilly would throw a fit about later – and the pose looked familiar. Feuilly glanced at the Pre-Raphaelite imitations leaning against the far wall, himself and Bahorel as Dicksee’s Belle Dame, Jehan as Millais’ Ophelia, before stepping forwards to Grantaire’s side and smiling knowingly at the sketch of Courfeyrac that Grantaire was starting to fill in with paint. “Rossetti,” he said, nodding. “Prosperine. Good choice. Brown hair, thick lips... even the goddamn blue jacket fits. What’s that he’s holding, in place of the pomegranate-?”

“Pills of some kind, thought I’d leave it ambiguous,” Grantaire muttered, too focused on matching colours to give Feuilly his full attention. “You want something?”

“Hm?” Feuilly muttered, scanning Grantaire’s lines, trying to look for a fault he needed to point out. Nothing. The boy was getting good... “Want? Oh, no, not with you. Have you seen Bahorel’s scarf anywhere, the bastard says he left it here and is too busy to come and fetch it himself. Doing what, it’s a fucking Sunday...”

Grantaire snorted. “You mean the pretentious grey and red one he wears with his suit? No, I haven’t.”

The pause was long enough that Feuilly had started to turn away, ready to leave Grantaire to his work, before Grantaire spoke again.

“But Enjolras dropped the adoption papers off, all annotated and perfected.”

Stunned, Feuilly spun back around. “What? Where are they? And when?”

Grantaire gestured with his brush – the same huge old tattered thing he’d been using for year. True enough, on the chair on the far side of the room, sat the cardboard folder. “Several hours ago, I don’t know. What time is it now?”

“Lunch.”

“Then about four hours ago.”

Feeling as if he was suddenly walking on eggshells, Feuilly walked over to pick up the folder. “Why didn’t you give them to me before?”

He watched Grantaire’s back carefully, but the man just shrugged, before continuing with the colour-wash background.
Absently, Feuilly flicked through the folder. Not only had Enjolras annotated the documents, but he’d added his own, revised version, notes explaining the details in layman’s terms for both him and Azelma, lists of contacts and references if he needed further help... the boy hadn’t half-arsed it. Closing it like it cost a hundred quid, Feuilly frowned, thinking, before tilting his head to look at Grantaire’s back. “How are you?” he asked, as if the question was casual.

Grantaire didn’t stop mid-stroke, he was too professional for that. But when his brush reached the end of the canvas, he paused. “I don’t know,” he answered. Then he dipped the brush back into the paint, and touched it to the white canvas once more.

Not sure how he felt himself, Feuilly nodded, before turning and leaving the room. He’d return in an hour or so, to make sure Grantaire ate. In the meantime, he had accounts to check, and a scarf to find.

*  
“Yo. Yo!”

Someone was snapping their fingers in front of Enjolras’ face. He swatted them away. “What,” he said, glaring up at Courfeyrac, who was dancing around him in his SpongeBob pyjama shorts (courtesy of Bossuet).

“How are you?” he asked, as if the question was casual.

Grantaire didn’t stop mid-stroke, he was too professional for that. But when his brush reached the end of the canvas, he paused. “I don’t know,” he answered. Then he dipped the brush back into the paint, and touched it to the white canvas once more.

Not sure how he felt himself, Feuilly nodded, before turning and leaving the room. He’d return in an hour or so, to make sure Grantaire ate. In the meantime, he had accounts to check, and a scarf to find.

*  
“Yo. Yo!”

Someone was snapping their fingers in front of Enjolras’ face. He swatted them away. “What,” he said, glaring up at Courfeyrac, who was dancing around him in his SpongeBob pyjama shorts (courtesy of Bossuet).

“Stop daydreaming!” Courfeyrac ordered, flopping down onto the bed next to him. “C’mon, lovely, you gotta getcha head in the game!”

The sentence was followed by a deep, soul-shaking groan from the adjacent bathroom. “I hope he knows that if he starts to quote or, god help us, sing from High School Musical, I will make him drink Listerine until he’s either poisoned or drowns,” Combeferre called through the adjacent wall.

“You dream that I would sing to you,” Courfeyrac called back, grinning, and looping an arm around Enjolras’ shoulder. “My singing is delightful.”

Leaning back against his friend, Enjolras snorted. “Who, exactly, told you that?”

“Marius,” Combeferre answered before Courfeyrac could defend himself. He spoke as he entered the room, just dressed in a pair of old, tattered tracksuit bottoms. Enjolras was the only one wearing a t-shirt, something he’d got for free in his first week at uni and which very much didn’t match his superman pajama trousers. He felt remarkably modest and prude, next to Mr Toned to his left and Combeferre showing off his geometric sleeves and the lines of Aristotle forming molecular structures across his shoulder blades. “I believe our misled Pontmercy told Courfeyrac the traitorous lie in a moment of extreme inebriation.”

“It wasn’t a fucking - mmph!”

Courfeyrac’s protests were cut off mid-sentence as Enjolras slapped a hand over his mouth, pulling him down with him as he fell back onto the mattress. “Get the lights, would you, Otosan?”

There was a muffled giggle from Courfeyrac, beneath Enjolras’ hands, and a second deathly groan from Combeferre. “Why do persist in quoting anime? You know it hurts me so, and it’s not like you like the stuff.”

“I quote it because it hurts you so, and because you were the one who said Courfeyrac should have his way,” Enjolras pointed out, feeling Courfeyrac shake the whole bed with how much he was laughing. “But seriously, the lights? Or are you expecting us to sleep beneath the deathray you have as a lamp?”
Combeferre sent him a scathing look, before flicking the light switch, causing what would have been pitch black darkness if not for the shine of the streetlights. “Yes, Okasan.”

Even Enjolras couldn’t hold back laughter from that. He and Courfeyrac shuffled higher up onto the bed, and Combeferre climbed carefully onto it the other side of Courfeyrac. It was a tight fit, nowadays, even on Combeferre’s king bed.

“I know it’s a big day tomorrow, but do we have to go to sleep yet?” Courfeyrac asked quietly into the darkness, arm pressed right up against Enjolras’ side. He could hear Combeferre’s slow breathing. “Or can we talk for a bit?”

It had started back in their GCSE years, and somehow become a tradition without any of them intending it, even though they were really too old to be calling it a sleepover anymore. They used to be able to fit onto the double bed Combeferre had in his parent’s house with ease, and they’d found it was easier, with Enjolras tense and Courfeyrac bouncing off the walls, to sleep together the night before a big event. Every results day they’d stay together until the early hours, when the other two had to leave to spend the morning with their parents. Before driving tests, rallies, debates. Now, having to share a bed with two fully-grown men, elbows in each other’s chests, Combeferre snoring heavily, Courfeyrac occasionally whacking them with a flying hand, the covers vanishing halfway through the night – was far more comforting than a night spent in peace in Enjolras’ own bed.

“No,” he said softly, turning onto his side so he could curl up against Courfeyrac. “I guess we can talk for a little while yet.”

* 

Grantaire caught the keys Feuilly threw at him with very little skill and sheer luck. It was always more fun when the person throwing wasn’t paying attention to where they were aiming.

“I should be back before midnight,” Feuilly was saying, rummaging through his coat pockets for something. “But if not, you know the drill, lock up by about eleven, it’s a Monday after all-”

“Eleven?” Grantaire exclaimed, settling himself into the chair behind the front desk. “Are you seriously expecting me to do a – what is that – a sixteen hour day by my self, are you nuts-”

“Jehan, you’re going to be late!” Feuilly bellowed, completely ignoring Grantaire’s ranting. “Look, you can take a lunch break, I’m not expecting you to go without food. And, y’know, I could shut the shop if you wanted to come-”

“Yeah, no-”

“Well, then, it’s your own fault. For fuck’s sake, Jehan! I’m going to leave without you if you don’t-”

“Coming, coming...” Finally, Jehan appeared from behind a shelf of sculpting tools, clutching knitted gloves in one hand and a bagel in the other. “Sorry, was just making sure Azelma knew where-”

“Don’t care,” Feuilly said, but Grantaire caught the slight almost-smile. “Can we go now?”

Jehan beamed, and half-skipped, half-jogged towards the door after an exasperated Feuilly.

“I’ll do it,” Grantaire yelled after them, “But when you’re all morose and disappointed tomorrow, don’t coming looking to me for comfort, because I’m going to sleeping. All day. You realise that,
yeah?"

“Yeah, yeah-”

“And Eponine better show up to keep me company soon, or I promise you, I will be raiding these shelves to postpone death by boredom-”

Feuilly stopped, halfway through the doorway, pausing to turn back and frown and say, “Mate, Eponine’s going to the protest too. I thought you knew that?”

The news struck Grantaire so forcefully that his mouth actually opened slightly. “You – what?” he asked, looking from Feuilly to the apologetic expression on Jehan’s face. “This is a joke, right? She’s a realist, she’d never think something like this could actually work-”

He stopped talking as Jehan’s arms snaked around his chest and squeezed him in what could half be described as a hug, half as a wrestling move. “See you later today,” Jehan promised him, bumping Grantaire’s ear with his nose lightly.


He watched them leave the shop, and Jehan gave him a cheery little wave through the glass before hurrying over to Feuilly’s car.

Ten minutes later and Grantaire was still sat at his desk, staring at the empty surface and wondering what the hell he could do to take up the sixteen hours and keep him distracted from the guilt that was starting to eat away at his insides.

*

The others were waiting for them outside of the Musain, looking less like the privileged young men they usually were and more like the angry students they were trying to be.

All, that was, except Bossuet, who was wearing about three layers of jumpers and coats and what appeared to be a home-knitted wool hat over his bald head.

However, it was Combeferre who caught Eponine’s eye. His usual neat jeans-and-jumper combo had been replaced by tattered, loose jeans and an Asking Alexandria t-shirt with the sleeves rolled up, leaving, for the first time, the entirety of his sleeves on full display. However, his hair was still perfectly quaffed, and he was still wearing tortoise-shell rimmed glasses.

Eponine whistled as she climbed out of the car, leaving Feuilly to mutter about something. “Well check you out, Rambo,” she said, striding forwards and smirking at Combeferre. To her amusement, he just raised one serious eyebrow before striking a Johnny Bravo pose.

To his left, Enjolras was rolling his eyes. “Please stop acting like a tosser.”

“Let the man show off his guns!” Courfeyrac protested, grinning like the Cheshire cat with his chin resting on Enjolras’ shoulder. “It’s not like he does it often. Everyone can be a bit of a tosser upon rare occasion.”

“You ever take your own advice?” Enjolras muttered. The comment seemed malicious, but Enjolras was grinning when Courfeyrac whacked him over the back of the head. With complete dignity, Enjolras straightened up and readjusted the heavy red plaid shirt he was wearing over a Sex Pistols: Vive le Punk top. “Hooligan.”
“That’s why you keep me around, isn’t it?” Courfeyrac continued, still grinning. “Jehan!”

Sure enough, the poet and the Scot had finally left the car, Gavroche jogging along in front of them. At hearing his name Jehan smiled broadly, running in his Wedgwood print docs over to his boyfriend, who romantically wrapped his arms around the younger man’s waist.

Eponine caught Feuilly’s gaze. He looked like he wanted to drown them both.

She was laughing as she turned back to the rest of the group.

Enjolras wasn’t.

Expecting the worst and feeling prepared for it, she followed Enjolras when he jerked his head off to the side and walked away from the main group. “What?” she demanded.

There was a moment’s silence as Enjolras drew to a stop, turning around not to look at her, but rather to where Gavroche was having his hair ruffled by Bahorel. “You can’t be serious.”

“How?” Eponine said coolly. She crossed her arms, and waited for Enjolras to make his next point.

The look of shock on his face reminded her strikingly of the only other person who’d protested so fiercely at Gavroche’s involvement. “He’s a kid!” Enjolras hissed, clearly struggling to stop himself yelling. “Barely a teenager! This thing is going to be filled with men my size and stronger, who are going to be angry.”

“You sound just like Grantaire,” Eponine said sharply, not caring when her comment made Enjolras look like he’d just been stabbed. “Look, I can’t be arsed with this and you don’t have time for this. So just accept that this was his decision, and he wanted to come. Okay?”

For a moment it looked like she’d won, as Enjolras glanced away to look over her shoulder, back at the group. “I barely feel safe about the rest of you coming—”

“Again, not your choice, not your problem,” Eponine cut in before Enjolras could spiral down into guilt again. “And trust us, Apollo – we’ve been in worse situations than this, and come out stronger.” She smiled at him, trying to show that she didn’t mean to insult him.

Enjolras froze where he stood, staring at her. “You don’t call me that,” he said eventually.

Eponine shrugged. “Well, it looks like you fall apart pretty quick without someone mocking you. Thought I’d give it a go.”

Hesitantly, almost bashfully, he smiled. “You’re pretty heartless, you know that?” he said wryly. “Marius would be wasted on you.”

Eponine gasped, and pressed a hand to her chest. “What’s this? Are you giving out relationship advice?”

Enjolras raised one eyebrow and no doubt Eponine would have got the best witty retort she’d ever heard, but instead they got Combeferre yelling over to them, “If you two lovesick housewives have finished, we need to get moving?”

It was a wonderful feeling, watching Enjolras’ face hardened at the exact same time as hers. Eponine flipped her hair as she snapped her head around, furiously yelling back, “We will both garrotte you!”
To add insult to injury, Combeferre just gave her a smile and a thumbs up, before turning back to the others.

Enjolras moved to step past her, to join the rest of the group, but Eponine shot out a hand and grabbed hold of his shirt. “Just – one last thing?”

He turned back to her, the wry humour replaced by his usual serious facade once more. “Of course.”

Eponine bit her lip, thinking, before saying, “Can you just make sure the others know to look out for Gavroche?”

Enjolras frowned at her. “I don’t need to. I can tell you for fact, they’re already planning on looking out for both of you.” He gave her an encouraging nod, before leaving her standing there.

It took Feuilly yelling over to her, a few minutes later, to snap her out of the shock.

* 

“If we show up to this thing fifteen minutes late with fucking Costa, I swear to all things even vaguely holy, I will kill you.”

“Better than Starbucks,” Bossuet muttered mutinously into the layers of scarves he was wearing.

“I promised you that I will fight capitalism and inequality, that’s true, but neither of us promised anything to do with early mornings,” Joly added, blowing through the tiny hole in the coffee cup’s lid in a futile attempt to cool it. “Besides, Bossuet already looks like he’s going to get another cold. Just be grateful it’s not raining, I’d still be in bed if it was.”

Enjolras raised an eyebrow at the two of them. “What great activists you two are.”

“Relax, they’re just joking,” Combeferre said. “And we’re not late. We’re here.”

It was a feeling Enjolras would never tire of: turning the corner to Parliament Square and seeing it full, not of tourists, but of more people than you could count holding placards, banners, people with spiked jackets and boots and jumpers and jackets, so many people from so many classes and ages here because... well, because they actually gave a damn. They cared.

This is why he did it, why he ‘wasted time’ exposing corrupt corporations, raising awareness for inequality, of people who abused positions of power. Because, not all the time but every now and then, you’d find people who’d listen, and occasionally there’d be enough, and occasionally, you’d get things changed.

It was worth a few punches, a few nights in jail, to see people so alive with anger and empathy.

Behind him, he heard Bossuet yell out someone’s name and go running into the crowd, Joly following him with a quick yell of, “We’ll be right back!” to Enjolras and Combeferre.

Enjolras laughed as Bossuet almost tripped over the curb to get onto the grass, weaving through groups of people until he found his friend. Joly’s bag, bursting at the seams with medical supplies, almost whacked someone as he ran past them, but the person dodged with a grin in time.

“ Didn’t the girls from Du Maine say they were going to come today?” Courfeyrac asked, arm around Jehan’s shoulders and resting his head against Combeferre.
“Yes, they should be here somewhere,” Combeferre said under his breath. He was standing shoulder to shoulder with Enjolras, watching the crowd with the same proud smile that Enjolras had. “It’s rather good, isn’t it?”

“It’s fantastic,” Courfeyrac breathed.

“Beautiful,” Jehan added.

Enjolras hesitated, then said softly, “‘A glorious people vibrated again, the lightening heart of the nations: Liberty from heart to heart’. He leant forwards slightly to catch Jehan’s eye, and winked.

Jehan shrugged in admittance. “Can’t beat our boy Percy Bysshe.”

Courfeyrac laughed, and started to bounce on his feet. “Well, come on, then! Are we going to join in or not?”

In answer, Enjolras looped his arm around Combeferre’s shoulder and walked forwards.

It was times like this, places like this, these gatherings, when he could truly believe that things could change, would change, for the better.

*

Feuilly and Bahorel were left watching as the group separated, diffusing into the crowd after friends and classmates, colleagues in Joly’s case. Feuilly’s eyes were fixed on where Gavroche and Eponine were chatting with a guy they knew from Covent Garden, right on the edge of the crowd.

“They all better keep their phones safe,” Feuilly muttered.

“Don’t concern yourself,” Bahorel replied, standing quietly, confidently still with his hands in his back pockets. He was wearing his bright red waistcoat again, over a grey shirt. “They might be acting like excited schoolboys but they know what they’re doing. They’re going to make sure they don’t lose contact. Wouldn’t surprise me to hear Combeferre’s placed trackers on us all.”

“Mm.” As Feuilly watched, a passer-by had to step onto the road to get passed an oblivious group of protestors, one of them holding a sign reading ‘Education is for the masses, not just the ruling classes’. The passer-by, a woman in a suit, shot them a glare. “I don’t like this,” Feuilly said, frowning. “This space is already overflowing, and more people are going to come. It’s going to overflow with angry students, and they’re going to block the roads and drivers and commuters will get angry, and someone will notify the police, and all it will take is one person, one broken nose...”

