Antiatomique

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Antiatomique

by ApurricatingCat

Summary

On October 23rd in the year 2077, China launched nuclear missiles against the United States. The world as it was known changed drastically. America's allies in Europe jumped to her defense, but the nuclear energy that the world relied upon had already become an enemy. Countries the world over began to crumble. The year is now 2294 and humanity has, for the most part, rebuilt itself upon the ruins left for it after The Great War. As is a constant with humanity, there is always someone a little stronger than the rest who uses their power to take control of the people, for better or for worse. Under a regime similar in cruelty and neglect to those many centuries before the war, a cruel man has claimed France as his own, forcing the people to submit to him, using hired gunmen and a military force that the scattered groups of people have no chance of matching. A group of young revolutionaries hope to change the tides, banding the people of Paris together to overthrow tyranny.
L'ange Radioactive

Chapter Summary

*For if the bomb that drops on you...gets your friends and neighbors too...there'll be nobody left behind to grieve! And we will all go together when we go. What a comforting fact that is to know. Universal bereavement: an inspiring achievement!*

*Yes, we all will go together when we go!*

*We Will All Go Together When We Go*

*Tom Lehrer*

Chapter Notes

This is kinda my baby. The amount of hours I have put into shaping and redesigning Paris is pretty ridiculous. I have maps. Once I finish drawing the map and marking important location's on it I will probably upload it. I have tons of art for this verse, actually. I even have a playlist of music for post-nuclear France. It's out of hand, honestly.

If you don't know anything about the Fallout series here is a super short explanation of what happened. After World War II, rather than putting nuclear energy away the world put it to more use. Everything is nuclear powered. There is a soda with nuclear energy in it. People just don't really care. In the year 2077 China attacked The United States. Pretty much the US as a whole is a wasteland. The games are only set in the US and I can't find any Bethesda released information on what happened to the rest of the world. I decided to make up what the rest of the world turned in to. Since I am Les Misérables trash, the most logical place to start? France. There will be mentions of what happened during the war scattered throughout the fic, but if you have any questions about it I probably have an answer! Questions are always welcome! I am not sure what pairings will be included? ExR for sure, but the rest are all still a bit in the air! So if you have any opinions on the matter feel free to let me know!!

Warnings for this chapter: Grantaire has a garbage mouth, Grantaire is a drug addict. He also kind of wants to die.

I think that is it, but let me know if you think otherwise!

If there is any French included the translation will be at the end. Mostly it'll just be swear words.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

The air stung today, breathing hurt more than it usually did. Breathing, on occasion, was painful. His lungs were scarred. Far too much money had been spent on drugs and not nearly enough had been spent on curing radiation sickness. Now Grantaire was paying for it. When he was younger it hadn’t mattered so much, but nearly two and a half decades of breathing poisoned air and shooting
up hadn’t treated him well. He’d never really thought he would make it to this point. He’d never taken the time to care for a body that might age past thirty, farther, even. The end didn’t seem as near as he wanted it to be. It had seemed nearer when he had started the abuse. His body was somehow clinging to life. It was most likely the radiation. He knew that distantly, ghouls generally lived longer than they ought to. Even so, he wasn’t sure how he had managed to live in Les Déchets for this long. Didn’t know how he hadn’t been killed. Radiation still hurt, on top of that, so he clearly wasn’t entirely a ghoul.

He rubbed a hand over his eyes, they were trembling, the world spinning. The air was hot and heavy, there was a storm in the distance, the air was crackling with it. But he was cold, an icy sweat on his marred skin. He pushed himself up, stomach churning in protest. He stumbled to his feet, holding heavily to the destroyed car he had camped beside, it was the only thing that kept him from eating dirt. His vision went black, sounds muffled, static filled his head. He followed the edge of the car, world swimming in to view, he retched. Barely away from his sleeping bag. That, at least, was a plus. The amount of times his sleeping bag had gotten splattered in his sick was disgusting. He was glad to not have to worry about that right now. He heaved again, acid and what alcohol remained in his stomach splattering his worn shoes and the faded, cracked asphalt. The contents, or lack thereof, settled, he leaned heavily against the side of the car, rusted paint scratching at the skin of his hand in a grounding way.