“Yeah, I know,” Bahorel added. He looked around, frowning in a way that mirrored Feuilly, before he said in a low voice, only for Feuilly to hear, “You know what scares me?”

“Go on.”

“That that is exactly what Montparnasse plans on making happen.”

In reflex, Feuilly’s gaze drifted back to Gavroche and Eponine. They had somehow located a placard of their own, and were leaning against it as they laughed. “If so,” Feuilly said, “Everyone can take care of themselves, right?”

“Sure,” Bahorel replied, but there wasn’t much conviction in his tone. He drew his hands out of his back pockets, and started to swing his arms, loosening his shoulders. “If not – well, I guess that’s what we’re here for.”
It reached ten o’clock before Grantaire started to search Google for news.

He neither found nor heard anything, until Radio 1 Newsbeat announced, “There are reports coming in of a gathering of protestors on Parliament Square in London. No officials asked have been able to give us any information, the gathering appears spontaneous. Though it currently seems a peaceful protest, the police are suggesting that drivers take other routes. More on this story as it happens.”

Grantaire turned off the radio, and left a sign on the desk saying that if anyone wanted assistance, he’d be found in the back room. He grabbed two new tubes of paint off shelves as he passed them, and kicked open the door. He let it slam shut.

* 

Courfeyrac was copying Gavroche in walking around like a clown, much to the amusement of the surrounding crowd. Jehan had found a girl in one of his modules and they were sat on the grass, watching the two big kids acting like idiots, and occasionally talking about false feminism in Shakespeare. It was quite relaxing, really.

The crowd behind Courfeyrac shifted, some people moving on and some arriving. Jehan absently scanned them as he laughed. He caught something familiar, and scanned the faces again, trying to figure out who it was he recognised – and realised just as the man turned away. For a second, Jehan gaped at his back.

Then he was up on his feet, not wasting time to explain to his classmate, not pausing to tell Courfeyrac to stay with Gavroche before running into the crowds, weaving his way through the people surely faster than the man he was following could have.

True enough, he was coming back into sight. And he must have heard the sound of Jehan running, or heard people call out ‘Watch it!’ as Jehan barrelled past, because he turned around to check and this time, Jehan had no doubts.

The shock of it, the fear, sent Jehan stumbling. He almost fell into a group of men, but one of them grabbed him in time. Someone else yelled at him to watch where he was going, someone else called him an idiot, another, a hippie. Most of them stank of alcohol. The man who’d caught him, some twenty-year-old in skinnies and superman tee, asked him if he was okay and it took a while to convince him that, yes, he was fine, he just needed to find his friends...

He ran out, tried to find some fresh air, jogged past groups and scanned the crowd, fumbling for his mobile phone.

He wasn’t aware he’d walked out into the road.

Someone called out his name, as he turned around in time to see a car swerve towards him, and stop barely a meter away.

Jehan held up his hands to apologise, but the driver was already climbing out of the car.

“You fucking students!” he yelled, “Get off the fucking streets, go do something useful! And, you fucking fairy cunt, watch where the fuck you’re going!” He threw his glass drink bottle at Jehan.

It struck him on the forehead, and the pain was enough to daze him for a few minutes, but he still had sense enough to grab at Courfeyrac as he barreled past, fists clenched and ready to swing at
the driver. “Don’t... don’t...”

Another pair of hands grabbed Jehan’s shoulder. “Hey, brother, you good?” Bossuet asked in a low voice, turning Jehan around to face him. “You’ve got a bit of a scratch there...”

“Stop Courfeyrac,” Jehan muttered, reaching up a hand to press against his forehead. It felt wet, but he wasn’t sure if that was blood or the guy’s drink. “He’s gonna make it worse-”

“I’m here, I’m okay, I’m not going to do anything,” Courfeyrac promised, taking hold of Jehan’s hand. “We’ll get you to Joly, check you for concussion-”

“He’s this way-”

Jehan shook his head, and felt small relief when it didn’t hurt as much as he’d expected. “Don’t need Joly. Had concussion, this isn’t it. We need to get the others together, quickly.”

Courfeyrac and Bossuet exchanged glances, looking concerned. “Why?”

“Because these guys are angry and drunk,” Jehan muttered, waving a hand at the crowd around them, “Because after that attack they’re only going to get worse, and because the police are already here.” Bossuet swore under his breath. Courfeyrac’s eyes widened, and Jehan tried not to panic as he looked at him and said, “Javert’s here. He’s in the crowd.”

* It’s said that the only thing that moves faster than light is monarchy – a King dies in England, and his daughter in Kenya instantly becomes Queen.

But struggling through the crowds, Bahorel wonders if Mob Mentality travels even faster.

There wasn’t even a moment when everyone changed, but there’s no denying the carefree laughter and communal atmosphere had been completely lost to the anger and fury that was always going to surface at some point.

“The Thernadiers are right on the edge, they should be fine,” Bahorel yelled down to Feuilly, trying to push someone to the side as gently as possible. “So if you could stop worrying-”

“They’re stupid, I mean intelligent in the best way but so stupid,” Feuilly yelled back, not bothering to be careful as he shoved his way through the crowd. “So, quite frankly, I’m not going to-”

Something hit Bahorel in the small of his back. He stopped, ground his teeth together and turned around. “Do you have a problem?” he asked in a low voice at the almost painfully stereotypical tough-guy who was stood behind him. Knock-off Addidas trainers and everything.

“You a policeman?” the man asked, scowling up at Bahorel with a pitbull face.

Confused, Bahorel looked across at Feuilly. The ginger just shrugged. “I have no idea what you’re talking about, but I need to find my friends, so if you’d just-”

“What, your other plain-clothed bobbies?” another voice asked, no less hostile.

Bahorel turned around slowly, making eye contact with Feuilly. Feuilly nodded back. This was going bad, and quickly.

“Where’s your gun, bobby?” a third voice called out, triggering a forth, a fifth, and too many more.
“I’m not a cop,” Bahorel gritted out.

“Then why’re you wearing a suit, Tory boy?”

Bahorel rolled his eyes, still turning, taking them all in, trying to see if there was a path of escape. “It’s jeans and a shirt, and I’m not a cop, and I’m fucking definitely not a Tory!” Bahorel roared. “I’m a fucking lawyer!”

As some idiot spat at the ground in front of him, he realised that probably wasn’t the best thing to say. “...I prosecute?” he tried in a high voice.

Feuilly laughed at him at the same time the first guy threw the first punch.

Grunts behind him as he stepped under the man’s swinging arm told him Feuilly had got sucked into the fight, too. He half wanted to turn to watch him. A fist grazed his chin and he growled as he slammed his knee up into the guy’s stomach. As no one else moved to attack him from the front, he spun around, to come face to face with a guy holding the broken handle of a placard and wielding it like a baseball bat.

Bahorel swallowed, and adjusted his stance. “Okay, mate, now look-”

The man spat at him, and took a step forwards. And like a guardian angel, Jehan appeared at the man’s side and in one smooth motion spun on his left foot to slam his right heel into the man’s stomach at full force. As the guy bent double, retching, Jehan slammed and elbow right where a kidney would be, then used both hands locked together, swung against his side, to knock him over entirely.

Then little Jehan looked up at Bahorel and grinned.

Bahorel blinked a few times, and failed to shut his mouth. “Courf,” he yelled, as Jehan’s boyfriend appeared and battered over a few guys with the help of Bossuet, “I think your boyfriend just gave me a boner.”

Jehan winked at him, but stepped over the beaten man’s curled form to get to Feuilly. “Keep it in your pants, lawyer,” Courfeyrac called, helping one of the worst injured men to sit up so Joly could check the cuts on his face.

Chuckling, Bahorel flipped him the finger before turning to Feuilly and Jehan. “What’s going on?”

“The police are here,” Jehan said quickly, rushing to get the facts across. “Javert’s in plain clothes, there’s probably more, and everything’s going to go very bad, very quickly, unless we do something.”

“How can we do anything? They’re pissed,” Feuilly countered. “In both meanings of the term.”

“Enjolras,” Bahorel cut in. “We need to get to him. He’ll be able to do something.” He sounded more desperate than certain.

Jehan frowned in though, but Feuilly just frowned in confusion. “What makes you think that?”

“Because,” Bossuet said, appearing at Jehan’s side with a bottle of antiseptic in his hands and eyes searching for hope. “He’s Enjolras. Right?”

*
“He’s not picking up,” Combeferre muttered, staring down at his phone, “But that’s almost certainly because something’s distracting him rather than anything serious...”

Enjolras bowed his head. They’d found a tree, a potential way to make it easier for the others to find them – but all that was for nothing if they couldn’t so much as contact them. “Try Bahorel again,” Enjolras muttered, closing his eyes and leaning back against the tree as he tried to stay calm.

There were just the sounds of the growing riot as Combeferre fell silent to call Bahorel.

“Still nothing,” Combeferre muttered.

Enjolras nodded without saying a word. He felt Combeferre settle against the tree to his right. “This all went so wrong, so fast,” he muttered.

“They do that, sometimes,” Combeferre pointed out, with an attempt at a smile. Enjolras smiled sadly back.

“And it started off so well.” Enjolras bit the inside of his cheek to try and keep his emotions in check. All he could hear was the voice of the one man who’d been right about all this. “I think I made a mistake.”

“Well,” said Courfeyrac, and Enjolras’ eyes shot open, “This was organised by Montparnasse and his lot. I say we take the morning as a win, and accept our losses with grace, and perhaps learn for next time?”

Enjolras pushed up from the tree so fast he almost tripped. The other side of the tree, looking remarkably smug and relieved was Courfeyrac, surrounded by pretty much everyone else. “You bastard,” Enjolras growled, grabbing the lapels of Courfeyrac’s leather jacket and tugging him fiercely into a hug. “Check your fucking phone every once in a while!”

“What about you?” Courfeyrac replied, voice muffled by Enjolras’ shirt. “I called you about twenty times!”

Stepping back, Enjolras whacked Courfeyrac’s ear. “Don’t be stupid, you know I use Combeferre as my phone,” he said, but he could think clearer now. Courfeyrac beamed up at him, and he could smile back. Knowing that his other best friend was safe, Enjolras turned to the others with just as much fear. “Jehan,” he said, frowning and stepping forwards, “You’re hurt?”

Jehan waved Enjolras’ concern away with a smile. “Nothing, just an angry man with a bottle.”

“Trust me, he caused more damage than he received,” Bahorel said, chuckling. He was sporting a scratch or two himself, but Enjolras knew better than baby him and ask how he was.

Enjolras nodded. “So who are we missing?”

“Eponine and Gavroche,” Feuilly said, holding up his phone, “But they’ve called and told me they’re at the edges and staying out until they hear from us.”

“Good, that’s good...”

“I think this is all of us,” Courfeyrac said, nodding and scanning the group again, just in case. “We’ve just – Marius!”

Enjolras blinked. “Wait – you don’t think Marius is in the middle of the riot? Seriously?”
But Courfeyrac flapped his hands at him, and held up his phone, showing ‘Marius’ on his caller ID. Which made a lot more sense. Enjolras turned and caught Combeferre’s eye, and had to stifle a snort.

“You’re ... okay we’re... big tree... what? Okay... be careful...”

Courfeyrac hang up with force, and said with authority, “Marius told us to wait here. Said he’d be here soon.”

“And?” Enjolras asked, expecting there to be more.

Courfeyrac hesitated, before answering, “... He says he has a plan. Sort of.”

Enjolras decided his best option here was not to comment.

It took all of two minutes for Marius to charge into their little haven beneath the tree, slipping awkwardly between two strangers, and his little face lighting up with relief when he recognised his friends. “Guys!” he called, grinning. His eyes landed on Enjolras and he hurried forwards – and holding out a loudspeaker. “Enjolras. Do it.”

Enjolras looked from the loudspeaker to Marius. “Do what?”

“Anything!” Marius yelled. He took a deep breath, and trying to find a semblance of calm before he continued, “Look, you’re you, you’re pissed, and there’s a bunch of other pissed people out there not really pissed at anything, so give them something to be pissed at! That’s what you do, isn’t it? You’re a leader! So for god’s sake please do some leading because I’m starting to get scared that I’m going to die.”

Slowly, Enjolras took the loudspeaker from Marius, turning it over in his hands, words that he could say already starting to form in his mind. “Where did you even get this?” he mused, realising that the loudspeaker didn’t have a handle, but a base that looked like it should attach to something.

“I think I stole it off a police van? Car? Thing? I don’t know, I’m not really sure, I just thought that you might be able to use it.”


Combeferre shrugged at him, and smiled. “Well, it’s bound to do something. And right now, anything’s better than nothing.”

*

Enjolras managed to control the attention of the crowd for half an hour. They let him speak, and they listened. Most of them would remember him. Several journalists took photos.

But there wasn’t peace. Just a circle of listeners amidst what continued to be chaos.

The riot vans showed up at around 2pm. The police in black, holding batons and faces hidden behind black masks just gave the rioters something to aim at, and the fragile hold the blond boy had on his audience started to slip away. Desperate and confused, the police broke out the water cannons.

It was when the tree Enjolras and his friends were standing under caught fire, that they were forced to realise that they were the only ones left who were bothered with trying to stay peaceful. It was
either leave or join in with the violence.

Enjolras had never really been good at realising when something was beyond being won. And as his friends got lost in the riot, stronger emotions – desperation, anger, and most predominantly guilt – replaced whatever trace of logic remained.

*

It’s impossible to keep track of the people you care about when the rest of the world seems determined to fight a war around you. Everywhere Feuilly turned there was someone screaming, someone he didn’t know, pushing forwards to get to the front line.

He’d been there a few minutes ago. He could still hear the battering of people against the plastic riot shields, the occasional scream that sounded more like pain than anger.

And he’d lost everyone. At some point he’d caught a blow to the face, leaving one eye out of action. Not that it was making much difference - he couldn’t see anyone he recognised anyway.

If someone got injured, if one of those stupid kids was hurt because he wasn’t there to watch their backs –

He tried to push his way through the crowd, but someone pushed back harder. He landed on the floor, deafened by the thud of boots and Doc Martins hitting the floor around him, right by his head -

“Hey, buddy – buddy, you okay?”

Gasping, trying to get off the ground – because he’d been there, he’d done that and he didn’t fancy having ribs stepped and crushed – he reached up blindly, hoping someone would help him up, anyone –

Please, let the others be okay –

“Hey, let me through, medic – buddy, c’mon get up brother-”

A hand wrapped around his wrist and hauled him to his feet. He turned a blurred gaze on the man. All he saw was a bald head, but it was enough. “Bossuet.”

Bossuet gaped, gently pulling Feuilly forwards and wrapping an arm around his waist, holding him up. “Jesus, buddy, I didn’t recognise you – c’mon, let’s get you to Joly-”

Feuilly let himself be ushered through the crowd, leaning heavily on Bossuet. “You’re – your arm-”

“Yeah, got caught on a broken sign, but what’re you gonna do,” Bossuet yelled. This close, Feuilly could only just hear him. “What happened to your eye?”

“Got too close to a policeman,” Feuilly yelled back. He risked raising his head, and saw clear space, thinning crowds rather than the crushing chaos he’d been trapped in before. “Do you know where-”

Bossuet didn’t hear, but one last push and they were out, a small clearing at the back of the crowd, by one of the trees untouched either by flames or people climbing them for a higher vantage point. Under it was Joly, tying a sling around the neck of a man with a freshly bandaged hand. A woman with a fiercely bleeding cut on her forehead was waiting. Someone else was sat cross-legged and
massaging their ankle.

“Joly!” Bossuet yelled, “We’ve got another walking wounded!”

Joly didn’t respond immediately, finishing his work on the man with the broken wrist before turning to see what Bossuet meant. When he did, his jaw dropped. “F- Feuilly? Jesus, what happened there!”

“I somehow ended up at a riot,” Feuilly replied wryly. “She’s a police officer, by the way,” he said, nodding towards the woman with the cut forehead. She froze, looking at him with terror. He looked back impassively. “I’ve seen her by the station when picking up Grantaire.”

Joly frowned up at him with confusion, already searching through his bag for a suitable bandage. “And? I don’t get your point.”

The woman started to shake with relief. Feuilly smiled. “Just checking.”

“We need to get out of here,” Joly muttered, swiftly spraying the woman’s cut with antiseptic before wiping away the blood. “We don’t want our name affiliated with this violence-”

“I know, I’m trying,” Bossuet muttered through gritted teeth, “But you try finding anyone in that crowd, it’s chaos – I don’t know if Bahorel’s found anyone yet, but we’re trying.”

The policewoman winced sharply as the antiseptic started to sting. Joly hushed her, comforting her in a low voice. “And anyway, we’re already affiliated – photos of Enjolras are going to be everywhere tomorrow,” Feuilly said.

“Yes, but hopefully anyone worth their salt will realise he was trying to stop the fighting, not encourage it,” Bossuet pointed out.

Feuilly laughed bitterly. “You’re assuming the media is reliable.” With a grimace, Bossuet shrugged admission.

“Enjolras isn’t going to come easy,” Joly cut in, using conservative amounts of surgical tape to stick a strip of gauze to the police officer’s cut. “Leave-”

“I’m not going near him,” Bossuet assured him, letting out a slight nervous chuckle. “I’m going toleave that to Bahorel and Combeferre-”

The two continued talking, but Feuilly had stopped paying attention. “Where’s Eponine?” he asked, looking around the clearing, the last remaining empty space in the Square.

Bossuet paused mid-sentence, turning to look at Feuilly with wide eyes. “Feuilly?”

“She – they were meant to wait here, stay where it was safe,” Feuilly muttered, desperately scanning the area. He pulled his phone from his pocket – only missed call was from Bahorel. “They should be here – have you found them? Did they go home?”

He’d made up his mind before Bossuet answered him. The look he shared with Joly was answer enough. “No, I – we haven’t seen them,” Bossuet said. Joly shook his head.

Feuilly nodded, thinking. “Right,” he said, glancing around the small space once more. “Right,” he said, one final time, before he ran back into the rioting crowd.

Joly’s voice drifted to him as he shoved past two guys in flannel. “No – Feuilly – at least let me
check your forehead first, please!”

That wasn’t important. Fear was driving away the pain away now anyway.

*

It was tempting, Bahorel couldn’t lie, to join the front lines of the riot. To become one of the people screaming with fury, one of those trying to tear down the police’s barricade of riots shields, and yeah, perhaps throw a punch at the guys in black uniforms hitting the people who were doing nothing but yell with good cause.

But he couldn’t. There was more important stuff to be done. There were people getting hurt, and he couldn’t let that happen.

Not Enjolras, Combeferre or Courfeyrac – he knew where they’d be. They’d be right between the civilians and the riot shields. They could take care of, if not themselves, then at least each other. Jehan was undoubtedly with them too. But there were other people who’d be getting punched, who’d be caught up in fights they weren’t prepared for. He’d already had to carry one guy back in a fireman’s hold because he was unable to walk – concussion or twisted ankle. He’d left Joly to find out.

“Incoming!”

Bahorel looked to his left. A riot van was not twenty meters away, just behind the police line, and it was turning a water canon in their direction. Thinking fast, Bahorel scanned those around him. Seeing two teenage girls, he grabbed their arms, shoving them down and bending over them in time to catch the full force of the spray – if it could still be described as a ‘spray’. If the force of it didn’t knock the breath from him, the cold did.

When it stopped, it took a few minutes before he recovered to the stage where breathing merely hurt. He let go of the girls, telling them to go the fuck home.

Furious, he turned his attention to the water cannon with the full intention of tearing that thing to the fucking ground. And it seemed that everyone around him had the same idea.

As one, the crowd surged forwards, slamming against the thin plastic of the police shield line. Bahorel was close enough to see the terror on the faces of the boys in black, but he couldn’t find it in him to care. He slammed his fists against the shields like the rest, the only thought going through his head being how dare they, what gave them the right -

It took a while for him to realise that someone was trying to get his attention. Realising that he could feel something else through the stinging of his busted knuckles, he paused. Someone was tugging on his shirt, hands slamming against his side, and a kid was shouting.

Gavroche was trying to push past him. He was yelling up at Bahorel, face scrunched and furious. He was jabbing a hand at the police line, the complete opposite direction than he should going.

“Get out of here!” Bahorel yelled down to him, grabbing Gavroche’s pointing hand, “For fuck’s sake kid, go!”

But Gavroche shook his head, scowling furiously, continuing to scream something Bahorel couldn’t hear. Bahorel’s heart stopped as someone’s elbow swung too close to Gavroche’s head, but the boy dodged it as if it was just a fly.

Eventually, Gavroche gave up and grabbed at Bahorel’s shoulder, as high as he could reach, and
tugged the larger man down ferociously to his level.

“Let me get through! I can break it!”

Stunned, Bahorel stared at the young teenage boy. But he didn’t have time to respond, as the kid took advantage of his momentary stillness to dive past, and through the gap in the shields.

Growling, Bahorel slammed himself against the wall of plastic again, this time for a different reason entirely. He didn’t give a shit for the guys struggling to hold him back, he just – if he could just see –

At an impressive speed, little Gavroche dived between the oblivious, panicking officers over to the van. He vanished behind it for a second and Bahorel strained desperately against the shields again, needing to – if he’d just acted sooner –

Gavroche appeared on top of the van, crawling across to the canon. He was holding an open Swiss army knife.

A dozen possible endings shot through Bahorel’s mind, none of them good.

As he watched, Gavroche crouched beside the huge pipe that carried the water up from the tank, took the knife in both hands, and stabbed at it.

The result was instantaneous. The police noticed what was happening just as the high pressure of the water was redirected from the canon, to the hole Gavroche had just created. The boy was knocked off balance just as the police reached him, jumping up to grab his arm and pull him away. Gavroche had no hope of maintaining balance. Hit by the water and being yanked by the police, he flew off the roof of the van and hit the ground hard.

The only relief was that in the confusion, Bahorel was able to break through the shields and the police. He grabbed the uniform of the officer who’d tugged Gavroche from the roof and threw him to the side, needing to see Gavroche.

Someone got to kid’s side at the same time he did. Moving faster than Bahorel, Courfeyrac was already crouched beside the small body, shaking him lightly and yelling the kid’s name.

“Tell me he’s okay,” Bahorel begged, breathing hard, heart hurting in his chest. “Courfeyrac. Courfeyrac!”

“Breathing,” Courfeyrac muttered, “But he’s not – I think he’s stunned, we’ve got to get him to Joly.”

Unable to do anything other than what he was told, unable to think, Bahorel nodded. Being gentle as he could be, he scooped the body into his arms. “C’mon, he’ll be around the edges somewhere,” Courfeyrac said. “We’ve got to get out of here.”

Bahorel didn’t know if it was the sight of a young boy in his arms, the rage in his eyes or perhaps, for once, just some God damn common sense, but none of the police bothered them as they left the broken cannon.

* 

Feuilly was the first to spot them. At the sight of the limp body of Gavroche, his look of concern was replaced by a look of terror like Courfeyrac had never seen before. He was already sprinting over to them before Bossuet and Joly even realised that anyone else had arrived.
“He’s okay,” Bahorel yelled as Feuilly reached them, “He’s breathing, he’s awake, he’s okay, he just fell-”

Nodding wordlessly, Feuilly scooped the kid from his arms. Bahorel wasn’t lying; in the few minutes it had taken them to find where Joly had set up camp Gavroche had come round. Still dazed, he let himself be carried without protest, but as he was transferred from Bahorel’s grasp to Feuilly, he spoke up. “M’fine...”

“Shut the fuck up until Joly’s had a look at you,” Feuilly muttered, tightening his grasp. “If you have a single bloody injury, I’ll personally make sure you don’t get pizza for a month.”

Gavroche groaned, and curled inwards against Feuilly’s chest. “Oh, c’ mon...”

Feuilly looked up over the kid, catching Courfeyrac’s gaze and jerking his head towards where Joly was sat. Catching his meaning, Courfeyrac nodded and ran towards his other friends.

Bossuet saw him first, and grinned widely. “Courf! Thank fuck – wait, what’s wrong-”

Courfeyrac shook his head, slowing to a stop. “He’s fine, he just fell a bit harder than any of us would’ve liked-”

As if they were communicating by thought, Bossuet turned as Joly looked up from the woman he was tending to. Joly nodded, saying something to the woman before rising to his feet. “Where is he?” Joly asked.

“Here,” Feuilly cut in, appearing at Courfeyrac’s side with a complaining Gavroche still cradled in his arms.

Joly stepped forwards, reaching forwards, first of all, to take Gavroche’s wrist and his pulse. “Can you walk, Gav?” he asked, his voice taking on the soft lilt of a doctor’s bedside manner.

“Yeah, think so,” Gavroche replied, squirming in Feuilly’s hold. Joly gave him the nod to set Gavroche down, then helped the kid stand upright.

“Now, I’m going to give you a once over,” Joly continued, kneeling so he was at the boy’s level. “I’m not groping you. I need you to yell if anything hurts, okay, and answer anything I ask you as best you can. You can do that?”

They waited as Gavroche nodded, and Joly’s smiled as he started to run his hands over Gavroche’s arms, legs, and torso.

“Where’s Eponine?” Bahorel asked in a low voice, turning his back on Joly and Gavroche so they didn’t hear him. “Anyone found her?”

“She and Marius are on the other side, helping people get out,” Feuilly said, matching Bahorel’s low tone. “She thought her brother was okay, and I decided to let her keeping thinking that. Jehan?”

“He was with me,” Courfeyrac said. “He’s fine, he’s with – well, he and Combeferre are-”

Thankfully, the others knew his friends as well as he did. “They’re looking after Enjolras,” Bossuet finished for him. Courfeyrac nodded.

“What’s the damage?” Joly called across, his careful fingers running through Gavroche’s hair, checking for any bumps on his scalp. Gavroche winced when Joly reached his hairline, and
everyone there held their breath. “That hurt?”

Gavroche shrugged. “Just a little bit. Ran into someone earlier.”

“It’s true, he landed on his back,” Bahorel added. Content with that answer, Joly nodded, and Courfeyrac took that as cue to continue.

“What’s the damage with Enjolras? Broken wrist, definitely,” Courfeyrac told him, fighting hard to keep his voice steady. “Something’s wrong with his ankle. Possible rib damage too, we don’t know, he’s not listening to us.”

“He thinks it’s his fault,” Bossuet breathed. Courfeyrac nodded, and Bahorel swore.

“This has gone too far,” Joly muttered, gently dabbing antiseptic on Gavroche’s grazes. “Bossuet, would you—”

Bossuet nodded, crouching down to rummage through Joly’s bag for bandages. “We’ve got to bail. This isn’t our fight anymore, we’ve had our say and it didn’t work.”

“Enjolras won’t like talk of quitting,” Courfeyrac cut in. “He won’t listen, and he won’t back down. No way. We can’t quit.”

Feuilly snorted with derivation. “Quitting? This isn’t quitting, this isn’t running away. This isn’t even a victorious last stand. This is a battle lost. There are going to be so many more opportunities to make your case and win but this? This isn’t it. We need to get the fuck out of here.”

“Yes, I know, but Enjolras is desperate, and grieving, and worst of all hopeful,” Courfeyrac said, eyes wide as pleading as he stared at Feuilly. “I don’t know how to— I don’t know—”

“God, you’re all so stupid!”

Gavroche swatted Joly’s hand away, and stared up at them all. “I really hope idiocy isn’t an adult thing, because I never want to be that stupid!” he yelled. “Christ, why do I have to do everything—”

With a roll of his eyes, he pushed Joly’s hand away once more, and before any of them could stop him, he turned and ran. Joly stumbled to his feet, attempting to run after him but the kid was fast. He’d had years of practise of running without being caught, and it wasn’t long before Joly gave up. Waving his hands in surrender, he turned back to the others, all of whom were stood stock-still, too stunned to move.

“I hate that kid sometimes,” Feuilly groaned finally, shaking his head.

* 

The Courfeyrac edition of Proserpine was almost done when the bells chimed for the opening of the door. Not in the sense that it was almost perfect, more that Grantaire was all but ready to chuck down the paintbrushes and admit that he couldn’t do any more to it and renounce drawing folds in materials or weirdly positioned wrists ever again, for the rest of his life.

Commerce had been going pretty steady over the lunch hour – not uncommon, usually they got all the business types who wanted to aspire to not being business type come and spend inordinate amounts of money in the shop as a remnant of a dying youthful dream – so Grantaire wiped down his hands, reducing huge splatters of paint to mere huge smudges as he headed out, welcoming smile in place, geared up and ready to try and sell as much bullshit as possible.
Not seeing anyone at first, he got a bit pissed off. If someone had just walked in, disturbed him, and left immediately...

He jogged forwards and peered around a few of the aisles, pursing his lips and scowling. Nothing, no one to be seen anywhere. Giving it up for a bad case, and probably some very lost tourist, he shrugged and made to head back to his painting.

Then he saw Gavroche, sat on the floor with his back to the front desk, chest heaving and bloody slowly dripping from a split lip and grazed arm. The kid looked up at him, smiled weakly and croaked between deep breaths, “Hey, R. You got any water? Maybe a plaster or two?”

Grantaire felt like he’d just been pushed off a forty-story building. “Shit.”

*  

The van swerved so close to the group of them, gathered right on the fringes of the riot, that Joly reached out to drag Bossuet back from the edge.

Feuilly, in contrast, stepped forwards. “Is that my...”

The parking was atrocious, about a meter from the curb and at a forty-five degree angle.

The driver’s door swung open, Grantaire jumped out, and Courfeyrac started to laugh.

“Idiots,” he muttered under his breath. “Of course. All of us. Total idiots.”

He could tell that Grantaire was giving each of them a once-over as he ran towards them. His face tightened as it saw Bossuet’s arm, now in a sling, and he scowled at Feuilly’s bruised and swollen face. Courfeyrac wasn’t sure how bad he himself looked, but Grantaire’s expression didn’t lighten up when it saw him either.

“Gavroche’s safe,” Grantaire said, slowing to a walk as he reached them. “I patched him up and sent him up to help Azelma make cookies, or something, I dunno – where’s everyone else? Is everyone safe?”

“Eponine and Marius are on the other side, helping people get out,” Feuilly said. “Jehan’s still at the front, with Combeferre and Enjolras.”

“As far as I can tell, no one’s seriously injured,” Joly added quickly. “But some of them I’ve only temporarily patched up. I think Courfeyrac’s fractured his hand, and I’m not actually sure what Bossuet’s done to his wrist. I’d like to check Bahorel and Feuilly over properly, too, to just check for internal haemorrhaging or any cracked bones they might have – possible hairline fractures in Feuilly’s skull, for starters. It’s unlikely, but-”

“And Combeferre and Enjolras have been at the front for a lot longer, so they’re going to need medical attention too,” Courfeyrac cut in.

Grantaire nodded, looking past them at the still rioting crowd behind them. “Okay. Where are they?”

Bahorel lifted a hand and pointed high. “Last I saw, at the front nearest the police vans. Enjolras isn’t-”

“Of course he’s not,” Grantaire muttered. “Right – Joly, which of these d’you approve for driving?”
With a wry grin, Joly glanced around at them all, then shook his head. “Quite honestly, the only person I’d feel safe with having behind a wheel right now is me.”

Grantaire threw the van’s keys at him. “Here you go, then. Get everyone into the back – it’s not going to be comfy, it’s used for transporting arts goods mostly, sorry, was the biggest transport I could get without stealing a bus – leave some space for the other three, yeah?”

“Where am I taking them? I suppose Courfeyrac’s is closest-”

“Yeah, but you’ve got better supplies at-”

“The hospital!” Grantaire yelled. “For fuck’s sake, you’re going to the hospital! Why was that not the first thought in all your heads?” At the guilty expressions surrounding him, he rolled his eyes and turned to Courfeyrac. “Where’s Enjolras injured?”

Courfeyrac looked stunned at the question, but he answered swiftly anyway. “Ribs, wrist, possibly ankle.”

“No head injuries?” Grantaire checked.

“Not last I saw.”

“Good.” He looked back to Joly, and shoved a thumb towards the van. “Get going. I’ll be right back.”

* 

There was a pain shooting down his arm, across his torso, up his leg, and all logical thought had left long ago. Each motion he made was automatic – a conditioned response, like a robot wound up and set loose. No longer adrenaline, but powered by furious regret, self-hatred and shame, the memory of a good man who should have – who deserved to make more of an impact, more of a legacy, than a few inspiring words at a class of students, half of whom were too busy checking Facebook or Twitter to actually pay attention to the lecture.

The screaming and the yelling and the fear had all merged into a monotonous background. Undoubtedly, if he stopped to think for a second, he’d collapse. A hand on the small of his back, familiar, was the only think keeping him sane.

If someone stopped him, and asked him, right that second, why are you doing this?, all he’d be able to say was what else am I meant to do?

So he couldn’t stop.

So he continued to scream and yell and slam his bleeding hands against the shields of the police, until something started to draw his attention.

“Enjolras. Enjolras!”

Blinking, he turned to look at Combeferre. His best friend’s face was inches from him, bruised jaw, and wide eyes. As Enjolras watched, as he struggled to focus, Combeferre nodded pointedly over Enjolras’ shoulder.

“Look. Look!”

Hands grabbed him, and turned him around. What he saw, he understood even less.
The crowd didn’t part, but Grantaire was shoving his way through, oblivious to the out-of-control masses around him and heading straight towards Enjolras.

He was confused, he was angry, and he was in pain. But somehow, all Enjolras could register in that moment was relief. He smiled. “Grantaire.”

Before he had time to react any further, Grantaire scowled at him, drew back and arm and punched him, fist landing neatly on Enjolras’ temple.

Enjolras went out like a light.

* 

“I need nurses, paramedics, I’m going to need x-rays and scans, we’ve got potential broken ribs and neural haemorrhaging, a lot of lost blood – quick!”

The previously silent A&E jumped swiftly to action at Joly’s words – most of the nurses recognised him from his shifts there, and didn’t question why a civilian was giving the instructions. The rest responded to the authoritative voice that seemed to know what he was doing.

Joly waited until two of the nurses were near enough before turning and running back through the entrance. He led them out the front, to where the van was parked in the space usually reserved for ambulances. Bossuet was already helping the others out the back – and away from the riot, by the quiet of the hospital, they looked in a sorry state. Not one of them was unscathed, most holding arms gently, keeping their weight on one leg only, or holding their sides. Feuilly’s eye had swollen and had turned deep purple. One of Combeferre’s tattoo sleeves was completely hidden by blood. Jehan was moving gingerly, trying to keep his back and torso completely straight, and Eponine was cradling an arm, jaw clenched and firmly blinking back tears. Enjolras was sat on the edge of the van, barely conscious, Grantaire’s hand on his shoulder seeming to be the only thing keeping him upright.  Behind him, Joly heard one of the nurses swear.