He finally pushed himself straight, shutting his eyes against the way the world spun. He just needed a shot. Everything would be fine with a shot. His body ached in protest, stomach crying its distress at this idea with a loud growl. God, he felt sick. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and walked back to his things, shuffling through the small cooler for a syringe of Med-X. His fingers closed around one and he gratefully pulled it out. Empty. He stared at the needle. No. No, that couldn’t be right. He threw the empty needle away and dumped the cooler on the ground, the half full bottle of absinthe clattering against the ground and rolling a few feet away, a mostly eaten can of crisps, the remnants tipped onto the ground, a noodle cup—bordel de merde. Merde. This could not be happening. He stared at the crumbs, heart hammering away in his chest. It was hard to breathe. Fuck. This was happening.

He fell back on his hands and scrabbled away from the mess of crumbs on the side walk, he could feel the sick rising in his throat again. How far was he from the nearest city? Maybe he could find a merchant of some sort along the road? God, he hoped so. He could feel the panic like it was another entity under his skin, possessing him. He shoved his hand into his pocket and his fingers closed around a wasteland worn box of cigarettes. He tugged one out and lit it quickly, hands a shaking mess. One, twice, three times—he got it, fingers only slightly burnt. He inhaled sharply, too much too suddenly. He coughed harshly into his hands, specks of blood staining his skin. Fuck. He lifted the cigarette to his lips again and took a more careful breath, letting the smoke fill his lungs. Slowly exhaled it, again. It would be fine.

He finished of the cigarette far too quickly and dropped the butt on the pavement. He put another between his lips and lit it, more efficient the second time. He needed to pack. It didn’t take long. He rolled his sleeping bag, attached it to his pack, put the noodle cup and half empty bottle of acidic green alcohol back into the cooler, attached that over the sleeping bag. He tugged it onto his shoulders, wincing at the way it rubbed against his skin. He leaned against the side of the truck a few moments, head spinning every time his stood—scratch that, every time he moved too quickly. He lit another cigarette, he was nearly out of those too. He’d need to slow down today if he wanted anything to last him in to Paris. Paris was closest, or maybe Mont-Saint Michel? The last time he had been there it had seemed pretty civilized. Well protected? Maybe it wasn’t anymore. Paris definitely wasn’t a nice place, but maybe it was closer? Fuck, he didn’t even know where he was, so it didn’t really matter. For all he knew there was a settlement just over the rise and he would completely miss it. Now that this thought had crossed his mind it seemed far too likely that that is
exactly what would happen, especially with his luck. He leaned more heavily against the car. Fuck. He would follow the roads. He could do that. Hopefully he would run in to something sooner rather than later. He pushed himself upright, swaying on his feet. He grabbed his sledge hammer, hoisted the heavy weapon over his shoulder, and closed his eyes hard against the way the world swam. He could do this.

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Combeferre was sitting still, the only movement was the synthetic rise and fall of his breathing and the flickers of color on his eyes. He was a synth, and not one of the pretty and incredibly realistic new models. He wasn’t necessarily one of the old models either, he could pass as human but only just. There was an unnatural sheen to his skin, dark and borderline metallic, unnaturally bronzed. It passed at a glance. It could pass in the right lighting. But, upon further inspection it became clear that he was not, in fact, human. This hardly bothered him. He had been created to think like a human. He felt like a human. Or...he assumed that the way he felt was...similar, at least, to the way that humans felt. There was no amount of studying that could be done to really clear up this foggy bit of information. There was no way to know if how he felt was the same way everyone else did. He couldn’t let it consume him though. He had spent so many years trying to find out, there wasn’t an answer. He had to deal with that.

“Combeferre?”