“Who’s the most at risk?” a familiar voice said.

Darren. Joly hadn’t even realised he was on duty. He turned to smile gratefully at him, before answering, “There’s a man with possible fractured skull, get him scanned ASAP, and then the guy with a long blonde braid has rib damage, same for that one sat there, in the red shirt. Others should primarily be fractured bones and blood loss.”

“You gonna tell me what happened?” Darren asked as they ran swiftly down the steps to the patients.

“Would you accept it if I said car crash?” Joly replied.

Darren shot him a shrewd glance, lips curling into a wry smile. “I could accept that. Nowhere near Parliament Square?”

“Don’t know what you’re talking about. We were up by Blackfriars,” Joly said.

For a moment, he wasn’t sure if Darren would call him out on his bullshit or not. Then, with a wry smile, Darren clasped his shoulder. “Let’s start getting these guys inside and tended to, yeah?”
Enjolras came around with the vague idea that he was still in Combeferre’s bed. A hand slowly closed and his head rolled to the side, feeling the stiff cotton of the pillow. It was rougher than he was used to, and didn’t smell quite right – in fact, it smelled wrong, and his hand was slowly brushing to the side but he couldn’t feel either of his friends next to him...

“Hey, buddy. Enjolras? Enjolras, it’s okay, if you’re waking up man I need you to open your eyes for me. Think you could do that?”

Joly’s voice was quiet, a whisper, but it still echoed uncomfortably through Enjolras’ head. It brought with it an awareness of other pains, the illusion of Combeferre’s soft bed falling away rapidly. He opened his eyes obediently, and immediately flinched away from the bright white of the ceiling. The movement jarred something in his chest and he hissed out through his teeth.

“Oh, there you go. Yeah, I don’t recommend moving too much, you’ve kinda got a few busted ribs there.”

Slowly, Joly came into focus, and Enjolras found enough strength to curl his fingers so only the middle finger was left. To his right, someone – Courfeyrac, it sounded like – laughed. “Oh, he’s feeling better obviously.”

“Of course it had to be now,” someone else said – Feuilly. He seemed to be on the other side of the room. “Right in the few minutes Grantaire actually leaves the room-”

Enjolras blinked slowly a few times. “Where’s-”

“Combeferre and Courfeyrac are sat on the bed to your left, Jehan’s opposite them, and Bahorel and Feuilly are on the bed opposite you,” Joly said, keeping his voice low. Enjolras appreciated the gesture. “They’re all fine – I’ve stitched ‘Ferre back up, Feuilly’s got a hairline fracture in his skull but nothing serious. Bahorel’s just a bit bruised. Eponine’s having a cast put on her arm, and Jehan’s nursing a few bruised ribs. You’re the one with the fractured ribs, fractured wrist and a shattered ankle, genius.”

Fractured ribs? Yeah, that’d explain it. Some of it. “And my head?” Enjolras muttered, raising a hand to feel at the throbbing coming from his left jaw.

“Grantaire knocked you out,” Bahorel said, sounding happy about it. “And Joly put you on the good stuff to help with the pain.”

“Right.” Enjolras blinked a few more times. “Joly – any way you can help me get a bit more upright?”

Joly chuckled, and moved around to the other side of his bed. He was wearing his white coat, but he was still had on his clothes from the protest underneath – clothes that were, in some areas, splattered with blood. “Only slightly, though,” he said, picking up a remote thing. “If you get a punctured lung, I’ll get pissed, but Combeferre and Grantaire will kill you for sure.”

Enjolras ignored him, just tried to hold himself as still as possible as Joly’s remote made the head of the bed tilt, until he was vaguely in a sitting position. Feuilly, most of his red hair hidden beneath bandages, waved cheerfully at him from across the small room. It really was tiny, four beds squashed with about a meter between them. Each bed, however, had about five bouquets of random flowers next to them.

“Being the only vaguely uninjured and unnecessary people, Bossuet and Marius decided to make
“the room pretty,” Combeferre explained, with a wry smile. He was carefully running an absent finger over the bandage wrapped around his upper arm. At Enjolras’ concerned frown, he shook his head. “Don’t worry. Scar will just make me look even more badass. Would be nice if I could actually see, though...?”

“I’ve already told you, this is an A&E ward, not an opticians,” Joly snapped, with the air of someone who’d long got bored of the topic of conversation. “Bossuet’s looking, but no promises. Your fault for being so stupid as to wear glasses to a fucking protest.”

“Grantaire,” Enjolras said before something could distract him again. He stumbled on the syllables, tongue still feeling heavy, so he tried again. “You said – where is he?”

“Went to the loo,” Feuilly said, sounding almost amused. “Sat on the corner of your bed, unmoving, like a bloody lapdog for two hours, and of course the instant he leaves you wake up. That’s worse luck than Bossuet, mate.”

“Did we manage to persuade him to get something to eat, or was he still being resolutely angsty?” Courfeyrac asked, smirking. “Oh, wait,” he said, as scuffed footsteps echoed their way. “Is this – it doesn’t sound happy enough to be Bossuet – ah yep-”

The door swung open as Grantaire walked in, rubbing his face and yawning.

Enjolras smiled. “Hello,” he said. His tongue still felt heavy, and his head was still throbbing and felt cloudy, somehow, but Grantaire looked up sharply and he couldn’t help but smile wider.

Grantaire froze in the doorway, one hand still holding the door open. Enjolras couldn’t read anything in his expression, past the shock. He couldn’t really think very clearly.

“I’m awake,” Enjolras said, not really realising the silence that had fallen around him. “Um. That’s important, right? And you carried me from the protest, didn’t you. I remember that, kind of.”

“Yeah,” Grantaire said, more of a breath than a word. “Yeah, that’s about right.”

“And I love you,” Enjolras said, frowning. “I mean, that’s also important. And I haven’t told you yet. Did you know that already? I’m pretty sure everyone else does.”

Apparently, that was the wrong thing to say. Before he had finished speaking, Grantaire’s mouth had fallen open. For a few seconds there was complete, terrifying silence, before Grantaire spun around and left the room, the door swinging shut behind him.

Enjolras didn’t know how to react. He couldn’t figure out what he’d done. Someone swore quietly. Slowly, he started to realise, and his eyes closed. “I’m a fucking idiot.”

“Don’t you dare,” he said, opening his eyes again and looking across at Jehan. The kid only had one leg off the bed and he was already wincing. “You need to be resting, you look like shit. Probably not as much as I do, but still. I’ll fix it.”

Combeferre chuckled. “Will you? It’d be about time.”

“You have no right to mock me, I’m barely awake and on drugs, you should have shoved something in my mouth the instant Grantaire walked into the room, you shouldn’t have let me say anything,” Enjolras said, carefully lifting his head to glare at his two best friends. He paused, blinked, and frowned. “There was an innuendo in there somewhere.”
From his position leaning against Combeferre, Courfeyrac sniggered. “How many drugs is he on, Joly?”

Joly shrugged, also grinning. “He’s still talking coherently, so clearly not enough.”

For the second time in fifteen minutes, Enjolras gave him the finger. Joly just laughed and patted him on the head, before going to check that Jehan hadn’t done himself more damage.

“Don’t worry yourself just yet,” Feuilly said. His words were slurring slightly, Enjolras noticed, and he was leaning against Bahorel’s side. Seemed like he was on the same drugs Enjolras was – it was almost a comfort, knowing he wasn’t the only one. “He’s gonna come back.”

“How d’you know?” Courfeyrac asked.

Feuilly shrugged, causing Bahorel’s hand to slip from his shoulder. “I know the kid. He wasn’t running away, he was rushing off. Besides, I can hear his footsteps again. No one else wears Vans that busted.”

Wide-eyed, Enjolras turned back to the door. The door swung open and Grantaire strode back in, brandishing about five packets of earplugs. He was panting and flushed. “Just had to run back to the shop,” he said, “Because I am not putting this off any more, and fuck if we’re gonna have the homosexual supporting cast contributing to our conversation-”

“Homosexual?” echoed Feuilly and Combeferre, sounding amused.

“Supporting cast?” Courfeyrac and Bahorel repeated indignantly.

“You’ve seen Ouran?” Enjolras asked, confused.

Grantaire started. He half turned back to Enjolras, eyes wide. “You’ve seen-?” But he shook his head and continued across the room chucking boxes of earplugs to Courfeyrac and Combeferre, muttering about more important things under his breath.

“Aww, but-”

“Put them on, Courfeyrac, or I swear, I will tell everyone what-”

Without further protest, Courfeyrac pulled out two bright orange earplugs and shoved them in, scowling. Combeferre and Jehan took theirs willingly. Reaching Feuilly, Grantaire faced the problem that Feuilly’s ears were beneath a thin layer of bandages – a problem he solved by lifting up Bahorel’s and putting them over Feuilly’s ears. He shoved Bahorel’s earplugs in himself. Then, he turned to Joly, and, with a firm finger pointed at the door, said, “Out.”

Not liking the idea of having to leave his patients, Joly folded his arms and narrowed his eyes. It was a fact well known amongst them that, though Joly would willingly do what people wanted normally, when you were in his hospital, you’d have more chance ordering around a cat.

Grantaire relented. “I’ll call you immediately if anything happens,” he promised. Seemingly contented, Joly nodded and left the room. But not before turning and giving Enjolras an enthusiastic thumbs up.

Palms starting to turn clammy with sweat, and heart beating an erratic rhythm against his already painful ribs, Enjolras turned back to Grantaire. But he wasn’t done. He was grabbing the two curtain dividers in the room and lugged them across to Enjolras’ bed, forming a vague wall between them at the rest of the room. It wasn’t perfect – one of the curtains was twisted and
Enjolras could see Bahorel’s leg, but there was a semblance of privacy about it.

Grantaire finally stopped moving. He stood still, fingers nervously playing with the metal foot of the bed.

“This is a little ridiculous,” Enjolras said, still a little unable to filter before he spoke.

Grantaire shrugged, cheeks flushing a bit. “Yeah, well, ideally we’d be a few miles away from that nosy lot and somewhere private, properly private, but you are not getting out of that bed until Joly gives you the all clear. Let’s get that straight right here, you’re not going anywhere until Joly says you can, no matter how much shit you think you have to do, no matter how many oppressed kittens you think you need to go and personally rescue, like some absurd Mary fucking Poppins, okay? Not happening.”

Enjolras smiled slightly. “I think I’d fall over if I tried to stand up. Don’t worry, I’m not going to run away.”

Grantaire’s fingers paused, hovering over the metal. “I, uh, was actually more concerned with you dislodging a rib and puncturing a lung or something, but if you could avoid the running away thing, that’d also be good.” His fingers started to tap again. If he wasn’t certain that it’d lead to exactly the kind of damage Grantaire was worried about, Enjolras would have leaned over and taken Grantaire’s hands in his own, in an attempt to calm him, reassure him. Something like that.

“Okay, here’s what’s going to happen,” Grantaire said eventually, shifting his weight slightly and looking straight at with Enjolras with a renewed confidence that, while slightly scaring Enjolras, still made him feel slightly proud. “I’m going to talk, and you’re going to listen.”

This was important. Enjolras considered it for a second, before saying, “I can’t promise that because if you go all cynical again it’ll be really upsetting and I’ll want to make you more optimistic and I’m not sure I’ve fully got control over what I say at the moment, but I think I can stay silent.”

Rather than the exasperation Enjolras was expecting, Grantaire smiled a little at that. Enjolras smiled back.

“Wow, you really are on drugs, aren’t you.”

“Well, obviously-”

“Shut up.”

Enjolras shut up. That made Grantaire smile again.

Enjolras shut up. That made Grantaire smile again.

The finger tapping started again, but stopped almost immediately. “Here’s the situation at the moment,” Grantaire said, speaking decisively. “You kissed me. I liked being kissed by you. I want more of that. And more stuff along a similar vein, if that’s okay by you. All that? That’s okay by me. The shit that’s not okay is how you yelled at me. How you used my alcoholism – which I’m recovering from, fuck you very much – against me as emotional manipulation. You used Gavroche against me, and that’s not right. Courfeyrac pointed out that you’re shit at emotions, not good at figuring people out and frankly that’s bullshit. You know exactly how to make people do what you want. What you’re bad at? Realising when you shouldn’t. So be warned that if you do that to me, or anyone, again? If you use your powers of human manipulation and glowing hair of emotional turmoil for bad, I will punch you. That’s a thing. That’s gonna happen. And don’t fucking think you can kiss it better.”
“I thought that if I kissed you you’d understand better, because every time I tried to explain verbally I fucked it up,” Enjolras said before he thought. He paused, wincing slightly at the glare Grantaire was giving him. “Like now, because I’m talking again. I understand why you thought I hated you, because, honestly, I thought I hated you for a while. Apparently it’s Mr Darcy syndrome, I don’t know, I think Marius mentioned it. But I know – and I want you to know – that I wasn’t trying to – I didn’t want to make you feel bad, I thought – I thought I could motivate you, because you could do so much better-”

“Shut up,” Grantaire ordered again, holding up a hand. When Enjolras fell silent, Grantaire leant forwards over the end of the bed, looking at Enjolras with the wide, passionate, honest expression that had caused Enjolras to realise the true potential, true depth of this astonishing, complex man in the first place. “That’s where you’re wrong. You think I’m some broken, twisted, depressed human who needs an Achilles to his Patroklos to come and save his arse-”

“Nice Iliad reference.”

“Thank you,” Grantaire acknowledged with a proud smile. “I’m not. I’m not a damsel in distress. And you’re certainly not a prince coming to rescue me. You’re just as fucked up as I am. You’re in a hospital. Fuck, Enjolras – you could have died today. Do you fucking get that?” His grip was tightening on the bed, knuckles turning white. Again, Enjolras wanted to sit up and take them in his own, reassure him. “If I hadn’t been there, you could have died. Okay, I might be a little depressed. I have a severely addictive personality and my self esteem is lower than ZZ Top’s baseline. Yeah, you could probably do me good. But if you think, you smug, self-righteous bastard, that you don’t need me to save you, too, then you’re more fucking stupid than I thought.”

“M’not stupid,” Enjolras said, struggling to keep down a smile. “My IQ’s in the range of 142. I could get into MENSA.”

“Well I’m sitting pretty on a 143, so you’re still stupid,” Grantaire said right back, a smile breaking through his defences, too. “Well, it was the last time I had it tested. Alcohol and blunt force trauma’s probably removed a few points since then.”

Concerned, Enjolras frowned. “No, that right there,” he said, “That. That’s what I want to try and get rid of. You’re still clever, why can’t you believe it?”

His cheeks were starting to look flushed. “I’m not – I mean, I don’t feel clever, is all.”

“You are,” Enjolras protested. “143. You’re clever. When did you get tested?”

“A Levels,” Grantaire said, trying to shrug it off. “Got extra time due to dyslexia. 50%.”

Suddenly, a lot more about Grantaire made sense. “You know,” Enjolras said, not bothering to hide his smile anymore, “There’s research that says learning difficulties in one area are linked to genius in another skill set.”

Grantaire didn’t believe it, that much was obvious, but he humoured Enjolras with a smile anyway. It didn’t matter. He’d have Grantaire believing it in time. “Oh yeah, really?”

“Yeah, just ask Combeferre.” As Grantaire shook his head with an amused smile, Enjolras just watched him, and enjoyed the comfortable silence. Grantaire met his gaze, and smiled slightly wider.

“So here’s what I suggest,” Grantaire said, hands now resting comfortably on the foot of Enjolras’ bed. “We have a go at having a romantic and, hopefully, seriously sexual relationship, in which
we’re both equal, and force ourselves to work through fights like the sensible adults you are and
that I pretend to be—” Enjolras chuckled, “- and that we realise that our happy ever after is always
gonna involve us arguing over politics and how much paint I spill on work surfaces, and how you
almost get yourself beaten to death, but you won’t, because you’ll listen when I tell you that you’re
going too far and need to calm down to reality.”

Something was tight in his chest, but it wasn’t pain. It took a few moments for Enjolras to realise
what he was feeling, as he hadn’t felt it in a few weeks – it was joy. Sheer, uncontainable, gonna-
burst-through-my-ribcage, need-to-laugh-until-I-can’t-breathe, joy. Biting his bottom lip to stop
form laughing, or going a little bit manic, Enjolras nodded. “I, uh, I’m on a few drugs right now,
and someone knocked me out, so I’m not sure how clearly I’m thinking right now, but, um,” he
swallowed, meeting Grantaire’s gaze again. A stray black curl was hanging over his forehead, and
it suddenly struck Enjolras that he now had the right to brush it away, if he wanted to. “But that
sounds like a pretty good option from where I’m sat.”

“Actually, it sounds to me like you’re thinking more clearly than you have in a month,” Grantaire
said wryly.

Enjolras shrugged. “Well, perhaps I need you to hit me round the head every now and then.” When
Grantaire laughed at that, a full, strong laugh that had him pressing a hand to his chest, Enjolras
grinned wickedly. “Can you just – can I ask one thing of you, though?” he asked, serious.

Looking concerned, Grantaire hesitated. “Honestly? Depends on what it is.”