The voice brought him from his thoughts. He blinked a few times and turned his attention to the new presence on the rooftop. “Courfeyrac.” He greeted. He looked out again on the sun rising over Les Déchets. “The day will be nice. Joly will want to stay indoors this evening though.” He relayed the information, doing his best at small talk. “Most everyone should stay inside, but Joly especially.” He could feel Courfeyrac join him at the edge of the balcony more than he could see him. Or maybe it was sight? He was frustrated that he hadn’t been able to find a word to explain how he knew. There were still so many books to look through, though. Surely, he would find one.

“A storm?” Courfeyrac asked, leaning his arms against the railing.

“Yes. Heavy radiation.” Combeferre confirmed, returning his focus to Courfeyrac. “It should be cleared by morning, though.”

“I will never be able to understand how you know.” Courfeyrac said with a soft laugh.

“I gave you a book on it. I can find you another?” Combeferre offered.

Courfeyrac shook his head, mouth lifted in a half smile, cheek dimpled, “It’s okay, I don’t need to know.” He pulled his gaze from the sunrise to look at Combeferre. “Thank you, though.”

Combeferre blinked at him a few times, never really able to understand the way that people didn’t need to know things. He finally smiled back, “You’re welcome.” He looked back out over the city and they stood there, quiet for a few moments. The only sounds between them, Courfeyrac’s soft breathing, the quiet mechanical whirr of Combeferre. “Did you come out here for something?” Combeferre asked eventually. The smog over the city was starting to lift, the sun cutting through it.

“What, I can’t come out here just to spend time with you?” Courfeyrac laughed.

Combeferre looked back over at him. He was leaned up against the railing, eyes shut, chin tilted up slightly. His eyelashes were casting shadows on his cheeks. Combeferre could, he thought, count them. If he wanted to. Courfeyrac reminded him of a sunflower in this moment, following the light of the sun. He opened his mouth to say so but stopped with a frown, Courfeyrac wouldn’t know
what those were, he looked back over the city. It was a pity that plants like that no longer existed, at least not that he had been able to find. “You can, I just assumed there was a reason.”

Courf smiled a little, “Did you run the numbers on the likelihood that I came here for nothing?”

“Yes.”

Courfeyrac laughed, “Of course you did.” He was quiet for a moment, “Bahorel is leaving today, looking for supplies.”

“Yes, we discussed that last night.”

“Will he be okay in the weather?”

“He will need to take cover during the storm, but yes, he will be fine. He should take Rad-X, to be safe. Joly has probably packed him some.” Combeferre turned away from the edge, “Bahorel knows better than most of the people here how to survive Les Déchets, you don’t need to worry, Courfeyrac.”

Courfeyrac laughed, the sound bitter. Combeferre hated it. “We always need to worry, Combeferre. Something can always go wrong. As long as anyone is out, I will worry.”

Combeferre looked at Courfeyrac, calculating. This was something he could understand. He had spent many years mourning over deaths he couldn’t control, blaming himself for them. “If anything goes wrong, it isn’t your fault.” He said eventually, “Some things are out of our control.”

“Have you run the numbers?”

“You already know that I have.”

“And?” Courfeyrac pressed.

“Bahorel will come home safe.” Combeferre said easily. He walked past Courfeyrac back towards the door, “He will be fine.” The numbers were screaming otherwise, there were far too many variables, far too many possible outcomes and dangers. All of them greatly outweighed the probability that Bahorel would survive Les Déchets. Every outing survived was a step closer to the one that he would not. Every journey lessened the chance of his safe return. Only so many dangers could be escaped. Courfeyrac didn’t need to know that.

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Shit. He was down to two cigarettes. He had no fucking clue where he was. Grantaire pressed his shaking fingers against his eyes, screwed shut against his throbbing headache and the waves of dizziness. Fuuuuuuck. He wanted to sleep. Lie at the side of the road and never wake up. The itching under his skin wouldn’t let him. It was horrible. He couldn’t sit still, couldn’t just be. His body wouldn’t let him die, anyways. God, he wished it would. Putain. The spinning slowed and he pushed on again, skin burning from the sun. He could see heat rising off of the pavement in a mirage. He wished it was actual water. The world was far too dry. It was baking him. He was baking and he couldn’t even just die and let it happen.