Enjolras paused, thinking how to phrase it. “Could you – d’you think you could come a bit closer
so I can kiss you? Because if I try and get to you I might just puncture a lung and as that’s not going
to help the oppressed citizens of the state, I don’t really fancy it. And I know we agreed
compromise in all instances, but I think broken ribs might-”

But Grantaire cut him off by laughing again. “You’re a complete, stone-hard bastard,” he said with
a smile, as he walked around to Enjolras’ side.

“Yes, I think the conversation we just had established that.”

Grantaire shook his head, but he was smiling as he did it. It looked like, hopefully, if Enjolras
didn’t fuck it up again – it looked like he might get to see Grantaire smile like that more often. He
liked it when Grantaire smiled like that. Very gently – probably remembering how the last time
he’d touched Enjolras it had been to knock him out – Grantaire ran his fingers through Enjolras’
hair. He looked so in awe that, for the first time in since he was about twelve, Enjolras felt like he
was going to start blushing. “It’s just hair,” he muttered. “I’m not even that blond.”

“Just proves how little you know,” Grantaire said, amused. Still touching him so gently, like
Enjolras was something precious, something that would shatter if Grantaire held on too tight – and
Enjolras guessed, lying in a hospital bed, it could be understood why Grantaire was treating him as
such – Grantaire tilted Enjolras’ head up. Finding it hard to swallow and feeling his heart threaten
to add another crack to his ribs, Enjolras was suddenly glad that Joly hadn’t hooked him up to any
monitors.

“Wait,” Enjolras breathed, his eyes flicking between Grantaire’s unmoving, soft gaze and his
smile. “Are you sure – I don’t want to-”

Grantaire groaned, rolling his eyes. “Oh, Enjolras,” he sighed, this thumb tracing gentle circles on
Enjolras’ cheek. “Shut the fuck up.”
It was the softest kiss Enjolras had ever had. Not that he had hundreds to compare it to, really, but – he couldn’t think of anything that could possibly be better. Calloused hands cradling him, warm lips touching him so lightly that they were barely there. Silk-soft curls of hair were brushing against his skin, and fingers were curling around strands of his own, holding him there so carefully, as if he might break under Grantaire’s hands.

When Grantaire finally, eventually, after what felt like no time at all but was probably far too long considering how much Enjolras’ chest hurt – when Grantaire finally lifted his lips from Enjolras’, he tried to lift himself up, chase Grantaire and kiss him again. But, unfortunately, he was painfully reminded of why he was in a hospital bed in the first place as his energy levels started to drain again, and his ribs protested loudly. “More,” he whined, trying to reach up a hand to pull Grantaire back down.

Grantaire smiled at him, a hand running through his hair again, cementing in Enjolras’ mind that it was definitely an action he liked. “Later,” Grantaire promised, hesitating for only a second before kissing him on the top of his head. “When I don’t feel like you’ll shatter if I use you for nefarious sexual purposes.” The instant he finished speaking, Grantaire froze, then frowned. “That sounded creepier than I intended.”

Enjolras smiled at him, at his utter stupidity. “I don’t think I’d mind being used for sexual purposes,” he said, using his years of training in self-discipline to keep his voice and expression blank. Just as he’d known he would, Grantaire froze, and looked at Enjolras with undisguised shock, as if he didn’t dare believe it.

“Let’s – uh, let’s save conversations like that for when we can actually do something about it, eh?” he said, sounding kind of strained.

Enjolras grinned. “I just turned you on, didn’t I,” he said, very matter-of-fact, and enjoying himself immensely.

Grantaire nodded furiously. “Yes. Yes you did. Absolutely, and completely not fair.”

Enjolras started to laugh, unable to contain that tight, explosive, wonderful feeling in his chest anymore. It made his chest hurt like hell, but he found he didn’t really care.

The sound of someone knocking shocked both of them, before they remembered where they actually were. “Oh yeah,” Grantaire said, sniggering. “I should probably tell everyone they can take their earplugs out.” He started to shove the curtain dividers back to their places, revealing the curious, or in several cases just bored faces of their friends.

“That really was fucking ridiculous, by the way,” Enjolras called across to him, only to be rewarded by Grantaire returning a very rude gesture. Grinning, Enjolras tilted his head back to the door. “You not going to let them in?”

“Yeah, yeah, stop bossing me around,” Grantaire said with a put-on weariness. “Good gods, five minutes and you’re already-” he pulled the door open to reveal a terrified looking Marius and Bossuet.

“The door was shut and we were worried,” Marius whispered in a very loud voice. Enjolras snorted with laughter, which only served to scare Marius more. Grantaire turned to look at Enjolras over his shoulder, giving him a wink. After that, Enjolras had to press a hand to his mouth to stop himself bursting out with laughter.

“No, no, it’s fine,” Grantaire reassured Marius with a grin, pulling them both inside. To the rest, he
gave an over exaggerated gesture of pulling earplugs out of his ears.

Obviously, not a single person in the room was able to keep their mouths shut after finally being told that they could talk. Despairing, and re-evaluating why he spent time with these people, Enjolras first looked over to Combeferre and Courfeyrac – one of who was looking ridiculously smug, and the other who was talking at full speed – before looking back to Grantaire and raising an eyebrow. Grantaire sighed, rolled his eyes, before turning to the room and yelling, “Would you please all shut the fuck up?”

Everyone, but Courfeyrac, shut up.

“Oh thank god, because I was seriously about a week away from locking you two in a fucking cupboard, I hope you understand the restraint I—” he stopped, mid-sentence, looking horrified at himself. “Wait – you two have got together now, right?”

Ridiculously amused by Courfeyrac’s ability to dig himself into any variety of potentially awkward situations with reckless abandon, Enjolras looked at Grantaire, curious to see what he would do. Grantaire met his gaze with a small smile, before shrugging. “Eh,” he said, by way of an answer.

“You’re a fucking piece of shit,” Enjolras told him.

Grantaire winked at him. “Ah, but you’re stuck with me now.”

The cheer that went up around the room made Enjolras want to plot the mass murder of everyone present. The look Grantaire gave him promised that he would, if not help, at least provide sarcastic commentary from the prison cell next to him. Which, in all honesty, was all Enjolras would ever ask of him.

“About fucking time,” Feuilly told them loudly, with an agreeing nod from Bahorel, who seemed to be applauding. Combeferre nodded at Enjolras, smiling with pride, before giving Grantaire a thumbs up. Jehan was beaming between the two of them, as if he couldn’t figure out which of them to smile the widest at. Marius and Bossuet seemed to doing a victory dance in the corner, before Bossuet shrieked, “Joly and Chetta!” and ran from the room.

Courfeyrac was sat bolt upright on his bed, arm around Combeferre’s shoulder and looking proudly across to Jehan. “So fucking happy,” he was declaring, loud enough for people down the corridor to hear, “So fucking happy. I’d jump up and hug you both until you couldn’t breathe, if that wasn’t a legitimate fear in Enjolras’ case and, that, well, my arm’s in a sling. And I knew the protest would be a catalyst, somehow or other – Jehan, Jehan didn’t I say—”

An obedient, loving Jehan nodded with a weary smile. “Yes, love, you did.”

Grantaire came back around to Enjolras’ side, leaning against the small clear patch of wall to the left of the head of Enjolras’ bed. “Is there any way to shut him up?” Grantaire asked under his breath.

Enjolras smirked. “‘Fraid not. He gets like this when he’s happy.”

“-now all I need is for Bahorel and Feuilly to admit they’re fucking, and my status as prophet will have to be confirmed!”

The sound of Feuilly choking on air, and Bahorel’s indignant cry of, “Why do none of you fuckers believe I’ve got a girlfriend!” set everyone in the room off laughing again, until Joly re-emerged – without Bossuet – to tell them to keep it down, they were disturbing the other wards.
Cosette had been in a seminar and Musichetta had been working, but Joly had finally received a ten minute warning of their arrival not long after he’d returned to find the group dancing in celebration.

Marius was the one waiting out front for them. Which was stupid on so many levels, as he’d probably be unable to speak as soon as Cosette arrived anyway, and there was only a 45% chance that he’d be able to find his way back to the room they were all in.

Either way, he had accepted his fate and was sat on the steps, waiting for Musichetta’s old Jeep to appear. As it was fast approaching sunset, the temperature was dropping rapidly and Marius was bundled in Courfeyrac’s leather jacket. It was a bit baggy on his smaller frame, but it was better than nothing. A few other people were waiting around the entrance, perhaps waiting for people, like him, perhaps for fresh air. He didn’t really want to make assumptions.

There was one guy with a battered nose and split lip that had clearly come outside to smoke. As much as Marius didn’t like to judge, he couldn’t stop himself frowning. His eyes kept flickering over to him, as if the man might suddenly realise the irony of his actions and put out the cigarette with disgust.

Instead what happened was that the man turned around, and looked right back at Marius. Startled, and some instinct that he’d never be able to overcome telling him to dig himself into a hole and never come out, Marius blinked, and turned away, staring at the ground and flushing. Oh god, that guy probably thought he was a total dick... and he was wearing a leather jacket, that probably just made him seem even more like a thug, or... he was being an idiot.

Marius looked across again, to find that the man was still smoking, but not glaring at Marius. Until Marius started to look away again, only to find that, once again, the man was looking back to him.

Feeling like he was catching a fever, and more than half wanting to get to his feet and go hide in the reception, Marius turned away again and stared fixedly at the ground. A hand reached up to feel the tops of his ears, just confirming what he already knew – they were overheated, flushed with embarrassment. Which meant his freckles and hair would be clashing with the pinky-red of his blush, too. Oh, god. He should have just stayed at home. He was meant to be revising, anyway...

A horn honked, startling him out of the slow spiral of self-criticism, and he looked up to see the familiar battered green jeep that Musichetta shared with Bossuet pausing by the bottom of the steps to let Cosette jump out. She beamed at him, rucksack hanging off one arm and folder scooped under the other. She was wearing high-waisted jeans and a fitted flowery top that suited her so well. Waving off Musichetta over her shoulder, Cosette ran up the steps towards him, two at a time. He scrambled to his feet. The man was openly staring at him now, but he dismissed that as just him being strange.

“Here, let me-” he offered, reaching out to take the bulging folders from her. She slapped his hand away forcefully.

“Don’t you even, you must be battered and bruised all over the place,” she chastised, hoisting her rucksack higher up her shoulder and tightening her grip on her folder. “Sorry, I just came from class and Musichetta’s gone to park the car – how are you, how is everyone-”

“Fine,” Marius said, barely managing not to stutter. “I’m – just a bit bruised, grazed knee, Enjolras is worse, obviously – he and Grantaire, they, uh-”
“Oh, did they, finally?” Cosette finished for him, nodding, and having to readjust her slipping rucksack again. “Something good came of this, then-”

“’Scuse me, kid.”

Marius blinked, and turned to the side. The man had – finally – chucked his cigarette to the side, and was heading up the steps to them. Beside him, Cosette stiffened. “Hold this,” she muttered, sounding furious, and shoving her folder into Marius’ arms. He took it willingly, and watched with a small touch of pride and joy as she straightened up and pushed the sleeves of her cardigan up to her elbows.

The man slowed to a stop a few steps below them. He nodded at Marius, before turning to Cosette. “Miss Fauchelevent,” he said politely.


Her tone implied that, actually, she hoped nothing of the sort.

Distracted by her comment, Javert glanced down at his collar. “Oh – just a broken nose. I’ve had a lot worse.” He looked back at her, confusion shifting into stern concern. “Your father wouldn’t be happy to know that you’d been to a protest.”

Cosette tilted her head back defiantly. “I’m not sure you’re in any position to tell me what my father would or wouldn’t approve of, DI Javert,” she said coolly. “And not that it matters either way, but I wasn’t at the protest, even though I strongly support the original message it was trying to convey.”

“Your boyfriend was, though,” Javert said, turning to look directly at Marius.

Marius swallowed nervously.

“And he got out as soon as it turned bad, and helped other people get to safety as well,” Cosette said, subtly shifting to stand in front of Marius defensively. “Are you going to press charges for helping people now, Inspector?”

Javert was starting to look really, really tired. “No, of course not,” he sighed. “And can’t he speak for himself?”

“He can,” Marius said quickly. “But clearly you and Cosette know each other, and I tend to make a mess of things when I open my mouth.”

Javert almost smiled at that. “Well, you haven’t messed anything up so far,” he said, sounding amused. “And yes, I do know Ms Fauchelevent, but I’m not concerned with her right now.”

Cosette’s quiet growl of protest made it seem like she was annoyed by that.

Again, Javert almost smiled. But he kept his focus on Marius as he said, “Your friends-”

“Had no responsibility on the turn of events,” Marius interrupted. The words felt like they’d get stuck in his throat, but thinking of his friends dancing around inside, of how they’d all been cheering, he forced them out. “My friends and I were purely there to highlight the issue of the sudden tripling of University fees and the impact that will have upon society. The riot which followed what started as a peaceful protest was caused, we believe, by a man called Montparnasse and his friends, who just like-”
“I know of Montparnasse,” Javert said wearily, reaching up to rub his eyes, an attempt to wake himself up. “That’s why I was there. Reports that the wannabe gang ‘Pussy Boss’ – yes, vulgar, isn’t it – had plans to cause trouble. Considering that none of them hold jobs or pay rent, catching them has been surprisingly hard, especially as our funding has just been reduced once more.” Javert paused, looking between the surprised faces on the two twenty-year olds in front of him. “I’m not always out to hunt down people I have a passing dislike for, I do actually have a job to do, you know,” he said wryly to Cosette.

“I think I can help you find them,” Marius said, before he could think better of it.

This time, it was Javert who looked surprised. “You sure, kid?”

“I’d just need to know that you’re not going to go after my friends,” Marius said, getting more confident when Javert waved away his concern.

“I’ve already told you, I’ve no interest in ‘going after’ your friends,” Javert reassured him. “Look – if you think you can get me that information, call me. I, uh – either of you got a pen?”

Cosette pulled one from her pocket, and Javert scrambled in his pockets for a piece of paper, eventually pulling out a short receipt for a meal deal and a packet of cigarettes. “Call me on this number, and I’ll see what I can do. I’ll only need to know how you know where they are if it goes to full court, in front of a jury, and frankly, with these bastards, I doubt it. Even in that instance, the focus won’t be on you – they won’t be able to get lawyers that good.”

“I know a really good prosecutor who’d be more than happy to lock them up,” Marius added, taking the proffered receipt. “He, uh – after today, he’s probably got a bit of a grudge against them.”

Javert snorted. “I think anyone within a mile radius of that square will have a grudge without them. But give me his or her name, and I’ll be more than happy to recommend them.” He made to turn away, but stopped, and added, “By the way, kid, your friends – if you’d have let me finish, I was going to tell you to pass on the message that they did well. It wasn’t their fault that the crowd turned. People are clever, but a mob just wants blood. For teenagers – you and your friends did well.” He pointed at the receipt once more, before heading back down the steps. With better timing than you’d usually expect from British, inner-city services, a police car pulled up to give him a lift back, presumably, to Scotland Yard.

Wide-eyed and blinking over the top of Cosette’s folder, Marius turned around to look down at his girlfriend. She stared after the cop car for a few more minutes before turning back to Marius.

“Don’t look at me, I’m more confused than you are,” she said with a shrug, taking back her folder.

*  

As Halloween passed and the Christmas holidays slowly approached, so did the first set of major deadlines and first load of exams. Most of the gang had barricaded themselves in their rooms or duct taped themselves to their dinner tables, surrounded by textbooks, notebooks and open laptops. Bahorel, when he wasn’t at work, spent most of his time tutoring Bossuet and Marius. Combeferre only left the library to buy sustenance. Jehan and Courfeyrac had group study sessions and actually worked.

And, to the surprise of almost everyone, Grantaire had all but locked himself in Feuilly’s art studio, in a last-ditch attempt to produce artwork that fulfilled the exam board’s criteria.
The only one not studying was Enjolras.

His deadlines had been pushed back for a fortnight, the combination of his injuries and the death of the convener for the two main modules he took. He spent most of the time under house arrest, with Joly supervising him, sat at his table reading various medical textbooks. He’d finished university, it was true, but unfortunately medical training didn’t end there.

It had been near three weeks, and Enjolras was starting to forget what the fuss was all about. He could now walk about (vaguely) autonomously, breathing has stopped hurting, he was walking with one of Bossuet’s hiking sticks rather than a crutch – all in all, he was perfectly functional.

And sitting on the sofa reading Sartre was getting dull.

Rather suddenly, startling Enjolras out of his depressing, boring gloom, Joly snapped his laptop shut and jumped to his feet. Enjolras struggled to twist his head around over the back of the sofa. “Where are you off to?”

“Bossuet,” Joly said, waving his mobile as explanation. Enjolras nodded, understanding instantly. “I shouldn’t be long,” he muttered, organising his books before grabbing his shoes. “But just in case he’s really fucked himself up, I’ve texted Marius. He should be over here in a second.” He finished the final knot and straightened up, looking Enjolras straight in the eye as he continued, “You, behave yourself. No taking advantage of Marius’ gullible condition, okay? Okay?”

“Who, me?” came out of Enjolras’ mouth before he could think. Joly glared at him, and Enjolras sighed. He’d been spending too much time around Courfeyrac lately. “Fine, fine.”

Joly nodded. “If you’re not still on that sofa when I get back, there will be hell to pay,” were his parting words, before he left the flat.

Alone in his apartment for the first time in weeks, Enjolras chewed the inside of his cheeks and considered his options. When, about fifteen minutes later, Marius entered, Enjolras looked up at him with a wide smile. “Marius! It’s been too long.”

Eyes wide with fear, Marius froze in the doorway. He gulped, and Enjolras’ grin grew wider.