Ominous clouds were drawing closer, growing angrier. He could see the radiation pulsing through them. Rain was coming, he just had to be patient…and that rain would burn his skin, poison the earth farther. Dieux, everything was great. He couldn’t think of a better outcome to this day.

Oh, wait. Yes, he really could.
He ignored the sprinkle at first. The rain stung and the air was suffocating, but he ignored it. He
needed to get to the city, worse burns be damned. The storm continued to pick up as he wandered
deeper into it. Everything was incredibly painful, from his burning skin and aching limbs to his
throbbing head.

He finally gave in and tugged open the door of a rusting car. He dropped into the back seat and
slammed the door shut. It didn’t keep the radiation completely at bay, but it protected him from the
rain, which was mostly what he had been hoping for. The air was stale and dusty. Everything about
the car was dusty, from the thick dust and lint covering all the surfaces to the driver and the
passenger, skeletons that had been here since before the war, their tomb had been untouched.
Untouched until Grantaire disrupted it. Long ago he would have believed that doing this would
bring him bad luck. He would never have done this. He couldn’t care anymore. So much had
changed. If bad luck was going to get him, it would come regardless of whether or not he
interrupted the slumber of spirits long dead.

Grantaire dropped his hammer and backpack to the floor and sank back onto the bench, resting his
feet against the window. It was cramped and horrible, but outside was so much worse. He tugged
out a cigarette and lit it, trying to make it last, holding the smoke in his lungs as long as possible
before blowing it up at the ceiling. Maybe the people who had owned this car had cigarettes? He
jolted up in his hurry to see. His head spun and his vision went black. Fuck. He held onto the seat
with shaking hands. His stomach was lurching, threatening to make him vomit acid again. He
dropped his head against the driver seat headrest, breathing slow in an attempt to keep the panic at
bay as well as to clear his head. He felt horrid.

When the spinning slowed, he moved to look through the different compartments of the car in
search of cigarettes. Or alcohol. Both would be fantastic, but he didn’t want to get his hopes too
high. A half empty box of cigarettes was buried in the glove box and a fairly undamaged new box.
Grantaire felt like crying in relief. Maybe he would later. He shoved the boxes into his pocket and
dropped back onto the seat. He relit his cigarette, finished it off, then lit another.

Grantaire woke up shaking. He was literally shaking. Being shaken? Someone was holding his
shoulders and shaking him. They were talking and it was far too loud. He tried to swat them away.
Everything was hurting. Fuck. “—ferme ta gueule” He snapped. “What the fuck. Dégage—” His
vision was swimming. Everything was muddled, he felt sick. Finally, the person shaking him
cleared, coming into view, blurred, but visible. He was trying so hard to make sense of the words
being thrown at him. He was so confused.

“Bro, are you alright?” The man was fucking huge. He looked like he was entirely muscle, no way
that there was anything else on him. Grantaire was so lost.

“I was fine until you tried to break me? What the- What the fuck?” His head was throbbing, his
skin itched. He felt like his lungs were full of dust. It was so cold, he felt like ice.

“You were definitely not okay. I was pretty sure you were going to die.” The man said, still
holding Grantaire up. His hands were massive, they basically covered his entire bicep. This was
insane, no way this guy was normal.

“I- what? No? No, why would you care?” Nothing about this was making any sense at all.

The man frowned at him, “Why wouldn’t I care?”

“Uh, for one, you don’t know me?” Grantaire squinted at him. What the fuck.
“So?”

Why wasn’t this guy getting that this was a weird situation? “So? Why do you care if I am dead or not? You going to sell me or something? Someone interested in owning something that looks like me? Why would you care what happens to me?” Grantaire snapped. Why was this guy still holding him? What the hell was going on.

“Dude, no? What? You needed help, I helped.” Grantaire was so dizzy. He felt like he was going to be sick. Everything was spinning and hurting. Apparently a response took too long to come, because the guy continued talking. Started talking again? “Dude, when was the last time you ate? Had water? Mon Dieu, you look awful.”