* 

There was paint everywhere. It was getting to the stage that, like thick eyeliner, even a solid fifteen minute shower and scrub left remains and smudges of colour all over Grantaire’s skin. A day hadn’t passed all week that his skin and hair hadn’t been abused by what was probably the equivalent to a tube of oil paint.

But, you know what? It might actually all end up being worth it.

As he heard the door open behind him, he called out on reflex, “Feuilly, unless you’re here to say-”

“Not Feuilly,” an amused voice corrected him.

Grantaire screamed internally. Brain shutting down in panic, he went with instinct. Which involved whacking the canvas off the easel.

Wincing, regretting choosing instinct over logic, Grantaire slowly turned to see Enjolras watching him from the doorway with a raised eyebrow. “Was that part of the artistic process?” he asked sceptically.
“That… was none of your business!” Grantaire said, awkwardly and slightly too loudly, hands settling on his hips for lack of any other idea of what to do with them. “And – and anyway,” he said, scowling, and deciding that a persistent offense might make a decent enough defence, or at least distract Enjolras enough to make him forget about the massive cock-up he’d just been witness to, “You shouldn’t be here. You’re not meant to be walking. You’re meant to be in a prone position somewhere under Joly’s persistent supervision, what the hell are you doing here?”

Enjolras raised an eyebrow in amusement, before saying carelessly, “Oh, well, if you don’t want me here, I’ll just leave you be—” he backed out of the door with a shrug and a sly smile.

“No, shit, wait, Enjolras, don’t—” Grantaire stumbled over both his words and his feet as he hurried after the blond, tripping through the door and straight into Enjolras’ arms. Still smiling and, if anything, looking smugger than before, Enjolras leant down and pressed a quick kiss to Grantaire’s lips. “What was that for?” Grantaire asked, breathless, staring agape at the wide, bright blue eyes of the man before him.

Enjolras shrugged, eyes flicking down to Grantaire’s lips and back to meet his gaze. “Because I can,” he said simply.

Grantaire licked his lips, relishing in the way Enjolras’ gaze zoomed in on the motion. On impulse, he copied Enjolras, quickly pressing their lips together before pulling back. “So can I,” he pointed out, winking. A small, strange, happy sound slipped past Enjolras’ lips, and Grantaire’s eyes and smile widened in glee. “Was that – Enjolras, did you just giggle?”

“What? No.”

“You absolutely did.”

“I absolutely did not.”

“Awww, how cute! The fearless leader can giggle!”

Scowling, Enjolras punched his shoulder lightly, then winced.

“Yeah, and that reminds me,” Grantaire said, trying to sound as stern as he could after hearing Enjolras fucking giggle for the first time, “Why the fuck are you here? How the fuck are you here?”

Enjolras blinked down at him, smiling softly that just looked strange on Enjolras. “What, can’t I come visit my boyfriend?”

Entirely unaffected by the performance in front of him, Grantaire crossed his arms and stared him down. “Yeah, the cutesy act isn’t going to get you anywhere, even if, and I’m not confirming it’s true, even if hearing you call me your boyfriend gives me happy little butterflies.”

For moment, the smile stayed in place, before the pretence dropped and Enjolras sighed, the happy look falling away to sheer boredom. “Marius was put on Enjolras-babysitting duty and I scared him into submission by being nice to him.” As Grantaire tutted at him, he continued, “But I was getting so bored. There’s only so many movies on Netflix that I want to watch, and Joly wasn’t talking and wouldn’t let me play music or so much as hold heavy books, so when the opportunity to escape presented itself, obviously I had to take it.”

Despite himself – and despite the severe lack of self-preservation instincts Enjolras was showing – Grantaire had to smile. “Of course you did.” He pulled his mobile from his pocket, trying not to let Enjolras see the really bad photo of him Grantaire had as his background, and started to scroll
through the contacts.

“What are you doing?” Enjolras asked quickly, sounding one part nervous and two parts angry.

Grantaire smirked, and took his time before replying. “Texting your poor, shell-shocked driver, telling him he can go home. You’re staying with me for the day. Mainly for his own safety, mind,” he added, as Enjolras breathed a sigh of relief. “I don’t trust you around such easily manipulated people.”

“Thank you,” Enjolras said, surprisingly actually sounding genuine. When Grantaire glanced up from his phone, he saw another gentle expression on his boyfriend’s face, one he was only just starting to recognise and appreciate. “Are you going to let me actually do stuff, too?”

“No.”

That gentle expression fell faster than Grantaire could count. “Are you kidding me?”

“I’ll make you pancakes, though,” Grantaire replied cheerfully, leading the way to the stairs.

“I don’t like pancakes.”

“No one doesn’t like pancakes.”

“Fine. If I eat your pancakes, will you tell me why you knocked that painting off its stand when I came in?”

“It’s an easel. And sure!”

“Really?”

“Nope.”

* 

“I’m scared.”

Joly’s footsteps momentarily went out of sync with Bossuet’s, his foot slipping down to the step below. “Wh- what? What of?”

“Them!” Bossuet hissed indignantly, waving a hand up the stairs. “I don’t want to visit them, you realise – oof!”

Joly went up another three steps before he realised that Bossuet was slumped, face down, a few steps behind him. “Good grief, you’re not having a good day,” Joly said, crouching to pick up the ice pack Bossuet had dropped and grab his hand. “You hurt anything?” he asked, pulling the clutz back up to his feet.

Bossuet nodded, looking down at his knees and pouting. “Grazed my knee.”

“I’ll check it out when we get in,” Joly promised. His seemingly innocuous sentence sent Bossuet back into his seething rage.

“Yes, but, as I was saying,” Bossuet resumed, slapping the icepack back to his black eye and continuing his rant as if nothing had happened, as ever, and to Joly’s unending amusement. “You realise, of course, that this, what we’re about to witness, is the first time that those two, those recently reconciled two, have been in the same flat, the same room, alone, for an extended period
Unsurprisingly, this didn’t clear up anything. “Yes, and your point?” Joly asked.

Bossuet flailed. “My point *is*, that they, they – they – they might be doing the *frick-frack!*”

It took a solid ten seconds for Joly to figure out what, exactly, Bossuet was talking about. When he finally did, he grabbed Bossuet’s arm and charged up the stairs.

“What? No! What are you doing!”

“I am Enjolras’ doctor!” Joly growled, stomping up the last few steps. “And I do *not* sanction such athletic actions!” He came to an abrupt halt, straightened his shoulders, and knocked on Grantaire’s door as hard as he could.

As scuffled footsteps approached, Joly perfected his scowl – which fell immediately as the door creaked open to reveal a gruntled Grantaire wearing tea-stained tracksuit bottoms and tattered plaid shirt. “What?” he asked in a low voice.

Joly stuttered momentarily in the face of such muted annoyance, but eventually managed to choke out the accusation, “Have you been frick-fracking!?”

Grantaire stared back at him blankly, blinking a few times in supposed confusion. “I don’t support fracking and think the government should look to renewable resources, if that’s what you mean,” he answered blandly. “And could you keep the volume down, please, Enjolras is asleep on the sofa.”

For a moment no one said a word. Eventually, Bossuet turned to Joly and said, “Well, now you look like a right tit.”

A solid red blush started to spread over what felt like every inch of Joly’s face. “Look, I was just-” he tried to explain, but stopped when he saw that the other two men were smirking. “You both suck,” he muttered, as Bossuet laughed at him.

“In you come,” Grantaire said, opening the door wider to let them in. “But I wasn’t kidding, keep it down. He seems a pretty deep sleeper – I dropped about five frying pans earlier and he didn’t wake – but hey, better safe than sorry.”

“Yeah I think I broke their entire lounge once and Enjolras didn’t wake up,” Bossuet said, chuckling, and kicking his tattered Toms off. “Dude’s a log when he sleeps.”

Joly followed his boy in, taking his brogues off with slightly more care, and glancing around the flat. He’d only been in it a few times, but even he could recognise that some major spring-cleaning had gone down. He could see the floor and not just canvases and books, for one thing. “The maid been round?” he asked, stunned.

“If by the maid you mean Jehan and myself drastically procrastinating from doing work and revising, then yes. Drinks?”

Bossuet’s screech of “Ribena!” pierced Joly’s ear drums, and Grantaire shushed him furiously, eyes glancing across the room. Following his gaze, Joly finally saw Enjolras. He was curled up on a sofa that, rightly, shouldn’t fit someone of Enjolras’ stature, but somehow he’d folded up his limbs in a way that made it work. His head was resting on about five cushions, including his own jacket, and a badly home-knitted blanket was loosely draped over him. “Uh, nothing for me thanks,” Joly said.
In the small kitchen corner of the open-apartment, Grantaire shrugged and poured out two Ribenas. “So, what brings you two fellows here then?” he asked, pushing one glass across the counter to Bossuet.

“I was thinking of rescuing you from a moaning Enjolras, but I guess…” Joly trailed off, smirking at the form on the sofa.

Grantaire laughed. “Yeah, Sleeping Beauty’s been no trouble – I suggested watching TV, and half an episode into New Girl he fell asleep on my shoulder. Almost a disappointment, really,” he mused, eyes fixed on Enjolras. “How much longer until he gets the all-clear?”

Why did people always want straight answers for questions like that? “I dunno, maybe a fortnight before I let him do stuff like running – and other, hm, athletic activities – maybe four weeks, probably closer to nearer three he way he’s going. If only to get him out of everyone’s hair.”

“Yeah, but,” Bossuet cut in, brandishing his squash, “Joly’s promised me he’s gonna be good by the 25th, because I had to give Mabeuf a date for when we want the pub to host a ‘The Protest Sucked But At Least We’re All Okay Now’ party.” He nodded knowingly, taking a confident sip of the squash. “It’s gonna be awesome.”

Grantaire’s eyes drift for a second as he thought, then muttered, “So, that gives me just under three weeks…”

Slightly bemused, Joly glanced across to Bossuet, who just shrugged at him with a mouth full of Ribena. “To stock up on lube and condoms?” Bossuet asked after he’d swallowed. Joly snorted. “Because, I mean, I’m sure we could lend you some if you’re finding it that hard to find any…”

“Shut your ugly slut mouth,” Grantaire said, pointing a stern finger. “How dare you imply I am not fully stocked and ready at all times. No, I… I have an idea.”

Joly caught Bossuet’s eye again. And again, all he got in return was another bemused shrug. “Are you… gonna share this idea?”

*

It was Tuesday the 21st when Joly finally caved, and admitted that Enjolras was in a good enough state to get a clear bill of health. And to celebrate, Enjolras called a group meeting at the Musain. Because what else was he going to do.

The great revolutionary leader, however, wasn’t at the pub just yet, neither were his two deputies. And while Bahorel was jokingly bad-mouthing Enjolras’ tardiness in the company of Feuilly, Bossuet, and a bottle of whiskey, Jehan had an insider’s knowledge. Not five minutes earlier, Courfeyrac had texted him saying that the three of them plus Joly were only a few minutes out, ready for Fearless Leader’s dramatic re-introduction to the world of alcohol.

“I put the bottle of mint flavoured lube on the kitchen work surface, for easy access,” Jehan stage-whispered to Grantaire, sat next to him at the bar. “I know it’s your favourite.”

He proceeded to smile benevolently as Grantaire choked on his beer. “You – fucking what?”

“Well, Enjolras is in the clear now, isn’t he?” Jehan pointed out, pretty certain it was the most obvious thing in the world. “And I’m going to Courfeyrac’s this evening, so you’ve got the flat to yourselves, don’t worry!”
Grantaire blinked across at him, mouth hanging slightly open. “… And how did you know it was my favourite flavour?”

Jehan shrugged. “You were drunk.”

To that, Grantaire just nodded. There was a pause before he asked, “Does the intimacy of our friendship ever concern you?”

“A little bit,” Jehan confessed, with a grin, leaning over to peck Grantaire’s cheek. “But face it – without me, you’d not have had a chance of finally getting your arse laid. Or rather, laying into his ass.”

“Hell no, I would totally-”

“You would not, you’d spend the whole time searching the cabinets for your special lube and condoms – which are by the lube, your welcome – until the mood had totally gone-”

“I am so much smoother than that-”

“Perhaps in your wet dreams-”

Their argument was interrupted by the door to the pub swinging open, and a weary Joly walking in. He cleared his throat, trying to get everyone’s attention. Jehan winked at Grantaire, and gleefully watched at his best friend tried to bury himself in his glass.

Joly waited until the small crowd in the pub had settled down, before making his announcement. “Under pressure, with no small amount of blackmail and barely with the agreement of my medical expertise, I finally say that Enjolras is a physically healthy individual. I can make no comment as to his mental health.”

To scattered laughter and rapturous applause, Enjolras entered the pub, ushered by a grinning Courfeyrac and Combeferre. Even though everyone clapping was personally glared at by Enjolras, it wasn’t until Bossuet yelled, “He’s got his swagger back!” that the applause faded to good-humoured laughter.

“You’re a piece of shit,” Enjolras said, giving Bossuet the middle finger, but it was pretty easy to see the smirk hiding in the curl of his lips. Jehan watched him turn to wink at Grantaire before he turned back to Combeferre, and a distraction in the form of Courfeyrac landed squarely on Jehan’s lap.

“How’s things hanging sweetie?” Courfeyrac asked excitedly, pressing a noisy kiss to Jehan’s cheek. “Ooh, is that a G&T?”

“Martini, actually,” Jehan corrected, giggling and wrapping his arms around Courfeyrac’s waist. “Sorry.”

His apology was rejected as Courfeyrac nuzzled him affectionately, making Grantaire next to them laugh. “Nah, it’s fine,” Courfeyrac said. “Shouldn’t be drinking anyway, I’m on driving duty.”

“You two are fucking kittens and it’s disgustingly adorable,” Grantaire told them firmly, shaking his head and picking up his own pint of coke – also driving, and staying sober for other reasons – presumably to protect it from the clumsy mass that was Jehan and his boyfriend. “Seriously. Not in public, please.”

Courfeyrac chuckled, but to Jehan’s disappointment shifted so that the way he was sat on Jehan’s
lap wasn’t so obscene. “You’re just jealous.”

As if disappointed by Courfeyrac’s comeback, Grantaire shook his head. “In case you’re a bit behind in the time, I actually have a boyfriend now,” he pointed out. “Ah, speak of the devil…”

Following Grantaire’s gaze, Jehan saw Enjolras heading over to their corner of the bar with an already annoyed frown. “Alcohol,” Enjolras groaned when he was close enough. “You’d better have alcohol.”

“Ye of little faith,” Grantaire said, handing Enjolras a full bottle of Stella. “It’s all yours. Something gone wrong already?”

Enjolras downed about half the bottle before replying. “Gods, I needed alcohol,” he muttered, handing the beer back to Grantaire. “No, nothing wrong as such,” he said. “Just Marius being his usual imbecilic self. With how well he behaved himself in the protest – or riot, I guess – I forgot what a moron he usually is.”

“Hey, my roomie is only slightly a fucking moron,” Courfeyrac said, in a feeble attempt to protest on behalf of his friend.

He was answered by Enjolras’ sceptical raising of an eyebrow. Eventually, Courfeyrac caved and shrugged in submission. “Exactly,” Enjolras said. He leant forwards and pressed a quick kiss to Grantaire’s forehead, before walking off again, back towards where Combeferre was apparently trying to be patient with a bemused looking Marius.

Jehan exchanged a glance with Courfeyrac, both of them trying to hold back laughter at the soppy expression on Grantaire’s face. Eventually their bestie noticed their sly exchanges, and scowled. “Like you two fuckers are much better,” he mumbled, hiding behind his glass of coke. “On a more serious note, is it a social gathering tonight, or are we actually gonna do some work?”

“Mainly celebratory, though the main party is on Saturday, but we do need to discuss how to deal with the aftermath of the protest gone wrong,” Courfeyrac said. Then, suspicious, he narrowed his eyes. “Wait – why do you care? All you’re going to do is drink and make jokes anyway.”

“Actually, Grantaire has a plan,” Jehan told him.

That seemed to grab Courfeyrac’s attention. “A plan?” he echoed, in just as dramatic a voice. “What plan?”

Jehan shrugged, dislodging Courfeyrac slightly. “No idea, he won’t tell any of us.”

A glint in Courfeyrac’s eye made it clear that he was intent in interrogating Grantaire further – something that Jehan could tell him after about a week’s worth of pestering was not worth it – but, perhaps luckily for all their sanity, Enjolras called for the room’s attention.

Enjolras was standing at the front of the room, waiting with his hands in the pockets of his skinny jeans and looking at everyone in the room to make sure that they all had eyes on him. “First off,” he said, voice loud, clear, and for the first time in weeks not sounding tired, “If anyone else says any more rib or bone fracture related puns, there will be hell to pay. Physical hell. Got that?”

Again, there was scattered laughter, but no one protested.

“Secondly,” Enjolras continued, turning and pointing an accusing finger at Grantaire. “If I start talking politics and protests, will you fucking behave yourself?”
They got more laughter at that. Grantaire just spread his hands and smiled benevolently. “I’ll go easy on you,” he called across teasingly.

“He won’t be saying that tonight!” Courfeyrac wasted no time in saying, followed by even more laughter and a loud “WHEYYYY!” from Joly and Bossuet’s table.

Never one to back down from a fight, Enjolras smirked before winking at Grantaire and saying, “Not if I have anything to say about it.”

“Oooh, Mr Grantaire!” Bahorel moaned teasingly, a hand pressed to his chest comically. “Oooh!”