“Thanks. That’s just my face.”

The man was having none of it, he only rolled his eyes at the comment. Grantaire had thought it was a pretty good joke. Well, actually, it probably was his face. The guy moved Grantaire around like a doll. This man was way too fucking big. He ended up leaned against the door of the car. He was so cold, and the cold glass was really not helping. Suddenly the man was all sorts of in his space. Touching his face. What was—? He turned his head away as the guy tried to look into his eyes. This was so totally not cool. “What drug?”

What? “What?”


“Uh—med-x. Why?”

The man ignored him. Grantaire’s mind was going way too fast. He didn’t know what was going on or what to do. Merde. He tried to focus on what the man was doing. Searching through a bag? What? Suddenly the man was in his space again. “I don’t have very much of this. We need it to help treat people back in the city. It wasn’t made for this. I will let you have some. You’re coming back with me.”

“What the fuck? Why?” Grantaire was feeling so eloquent. Amazing. He felt the familiar pinch of a needle on his arm and his eyes fluttered shut, exhaling shakily. Oh Gods. If he had said anything rude he wanted to take it all back. “Putain.” He could feel it working almost immediately. The rush of it in under his skin. He was speaking. He realized this distantly but he had no idea what he was saying. Rambling a monologue of thanks, surely. The man looked amused, massaging the skin where the needle had been, dabbing the blood away. Oh—that was nice. Why hadn’t Grantaire been doing that before? This man was a God. Grantaire was pretty sure he said so out loud. The man laughed, and that was nice. He felt like he was laying there a long time. The man’s hands were in his hair, on his neck, his shoulders. At some point Grantaire had been moved and was leaning against the man’s chest. He could smell him, not unpleasant. He felt like he was floating, perhaps he was.

Eventually the high faded. It could only last so long. He wanted this one to last forever. “Thank you.” He said, voice a bit rough from all of the rambling he had done.

“You coming back?” The man asked, still rubbing circles against Grantaire’s temples. Gods, it felt so nice. Why was this guy so nice?

“Why are you so nice?”

The man huffed a laugh and pushed Grantaire up enough to move out from behind him, “When
was the last time you ate?”

Grantaire looked at him, blinking hard, feeling light and limp. “I had… some crisps… sometime. I don’t know. Why?”

“And water?”

Grantaire shrugged. He felt so confused. He felt so light. “Who are you?”

His soft smile turned into a bit of a smirk, “A God, apparently.”

“Oh, I definitely still think that. What’s your name?” And Grantaire was blushing, he could feel the warmth under his skin, but couldn’t bring himself to care too much.

“Bahorel. Yours?”

“Grantaire.” Bahorel. “Why did you… do all of that for me?”

“Someone once did it for me.” Bahorel replied after a beat of silence.

“Thank you.”

The man smiled at him, sincere. “You’re welcome. Now, I have some food and water. Do you think you can hold it down? You definitely need it. You… smell like you haven’t held anything down in quite a while.” His nose wrinkled, he didn’t seem to care too much though, he had been holding Grantaire, after all. He still had the kind smile on his face too. So, Grantaire didn’t feel too horrible about it.

“I can try.”

Bahorel smiled at him again, wider. His smile was nice. Grantaire couldn’t remember a time someone had smiled at him like that. Smiled at him like they actually meant it. Grantaire leaned back against the window again, shifting until he was comfortable. Bahorel held up a pastry of some sort. Grantaire wondered if it was one of the sort that had lasted from before the war or if it was one someone had made. He willingly let Bahorel feed him. He was feeling too light to care much about how pathetic that was. It was good. It was really good. Surprisingly good. Bahorel wouldn’t let him eat quickly, though he wanted to. He was starving. How had he not realized? Bahorel lifted water to his mouth and he eagerly drank it. Was it clean? Holy shit, it was totally clean. Grantaire couldn’t remember the last time he’d had clean water. Dieux, this was incredible.

Bahorel let Grantaire lean back against him again once he finished eating. “Once the storm passes we will leave. You’re going to come back with me.”

“Where?” Grantaire asked, eyes shut, comfortable for the first time in… he didn’t even know how long.

“A shelter in Paris.” Bahorel replied. Grantaire could feel Bahorel’s heartbeat, the rise and fall of his chest. It was incredibly nice…and strange. It was so incredibly strange.

“Okay… why?” Grantaire could not wrap his mind around this kindness. “I’m… I’m a ghoul. No one will want me there. I’m addicted to… Med-x… alcohol… cigarettes…” he could feel himself slip closer to sleep. “I’m useless.”

“You’re coming with me.” Bahorel replied firmly. Grantaire didn’t understand still, but there was obviously little arguing to be done. Maybe he could figure it out when they started travelling, when
sleep wasn’t threatening to drown him. Bahorel’s fingers found a place in his hair again. He had missed human touch. How had he not realized how much he missed human touch? He pressed into the gentle scratch of Bahorel’s nails and before he could find anything more to say, he was asleep.

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Enjolras was a restless sleeper, he had been since he was little. The older he got the worse his restlessness became. This was not surprising, given the world that he lived in, but it definitely wasn’t nice. This restlessness is what brought Enjolras to the roof in the middle of the night two days after Bahorel had left. He stood at the edge of the roof, in the same place where Combeferre and Courfeyrac had been only a few mornings before. The moon was high overhead and it made his hair glow nearly white. The air was crisp, fresh from the clean rain that had come shortly after the radiation storm. Jehan had said it was a good omen. Enjolras didn’t know if he believed that, but he quite liked to breathe in the clear air. It was refreshing in his nose, mouth, chest. It cleared his head, made it easier to think. Each cold breath made everything feel so much easier.

The world was loud. Even at night, the sounds of gunshots and fighting rang through the city, echoed off of the buildings. Quiet very rarely existed here, but this evening was quieter than most. People were probably appreciating the clean or trying to heal from the radiation the day before. Enjolras liked to think that people were enjoying the clean air, though. He liked to imagine that the people of Paris had been safe throughout the storm and could enjoy the cleanliness rather than lick their wounds. In the air, fresh from rain, Enjolras’s mind wandered to a world that could be.

The state of Paris, of France, of the entire world was so disgusting. He had spent hours learning the ways of the world before La Grande Guerre. He broke into libraries and devoured the information, desperate to learn how to heal the world. Everything was so different before the war. There had been peace. People had been well taken care of by the government, and then they were betrayed. Forced into a war for reasons Enjolras couldn’t begin to fathom. The events around the war were badly documented. The civilizations of the world had fallen with the bombs, so it was unsurprising. This didn’t stop Enjolras from searching for answers.

This late night excursion, his inability to sleep, was the reason that he saw Bahorel returning home long before the gates had been opened to let him in. Another person leaned heavily on his shoulder. Enjolras stared for a few moments and the slow progress being made down the ruined street. His late night excursion was the reason that he saw the feral ghouls approaching from a few streets away, though they remained unnoticed by Bahorel.

Enjolras froze for half a second then jolted in to action. Always armed or prepared to be, he grabbed his pistol from the table. It wasn’t enough, it was so not enough, but there wasn’t time to get more. He swung his legs over the railing and quickly scaled down the side of the building, as carefully as he could with the adrenaline pumping through his veins. Once he was close enough to the ground to drop he did so, wincing as his feet made contact with the uneven ground. He regained his footing and took off towards the gate. “Open it!” He shouted, “Open it!” The young man guarding the gate looked at him, confused, but quickly smashed in the code to let the gate roll open, the flow of electricity ceasing as the connection was broken. Enjolras slipped through the gate and sprinted down the street.

He dodged around the cars and garbage littering the street to get to Bahorel. The Sauvages were already upon them, he could hear the sounds of fighting. He rounded another car and saw them, the ghouls sprinting to attack, at least a dozen of them spilling into the street and sprinting to attack Bahorel and the stranger. Enjolras cocked his gun, took careful aim and shot one between the eyes as it fell onto the stranger.
The man looked at him, eyes wide and horrified, more pupil than color. Hair down past his shoulders, a sweaty curled mess. Enjolras looked away and shot again, taking down another. The man stumbled to his feet and hoisted a war hammer. Bahorel gunned down a few, unused to fighting from a distance, usually using his fists. More of his shots hit the street than hit the monsters. The fighting was over shortly after Enjolras arrived, the mindless monsters falling to the street, dead.