Enjolras grinned, clearly enjoying Grantaire’s embarrassment, and waited for the next wave of laughter to die down before continuing. “Now, there’s no way around it, the University Fee Protest did not go all that well—”

“You mean it wasn’t a cracking success?” Bossuet chimed in loudly, grinning at his own pun.

Enjolras stared him down. “You’re going to pay for that,” he said in a low voice, and a laughing Joly shoved a scared looking Bossuet off his chair. “Anyway,” Enjolras said, endeavouring to persevere. “It had its problems. However, Combeferre has assured me that some aspects of it should be salvageable, if we get press from the right people, such as Owen Jones, the Guardian, and if, hopefully, most people ignore the Daily Mail’s coverage entirely.”

At this, like a kid in school, Bossuet tentatively raised a hand. After a permitting nod from Enjolras, he spoke. “I can offer some news on that front,” he said. “There are several pictures floating around of the hour or so when the protest was actually a protest, and a few of you speaking, Enjolras. I’ve spoken to my contacts, and speaking as ‘someone who wished to remain anonymous’ told them the group that took control in that short time was a London Friends of Students political protest group, what we were fighting for, and said contacts now have enough to spin a good and positive story. I also told them that the group behind the violence at the protest had, to my knowledge, been detained by the police…?”

His tone turned questioning, and he glanced over his shoulder, to where Bahorel was leaning against the wall with a bottle of something.

Bahorel smirked. “One solid court hearing away from being locked up for long enough to become prison bitches,” he said vindictively. He shrugged at the disapproving glare Combeferre gave him for his comment. “What? The bastards deserve it.”

“Yes, but that’s not really a joking topic,” Courfeyrac cut in, sounding rather sharp. Then, expression suddenly changing to a grin, he turned back to Bossuet. “Think you can tell your drinking buddies that before they put anything to press?”

“I can pass that along to my contacts, yes,” Bossuet replied snidely. Next to him, Joly sniggered.

Even Enjolras smiled. In the momentary pause people muttered jokes, took a drink, enjoying the relieving thought that, perhaps, something good might come out of something most of them had thought they’d much rather forget.

And then Grantaire stirred in his seat. “Here’s the only problem I see, though,” he said, and Enjolras slowly turned to stare daggers at him. Undeterred, and smirking slightly at Enjolras’ rage, Grantaire pressed on. “Well, we all know what the press is like, doom and gloom consistently. Nothing hits the headline unless it’s sure to ruin the lives of at least five people. So what makes you think a story of preppy twenty year-olds will be able to make an appearance through the wallpapering of stories slamming students as being the rebellious little pieces of shit that the upper-
classes and older generations always believed us to be? Especially several weeks after the main story hit the headline. You’re gonna need a huge cause for publicity if you have any hope of getting a good side of the story out there.”

Enjolras narrowed his eyes at Grantaire, but didn’t seem able to refute the point. “All right then,” he said, turning to the rest of the group, “Does anyone have any ideas as to how we can raise publicity for our side of the story?”

When Grantaire cleared his throat, Jehan felt sure – probably along with most people in the room – that Enjolras was going to throttle him. “Actually, I might be able to help you there,” Grantaire said, smiling.

Jehan could feel Courfeyrac silently giggling on his lap. Across the room, Bossuet wasn’t being so silent. Even Combeferre was smirking slightly. Enjolras folded his arms, turning to face Grantaire head-on, and hissed through his teeth, “What exactly are you up to?”

“Nothing, not really,” Grantaire promised, raising both hands as an indication of his honesty. “But I think I have an idea of how I can help. You just have to trust me.” Enjolras snorted at that. “What, don’t you trust me?” Grantaire asked, not really sounding too worried.

“With my life, yes,” Enjolras said without a pause. “With this shit? Hell no.”

Grantaire considered Enjolras carefully. He picked up the beer that Enjolras had discarded, rose to his feet and walked across to his boyfriend. “Please,” he said, offering the beer. “I want to help you.”

Enjolras didn’t reply immediately. Eventually, with resignation, he took the beer. “What are you thinking?” he asked.

At the show of trust – no, he’d been told it wasn’t trust – at the show of love, Grantaire beamed. “Well, it’s a secret, so I can’t tell you,” he said, grinning, “But I’m going to need to borrow Courfeyrac and Bahorel Friday night. Oh, and Feuilly and Jehan, of course.”

Enjolras narrowed his eyes, suspicious once more, but any doubts he had were drowned out by Bahorel’s loud shout. “HELL YEAH!”

Grantaire’s heart was thudding in his chest as the key clicked in the lock. “Jehan’s with Courfeyrac tonight,” he said, standing back to let Enjolras into the apartment first. “So the place is to ourselves... we can do whatever we want…” He shut the door, and turned to look at Enjolras. His boyfriend – fully healthy, completely in-the-clear boyfriend – was stood in the middle of the room, watching Grantaire with a smile that matched his own, slowly taking off his coat.

“Mm, all to ourselves?” Enjolras echoed, nodding as if in deep thought, but his eyes not leaving Grantaire’s. “The whole night? Are you, by any chance, thinking what I’m thinking?”

Grantaire gasped, and put a hand to his mouth. “You don’t mean – a Harry Potter movie marathon?”

Enjolras frowned with disapproval, dropping his coat onto the back of the sofa. But Grantaire kept the pretence and grin up, and, after only a few seconds, Enjolras cracked. Laughing hard, he walked forwards. His hands rose to grab the collar of his shirt and pushed him back against the door. “You’re so full of shit,” Enjolras said, lips so close that Grantaire could feel the words brushing over his skin. He couldn’t look away from where Enjolras’ darkened eyes were staring.
fixedly down at him, flickering as if taking in everything of Grantaire he could, memorising it, waiting.

Smiling, knowing what Enjolras was waiting for, this time, Grantaire nodded.

Enjolras surged forwards, lips pressing hard again Grantaire’s, open, desperate, panting. His hands pressed against Grantaire’s chest and Grantaire could hardly breathe, his own hands desperately grasping at Enjolras, his waist, his neck, curling into his hair as he kissed back as fiercely as he could.

“How much did you drink?” Grantaire gasped out between frantic kissing.

“Not enough to get drunk,” Enjolras muttered, running his lips along Grantaire’s jawline, to the sensitive joint just beneath his ear. “And definitely not so much that I can’t give full, exceedingly enthusiastic consent.”

“That’s all I needed to hear.”

As Enjolras laughed breathlessly against his skin, Grantaire gripped his waist, pushing him back. “Move, move,” he muttered, trying to get Enjolras to push back. When Enjolras muttered a negative against Grantaire’s collar bone, Grantaire didn’t know whether to laugh or beg. “Oh, gods, Enjolras, c’mon move,” Grantaire said, patting Enjolras’ chest forcefully. “We’re not fucking against the front door. No way.”

Finally Enjolras stepped back, laughing. “Ooh, Mr Grantaire,” he said, walking backwards, grinning, and eyes fixed unmoving on Grantaire. “Are you going to fuck me?” Enjolras reached for the back of his top and pulled it off in one swift move. “But how do I know you’ll respect me in the morning?”

“I’ll respect the fuck outta you,” Grantaire promised, lungs barely working as he followed Enjolras. His eyes roamed over the perfectly sculpted chest – toned, bronzed, smooth – and promised himself he’d immortalise it one day. He tried not to feel self-conscious as he unbuttoned his shirt to reveal his own pale, slightly flabby and slightly hairy chest. His confidence boosted slightly when Enjolras’ eyes darted over his chest only to bite his lips. “I’d wake you up with kisses, let you lie in, make you breakfast in bed-”

“Would you make me pancakes?” Enjolras asked, one hand gripping the doorframe of Grantaire’s bedroom. His lips were twitching with a grin, but his eyes were wide, honest, and staring at Grantaire like they’d seen nothing more important in their entire life.

Grantaire laughed, stopping barely a meter from Enjolras. “Pancakes? So many pancakes. With Nutella and crushed hazelnuts.”

“Fuck, I love your pancakes,” Enjolras muttered. He lunged forwards, two fingers hooking into the top of Grantaire’s jeans to tug him forwards. This time when they kissed Grantaire could feel the heat of Enjolras’ chest, the thudding heartbeat, hot hands pressing against the small of his back, sweat the only thing between their skin.

Grantaire had just the presence of mind to swipe the bottle of lube and packet of condoms from the side before letting Enjolras drag him into the dimly lit bedroom.

He wrapped his arms around Enjolras’ waist, hands too full to run his fingers through the soft blond hair again, like he wanted to. His lips ran along Enjolras’ defined collar bones, and Enjolras giggled lightly. “What?” murmured Grantaire, flicking his eyes up to Enjolras’ face while his lips
never left his skin.

“You’re fucking ridiculous,” Enjolras told him affectionately, smiling wider than Grantaire had ever seen.

Pretending offence, Grantaire stepped back. “Says you!” He pushed against Enjolras’ chest again, and the blond got the idea. Still laughing, Enjolras fell back onto the bed, crawling back until he was against the headboard. “Seriously? The whole box?” he asked, nodding to the box in Grantaire’s hand.

In truth, Grantaire hadn’t realised he’d picked up the whole box, but looking at it, he shrugged. “I don’t know about you,” he said, dropping the box and bottle onto the bed, freeing up his hands to unbutton his jeans. “But I’ve been waiting a fair damn while for this moment. Gods know how many we’ll get through before I’m satisfied.”

“I’ve been waiting a while too,” Enjolras said softly, eyes unashamedly fixed on the tent in Grantaire’s boxers. “For a long time I thought it’d never happen.”

The honesty of the comment, the guilt Enjolras wasn’t bothering to hide, drew Grantaire to a halt. Then he smiled all the wider. “Well, then,” he said, kicking his feet out of his jeans. “We’re only going to be waiting even longer if you keep procrastinating taking off those damn skinny jeans.”

“Procrastinating?” Enjolras growled, fingers nimbly flicking the button of his jeans open. “Who’s procrastinating? Get on the fucking bed.”

Grantaire laughed, climbing onto the bed on his hands and knees, until he was looking down on Enjolras. “Your wish, as ever, my command.”

Enjolras grinned, one hand reaching up to hold the back of Grantaire’s head, fingers twisting in Grantaire’s curls. Softly, a change from the frantic movement of the last few minutes, the desperation that, gods, had lasted weeks, Grantaire leaned down to press a kiss to Enjolras’ forehead, cheeks, lips. It felt… so…

“Is this how it’s going to be from now on?” Enjolras asked, words softly ghosting over Grantaire’s lips, blue eyes staring deep into him. “Annoying quips, bad jokes and romantic kisses?”

“Yeah,” Grantaire said, kissing him chastely. “Is that good?”

“That’s good,” Enjolras whispered back.

“Good,” Grantaire grinned, and before Enjolras could dodge him, booped their noses together. Clearly trying not to laugh, Enjolras whacked the back of his head.

“Now, enough talk, talk wastes time,” he said, letting go of Grantaire to shimmy his jeans off. “Where’d you put the condoms?”

Laughing, Grantaire rose back onto his heels and reached back to grab a condom from the box and the lube. “How d’you want to do this?”

Enjolras waited until Grantaire was facing him again to answer. He’d sat up. Both of them were in their boxers, kneeling on the bed, chest to chest and Enjolras’ lips brushing over the stubble on Grantaire’s jaw. “I want you to fuck me,” he muttered, teeth momentarily biting on Grantaire’s ear. “God, I want you in me so bad,” he moaned, voice guttural. “Have you thought about what it’d feel like, you in me so deep? I have. I want the real thing.”
Grantaire was left completely unable to talk. Unable to breathe. Forehead resting against Enjolras’ shoulder, trying to compose himself, he nodded. “I can,” he muttered, pressing his lips against Enjolras’ skin, desperate to feel him, taste him, “I can do that.”

Eyes dark, mouth open and panting, Enjolras nodded, shuffling back. He kicked off his boxers, the motion kicking Grantaire back into reality, back from the edge of blissful oblivion to sheer desperate want. He tugged off his own boxers, carelessly ripping the condom packet open with his mouth and with one hand rolling it on, with the other leaning forwards, hand resting on Enjolras’ bare thigh. He thought he should make a joke again, break the tension, but he couldn’t. Not when this tension, this feeling of being right on the edge of something life-changing, felt like it’d shatter if he made a single sound. The condom on, he held himself over Enjolras, exactly where they had been minutes before. This time, Grantaire didn’t tease. He kissed Enjolras, open-mouthed and heady, tongue running against the back of Enjolras’ teeth, Enjolras lightly bit his lower lip, hands tightening on the blond hair as Enjolras’ nails dug into his back.

When he felt like his chest would break, from the effort it took to breathe, from the hammering of his heart against his ribs, Grantaire pushed himself back up, kissing Enjolras’ jaw, biting his collarbone, kissing a line down the centre of his chest, down to his navel, along the defined lines of his hips.

Grantaire glanced up, seeing the shining, heaving chest, and Enjolras looking down at him with wide, dark eyes and longing anticipation. He smiled, before pressing a kiss to the tip of Enjolras’ cock. He ran his tongue along the slit, tasting him, before bobbing down as slowly and as far as he could. In truth, it wasn’t far, but Enjolras groaned loudly with pleasure all the same. Feeling the heat spreading from his chest deeper to his groin, Grantaire hummed as he pulled back, and carefully lifted Enjolras’ thigh up so it was over his shoulder.

He had never gone this far, been this reckless, with someone he cared so much about on their first time together before. But he didn’t care. He’d never felt this comfortable with anyone, either. He lowered his head and licked up from Enjolras’ hole up the perineum.

Above him, Enjolras gasped loudly and jumped, body lifting off the bed quickly. Momentarily, Grantaire felt concern. “Are you-”

“Good,” Enjolras gasped. “Don’t – keep going, don’t stop-”

There wasn’t a need to be told twice. Grantaire bent back down, tongue pressing against the tight ring of muscle, saliva slowly helping him push in, tasting the hot, salty skin.


Grantaire nodded, having rest his forehead against the inside of Enjolras’ thigh to compose himself. The sweat, the heat, didn’t help him calm down. He pushed himself back onto his knees, kneeling, Enjolras’ leg still over his shoulder as he reached for the lube. The cool gel poured out onto his fingers, and he pushing one finger in, slowly, making sure that the liquid covered Enjolras’ skin thoroughly. Enjolras moaned again, and Grantaire bit his lip. “Are you-”

“More – more.”

The second finger slipped in easily. Enjolras flexed, back rising from the bed, Grantaire felt the muscle and heat tightening around his fingers. He pressed against it, pushing, stretching, as Enjolras writhed above him.

“‘Taire-”
“Okay – okay-”

Third finger was harder, but Enjolras pushed back, taking it in without a single sound of complaint.

“Don’t wait – don’t wait.”

Grantaire nodded wordlessly, even though Enjolras, with his head thrown back and eyes closed, couldn’t see. He took his fingers out of Enjolras, forcing himself to ignore Enjolras’ disappointed moan to cover his own cock with lube. He grabbed Enjolras’ hips, pulling him forwards, lining him up. Enjolras pressed his heel into his back, pulling him in. Enjolras opened his eyes, lifting his head up to meet Grantaire’s gaze. He watched as Grantaire pushed in.

In the time it took to adjust Grantaire lost awareness of what was happening, lost sight of Enjolras. All he could feel was the sweat on Enjolras’ skin beneath his hands, the heat, the tightness of being as close to another – to Enjolras – that was physically and emotionally possible. A hand wrapped around his neck, forcefully pulling him down until he was lying on Enjolras. He leant on the arm resting by Enjolras’ head, the other cupping Enjolras’ face, thumb rubbing over the bright red, open, swollen lips. “I don’t think I’m going to last long,” Grantaire breathed, their lips brushing.

Enjolras let out a stuttered laugh. “I’ve waited months for this,” he murmured. “Don’t worry, neither will I. You know I love you, right?”

“You might’ve mentioned it,” Grantaire replied breathlessly, smiling and kissing Enjolras quickly. “I love you too.”

He rocked his hips experimentally. Beneath him, Enjolras gasped and arched up, their chests pressing, slick with sweat. Groaning, Grantaire fell forwards, their forehead pressed together, a few soaked curls caught between them. He pulled back slightly, and rocked again.

Eventually, it was Enjolras who came first. Mouth open and gasping, his cock caught between their abdomens he came, head rolling back and nails digging deep enough into Grantaire’s back to break skin. Grantaire came a few seconds later, muscles taught and breath stuttering. Gentle fingers brushed away the dark curls stuck to his face and his eyes flickered open. Enjolras was smiling up at him lazily, looking barely awake and completely blissful.

Feeling something similar himself, Grantaire smiled back, resting their foreheads together once more, before he pulled out and rolled to Enjolras’ side. He reached for Enjolras’ hand, closing their fingers together. “I’m going to guess you enjoyed that,” Grantaire tried, smiling in anticipation.

He wasn’t let down when Enjolras started to laugh hard. “Oh, gods… what gave it away?”

Chuckling, Grantaire pressed his smile to Enjolras’ shoulder. “You wanna get the flannel to clean up, or shall I?”

Still laughing, Enjolras rolled his head to look across to Grantaire. “That’s how you want to spend the afterglow?”

“What would you suggest, then, oh wise one?”

Enjolras paused, smirking, thinking, before nudging Grantaire and saying, “Didn’t you promise me pancakes?”

The disbelief and surprise made Grantaire snort, and suddenly he was laughing harder than he ever had in his life as he wrapped his arms around Enjolras and pulled him closer, holding him there for as long as he could. Enjolras’ thumb stroked the back of his hand, where their hands were still
“I love you,” he said again, the words whispered to the back of Enjolras’ head.