“God, man, we are lucky you got here.” Bahorel panted, “I was so not ready for that.”

Enjolras gave Bahorel a tired look, “Hundreds of missions out and you die at the gate?”

“Oh, come on. We wouldn’t have died.” Bahorel said, puffing his chest out haughtily.

Enjolras rolled his eyes, mouth twitching into a smile, “Might have killed Joly, though, with all the radiation you’d have picked up.”

Bahorel laughed, “We wouldn’t want that, so it’s lucky you were nearby. What were you out for, anyways?”

Enjolras motioned back towards the Musain, dimly lit up the street, candles flickering in some of the windows. “I was…I saw them coming.”

A look that Enjolras couldn’t quite place flickered across Bahorel’s face, “Well, thanks man.” The look disappeared and he clapped Enjolras roughly on the shoulder.

Enjolras laughed and rubbed his shoulder. His eyes wandered to Bahorel’s companion, who was staring at Enjolras, eyes as wide as they had been when Enjolras had shot the ghoul attacking him. He hardly seemed to care that Enjolras had caught him staring, holding eye contact for a few uncomfortable seconds before looking away.

“Oh, this is Grantaire. He came back with me.” Bahorel said, trying to break the sudden discomfort, “He’s cool.”

Enjolras pulled his eyes away from Grantaire and smiled at Bahorel, “Always glad to have more people supporting our cause.” He stepped around Bahorel and held out his hand to Grantaire, “I’m Enjolras, it’s nice to meet you.”

Grantaire straightened up. He had been leaning heavily against his hammer, back hunched. The man was significantly taller than Enjolras had expected, he had to look up to see his face. Grantaire took Enjolras’s hand and grinned down at him, “The pleasure is mine.”

Chapter End Notes

Coming up? A totally different kind of Fallout.

I've got tumblr! If you see any typos that I ought to fix or if you just want to talk, hit me up! I am up to taking prompts and other fun things like that. And I am super in to talking Les Mis at any and all times.

Turquoise-Candy

Translations
Les Déchets- The Wastes
Bordel de merde- oh fuck
Merde- shit
Putain- fuck
Dieux- Gods
Ferme ta gueule- shut the fuck up
Dégage- piss off
Mon Dieu- My God
Mes Dieux- My Gods
La Grande Guerre- The Great War
Sauvages- Feral Ghouls (Essentially zombies)
Chapter Summary

*Into each life some rain must fall, but too much is falling in mine. Into each heart some tears must fall, but some day the sun will shine.*

*Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall*
*The Ink Spots & Ella Fitzgerald*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Is he an angel? Mes Dieux—Bahorel, exactly how high am I right now?” Grantaire hissed, leaning heavily against Bahorel’s side. Enjolras had lead them back to this… this settlement? Grantaire wasn’t sure what exactly it was. A group of buildings that these people owned? Everything was blowing his mind. They were walking near The Seine, he hadn’t realized how close it was. It was ridiculously clean here. Rubbish covered most of the city, but it was nowhere to be seen once they were inside the fence. It slid closed once they were through with a crackle of electricity. His heart was still pounding in his chest, and he would have liked to blame it on the fact that he had been attacked by a feral ghoul, a creature that usually ignored him, but it was more due to the fact that he felt like he had been struck by lightning. The fire in Enjolras’s eyes had struck him to the very core and he was still trying to recover from it. “Bahorel, you told me about him but you didn’t tell me about him. I feel that was incredibly unfair of you. I wasn’t prepared.”

“Mon Dieu, Grantaire.” Bahorel laughed, “Ta gueule. You are not being very quiet.”