“I know,” Enjolras said back. “I love you, too.”

* 

“I was expecting something slightly more exciting than this,” Courfeyrac said dismally, squashed in the back of Feuilly’s van between a pile of huge cardboard stencils and Bahorel. “Like, this is pretty standard for you, right? Why’s this got to be kept a secret?”

“Because everything’s better as a secret,” Grantaire called from the driver’s seat. Next to him, feet resting on the dashboard, Feuilly snorted. “Also, because plausible deniability. Enjolras kinda needs to be able to honestly say that he has no idea about this.”

Well that made things more interesting. Courfeyrac looked across to Bahorel, raising a questioning eyebrow, and getting a smirk and shrug in return. “So what we’re doing is illegal?”

“Well. I mean. Yeah, kinda.”

“So, what, you don’t care if we go to jail?”

“Eh, you two are parkour kings, you can break yourselves out easy.”

Courfeyrac scoffed at that, unimpressed at the lack of care his friend was displaying for his safety. “Really? Look at me, man. I wouldn’t last a day in prison, and that’s not long enough to form a decent escape plan, even for me!”

“Don’t worry,” Jehan said, catching Courfeyrac’s eye and winking. He was sat on the other side of the van, his feet tangled with Courfeyrac’s. “If we land in prison, I’ll protect you.” Still sulking slightly, Courfeyrac gave Jehan a grateful smile.

Bahorel, however, didn’t seem to be satisfied. He’d been grumbling the whole time, from the moment he was told he had to sit in the unfurnished back of the van while Feuilly got to ride shotgun. He kept calling the decision unfair, regardless of how it was, technically, Feuilly’s van. “I still don’t fucking get it,” he said. “Graffiti’s bad, yeah, but not that bad. What’s all the fuss about?”

“The location, apparently,” Feuilly called from the front.

“And before anyone attempts, like the snarky little pricks you all are, ‘are we there yet’, let me tell you that the answer is, in fact, yes,” Grantaire said, giving them very little warning before he hit the brakes.

In the back of the van, chaos hit very quickly. The sudden loss of momentum sent Bahorel flying into Courfeyrac’s lap, who slid into the painfully hard sides of the sheets of cardboard. Jehan lost balance and landed face-down on the floor. “Everyone okay back there?” Feuilly called through the grate.

Bahorel lifted his face from Courfeyrac’s crotch. “Fuck no,” he spat, and Feuilly laughed.

It wasn’t until they’d stealthily – or rather, with a lot of dropping stuff and swearing by various people – removed the stencils and bag of aerosols from the van that everyone finally had time to look around and realise where Grantaire had brought them. It wasn’t hard to recognise the space.
They were standing on the edge of Parliament Square.

“Huh,” Bahorel said, nodding as he looked around. “Yep, this would definitely make an impact. But where are you going to paint? It’s an open field.”

He didn’t get an answer immediately. Grantaire was focused, sorting out the stencils, checking they were ordered, checking the two backpacks of spray cans before finally swinging one onto his shoulder and grinning at Bahorel. “Open field? Please, give me more credit. I’m painting the tarmac,” he said, waving a hand up the road, “And you and Courfeyrac are going to use your impressive climbing skills to paint that.” He pointed over his shoulder, to the imposing building behind him.

Courfeyrac cleared his throat. “Um, call me blind,” he said, looking between the rest of them and seeing the same bemusement on their faces – save for Bahorel’s manic grin, “But all I can see behind you is Westminster Palace.”

The silence, and Grantaire’s sheepish smile, gave him an answer. Courfeyrac sighed, waving his hands in surrender. “Great. Okay. Now I get what you said about being slightly illegal.”

“No that I’m too bothered,” Jehan chimed in, “But I’m hoping that you have considered the problem of there being guards?”

For the first time, Courfeyrac had the pleasure of seeing Grantaire look slightly guilty. “I, uh,” he muttered, rubbing at the back of his head. “I’ve already dealt with that.” At the panicked faces the immediately surrounded him, and more than slightly annoyed noise that emanated from Feuilly, Grantaire hurriedly added, “Not anything permanent! Or temporary! I just pulled a few strings with a few people, called in a few favours…”

“So no one’s been beaten up, drugged, or killed?” Feuilly asked.

“No,” Grantaire reassured him firmly. “As for the rest, you’re probably going to want to be able to plead plausible deniability again.”

Out of nowhere, surprising most of the group, Bahorel chuckled. “I know more than you do,” he said gleefully to Feuilly.

Feuilly scowled at him. “How d’you-”

“Because it was his favours I had to use,” Grantaire said wearily. “Now, brushing aside my potential jail sentence and you two’s bickering, do either of you two have any experience with using aerosol cans to graffiti stuff?” he asked, looking between Courfeyrac and Bahorel. At the question, they both looked vaguely ashamed, and Grantaire sighed. “Okay. In that case, do you think you can get Feuilly over the fence?”

“Oi!” Feuilly yelled, turning to Grantaire. “What do you think I am, chopped liver? It’s a wrought-iron fence, about nine foot high, I can scale that. And I think I can make sure these two don’t fuck up your artwork.”

“We’re not that incompetent,” Courfeyrac muttered.

“Using aerosol and stencils is harder than you’d think, trust me, it’s better if you’ve got Feuilly helping you,” Grantaire said. “And that one’s important. I don’t want that one being fucked up, in any way. Got it?”

“Then go forth and do me proud, my minions!” Grantaire handed Bahorel the huge stencils and the backpack to Courfeyrac. “There’s duct tape in there, you’re going to need it,” he told Courfeyrac, nodding at the bag. With no other words of wisdom to bestow, he turned to Jehan, starting to plan their side of things, and heading back to the van.

“So, can you actually get over that fence, or are you gonna need a push up-”

Feuilly strode forwards to the fence and flipped a middle finger up at Bahorel over his shoulder, only to receive booming laughter in return. He stubbornly didn’t let his pride take a hit when Bahorel and Courfeyrac were over it seconds, and he flopped to the ground several minutes later.

It was almost concerning, that one of the major hubs of London politics was so easily accessible. Aside from the fence enclosing the area, and the hut where, presumably, police guards should have been, there was nothing stopping someone from going right up to the side of Westminster Palace, or Big Ben. Presumably there would be hundreds of alarms for inside of the building, but they were only concerned with the outside.

“Okay, so we’ve got time to stick up the stencil, but once you guys start with the spraying we’ve got to move as quickly as possible,” Feuilly instructed, taking the stencils from Bahorel and flicking through them. “The grey cardboard shouldn’t be seen at night, if we get some pedestrian or car going by – though unlikely at 3am, not impossible – but the majority of this is yellow, so we’re gonna want to move fast because it’s going to stand out like a beacon, and the whole point of it is to be as visible as possible. The architecture is pretty damn gothic, I’m assuming there’s enough hand- and foot-holds for you two to scale it?”

“Without breaking a sweat,” Courfeyrac promised, slipping his climbing gloves on and examining the walls. “How high up?”

“We want it pretty smack-bang in the middle of the side visible from the square, so not that high,” Feuilly told him, a nod telling him he’d been heard. “Right then, here’s the first stencil, and here’s the duct tape. Let’s get started!”

Bahorel and Courfeyrac may have been unpractised, but Feuilly had been doing art and sculpting before Grantaire got his first colouring book. It wasn’t long before the frame of the graffiti was taped the brick. For a moment, Courfeyrac and Bahorel just stood on the ground, staring up in awe. “You, take the yellow,” Feuilly muttered, shoving the right can into Courfeyrac’s utility belt, which Feuilly had lent to the cause. “Bahorel, the red. You know which parts you’re filling in?” They both nodded. “Okay. Off you go, and remember, speed is essential.”

Fifteen minutes and it was finished, and the two climbers were throwing down the cardboard for Feuilly to collect before climbing down themselves. Courfeyrac again dallied, staring up at the image. “C’mon, we’ve got to move,” Feuilly said, tugging on his arm.

“Yeah, I’m sure there’ll be plenty of pictures of it around tomorrow for you to gawk at,” Bahorel said, shoving Courfeyrac. “Move, moron.”

Courfeyrac obeyed them and jogged to the fence. Bahorel and Feuilly strolled behind him, the warm feeling of achievement numbing any need to rush. Feuilly looked across, planning to share a grin, only to find that Bahorel was already staring at him. “What, fucknut?” he asked.

Bahorel frowned at him. “When we get back, wanna fuck?”

Feuilly thought for a second before replying. “What about Marina?”
Bahorel shrugged. “Open relationship, I told you. She’s spending the night with her girl anyway. That bother you?”

“That’s not really,” Feuilly said. “But if you break my bed, I’ll be pissed.”

Bahorel laughed. “Good,” he said, winking at Feuilly before he shoved the stencils through a gap in the wrought iron and vaulting the fence.

Feuilly was the only one left in the courtyard, shaking his head and grinning like an idiot.

“Are you coming or what?”

Laughing, Feuilly scrambled over the fence. “If you do your job right,” he retorted, slapping Bahorel’s arse hard as he passed.

While they’d been working, Grantaire and Jehan had been busy. The road, or as much of it that Feuilly could see of it in the night, was covered with slogans that had been used and said by the protestors, each in clear block lettering, facing the direction of the oncoming traffic. “There’s also a quote from Shelley’s ‘Ode to Liberty’ over there,” Grantaire said, coming up to him. “Jehan went mad, I couldn’t control him.”

“It’s a good extract,” Jehan argued stubbornly, coming up to Courfeyrac’s side. His hands were covered in various shades of paint. “And Enjolras quoted it on the day. I thought he’d appreciate it.”

“This is more an appetizer, though,” Grantaire said, turning toward Westminster Palace. “That’s the main event. And you guys did good, it looks great.”

“Great?” echoed Courfeyrac, in disbelief. “It’s fucking stunning! It’s going to be absolutely everywhere tomorrow! Where the fuck did you get your inspiration from?”

The question seemed to confuse Grantaire. “I just thought he was owed the recognition,” he muttered.

“Well, he’s definitely going to get it now,” Feuilly said, resting an arm on Grantaire’s shoulder and letting himself fully appreciate the artwork, the whole image clearly visible from this distance.

On the side of Westminster, clearly visible from Parliament Square in block colours, was a pop-art recreation of curly blonde hair, copied perfectly from the most recognizable image of Enjolras from the protest. Where his face would have been was his most repeat phrase, in bold red capital letters: ‘Fuck Fees, not our Future’.

“C’mon,” Grantaire said, smiling softly. “We’d better get going.”

“Did you remember to tag it?” Feuilly asked, heading towards the driver’s seat.

Grantaire laughed. “Of course I did! What do you take me for?”

*

Saturday morning, Enjolras woken up by a newspaper thrown at his face. “That man of yours is a keeper,” Combeferre said, before throwing the curtains open and leaving again.

Fifteen minutes later, when Enjolras was awake enough to open his eyes, he saw his own face and words staring back at him. He started to laugh.
“Pictures were too unclear for a firm identification of the passionate speaker-’ Bullshit!’” Bossuet yelled, throwing the newspaper back down onto the alcohol-sticky and stained bar for the fifth time in the same amount of minutes, everyone around him laughing. “It’s clearly Enjolras! Such bullcrap, they should do their job properly, this man deserves the recognition and praise! He bust his fucking ribs for it, for God’s sake!”

Enjolras smiled, hiding it behind his beer as Combeferre spoke up. “It’s easy for you to recognise him, yes,” Combeferre said, grinning, one arm around Eponine’s shoulders and the other holding a whiskey and coke. “You’ve known him for years at this point. For the reporters, they have absolutely nothing to connect Blondie, the passionate speaker, to Enjolras, the law, philosophy and politics student.”

“I will remedy that, the instant I’m sober enough for ‘Chetta to give me back my phone,” Bossuet insisted, arms swinging wildly.

He made to stand up, but, laughing, Enjolras reached over to both steady and support him. “No, don’t,” he said. “Better to keep it a symbol, than a student.”

Bossuet looked offended, as if it was his own historical legacy on the line, and tugged his arm from Enjolras’ grasp. Mumbling various disgruntled complaints and followed by the laughter from the table, he staggered across to where Joly, ‘Chetta and Cosette were messing around with Feuilly, Bahorel, and the woman they’d been introduced to as Bahorel’s infamous girlfriend. Tall, stunning, African, and looking far more badass in a three-piece suit than Bahorel ever did, Enjolras had liked her immediately.

Eponine also dismissed herself, making a swift explanation about needing another drink. Grinning, she ducked under Combeferre’s arm and danced off, pressing a quick kiss to Combeferre’s forehead before she left. Stunned by the sudden change of events, Enjolras raised an eyebrow, but Combeferre ignored it snidely.

“Here, pass that,” Combeferre said. Enjolras snorted at his poor attempt to change the topic, but Marius, still laughing, obediently threw the paper across the table. “Hm… oh, apparently people have compared you to a Greek god, Enjolras, in appearance and dictation,” Combeferre pointed out, with a smirk and matching raised eyebrow.

“That’d be thanks to the Shelley quote, probably,” Enjolras said wryly.

“Yes, they’d quoted that passage here, too…” Combeferre chuckled suddenly. “Well that’s amusing.”

Marius shuffled his chair, trying to read over Combeferre’s shoulder. “What?”

Still chuckling, Combeferre chucked the paper back down onto the wooden surface, swapping it for his drink. “As ever, they’ve spouted a load of waffle – flattering waffle, though. The only thing that they seem confident about is that, after the bank assault and now this display in Parliament Square, that ‘the hitherto cynical artist identified through the rebus ‘R’, has now firmly allied himself with the protest group Friends of Students’.”

Enjolras laughed. ‘Allied himself’. It made it sound like Enjolras had waged war against the government. Not that it wasn’t an attractive idea, but still, the thought of Grantaire fighting by his side, with him, regardless of the cause… it made Enjolras happy. Proud, and happy beyond explanation. “Allied?” Enjolras echoed, turning in his chair to find Grantaire in the crowd. Dressed
in his best plaid shirt – as in, the only green one that didn’t have paint all over it – fitted black jeans and his same old tattered green Vans, Grantaire was now in a group that consisted of Eponine, Jehan, Courfeyrac, Bossuet and Gavroche, dancing idiotically to whatever pop music Bossuet was playing. “And I’m sure we’re very lucky to have him on our team,” Enjolras said, trying to sound sardonic.

Combeferre snorted. The rustling of paper told Enjolras that the newspaper had been picked back up again, and Marius started to make more joking comments about the journalist’s story, Combeferre occasionally responding with something that made Marius laugh.

But Enjolras was still watching Grantaire. He was holding a bottle of beer lazily between his fingers as he danced back-to-back with Eponine, laughing almost inaudible over the loud music. For once, Enjolras didn’t care that he was smiling as he watched him. He was allowed to, after all. It wasn’t a secret anymore. As the song approached the chorus, something seemed to pass between Jehan and Grantaire, because with one wink Courfeyrac was laughing his head off as Grantaire and Jehan grabbed his wrists and dragged him up onto the table. Other groups around Mabeuf’s club broke off their conversations to cheer the three on, whooping and applauding, but mainly laughing. Jehan and Courfeyrac were face to face, palms pressed together and dancing like they were seventeen again. Grantaire was circling his hips exaggeratedly, looking teasingly down at Eponine, who only held his gaze for a few seconds before bursting out laughing.

And finally, Grantaire looked across to him. His eyes caught Enjolras’ and he grinned, holding his hands above his head as he danced. Enjolras tried to look unimpressed, but Grantaire winked and he was gone, laughing and shaking his head. Then Jehan and Courfeyrac turned their attention back to him and were pulling him back around, the three of them belting along to the chorus, not entirely in tune, probably letting everyone within a few streets know how their partners looked so perfect standing there, in my American Apparel underwear…

“That’s yours to deal with now, you know,” Combeferre says, leaning onto the bar to look around Enjolras.

“I know,” Enjolras tries to lament. And yet, Grantaire’s laughing as he turned back to Enjolras, beckoning him and making him show the smile that he’s been trying to hide.

It seems that Enjolras doesn’t have a choice if he goes or not, as, ignoring the shaking of his head, both Combeferre and Marius shoved him from his stool and Eponine’s there to grab his hand and tug him forwards, to where Grantaire is waiting to pull him onto the table –

And yeah. It’s a little bit perfect.
Of course, the biggest of shout-outs now I've finished this has to go to Priya. She's put up with so much shit in the two years or whatever the fuck it is since I started this. Neither of us realised it'd be this huge when I started it, a fresh kid into the Les Mis fandom. She's edited what, sometimes, have been piles of complete toss-shit, and made it readable. I don't think I can thank her enough for what she's done for me. Her reward was that she gets to read a pre-polished version (though no doubt she'll have her own inputs), because I got the fantastic Iona to edit this last chapter for me. It was clear that she wasn't aware what she'd got herself into when she volunteered, but she did amazingly and I'm so grateful that she suffered through all my various repeated faults. Also, massive thanks to everyone who follows me on tumblr - so many of you sent me comments of encouragement when I felt sure that everyone had forgotten that this thing even existed. Thanks, so much, for your support!

And, especially, thanks to the reader, if you managed to get your way through this behemoth of a fic, and stayed conscious enough after all that to read the notes. Thanks for sticking by my boys for this long.

End Notes

Thanks for reading, I'll try not to keep you waiting long for an update, and please leave a comment and I'll love you forever!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!