Enjolras, blessedly, was not paying attention to them. He was busy in conversation with the person manning the gate. “Bahorel, is he an angel?” Grantaire hissed, quieter.

Bahorel rolled his eyes, Grantaire couldn’t see it, but he knew. “Tais-toi.”

Grantaire groaned and dropped his head against Bahorel’s shoulder, this was horrible. He didn’t have time to complain more because Enjolras returned, looking ethereal. Grantaire had the sense to keep his mouth shut for once. Enjolras’s smile was blinding, it wasn’t even a full smile and Grantaire was electrified. It was hard to breathe and there was no cause for it at all this time. “Do you guys need rest? Food?”

“Food.” Bahorel said quickly. “Food, please.” Enjolras opened his mouth to speak but Bahorel interrupted. Grantaire wanted to punch him for it. “I’ll drop off the supplies first.”

“I’ll show Grantaire to the kitchens.” Enjolras offered, and Grantaire really wanted to punch Bahorel now.

“Yeah, I’ll meet up with you guys in a few.” Bahorel grinned. He messed up Grantaire’s hair and pushed him away. Maybe Grantaire wanted to kiss him. “Then a bath. We are both disgusting.”

Grantaire’s eyes widened, “Baths”

The look of pride that crossed Enjolras’s face and the way that he proudly straightened up made
Grantaire feel dizzy, “Pre-war ones.” He boasted. Combeferre had figured out a way to run the water from The Seine into the buildings, “Filtered and running water.”

“Toilets too.” Bahorel piped in, and he started laughing at the shock that crossed Grantaire’s face, and when he looked, Enjolras was smiling a bit too.

Grantaire was so screwed. He had barely met Enjolras and he was already practically begging for his attention. He wanted to punch himself in the teeth a little bit. “I really look forward to that.” He said finally. Bahorel laughed and clapped him on the back. Grantaire stumbled forward, only just keeping his balance, “T’es un salaud.” This just made Bahorel laugh harder.

Enjolras cleared his throat, “So, food?” he asked. He probably had a million things to do, Grantaire felt bad for keeping him. He meekly nodded and looked at Bahorel again to convey as much ‘Why did you make this happen to me’ as possible before following Enjolras, already walking into one of the buildings.

Enjolras’s pace was quick and Grantaire almost struggled to keep up. He walked with a purpose, whereas Grantaire rarely had a purpose, and certainly never a reason to walk with one. Seeing someone walk that way and having to keep up with them was like a punch in the face. It was a good punch though. Enjolras could punch him in the face any time. Grantaire wouldn’t even complain. That realization was like the bad sort of punch in the face. The thought made him rather dizzy, a realization that made him feel a little sick to his stomach and more than a little surprised with himself.

“This is our Headquarters.” Enjolras said suddenly, jolting Grantaire from his thoughts. “Bahorel told you about us, I’m sure?”

Grantaire hadn’t been incredibly sober most of the journey back to Paris, so if he had been told he didn’t remember it. Headquarters? What for, exactly? He had been told about the people, but Enjolras seemed to have a mission and Grantaire knew nothing of that. “He mentioned it.” He finally settled on answering, “There wasn’t a lot of time for conversation.”

Enjolras lit up again, clearly pleased to be able to enlighten Grantaire. “We are an organization spreading across Paris in a fight for the safety and care of the people of France.” He said, “Les Amis de l’ABC, is what we are called. I’m sure you know of that monster that has taken to calling himself King?” He didn’t wait for Grantaire to confirm or deny this, “He cares nothing for the people. He only cares about the money, and he is only successfully holding the throne because he has the arms and caps to have forced it to happen. He plans to spread his rule across France, and surely farther across Europe. He already enforces taxes on the people of the city and expects people to willingly give up huge portions of food when we can hardly feed ourselves as it is. Thus far, anyone who has made a stand against him has been killed. Worse than that, he has his men poison their land with nuclear waste, making it impossible to use and poisoning the earth around it. We are fighting to take this power away from him. We are not a people made to be stepped on. He only cares about the money, and he is only successfully holding the throne because he has the arms and caps to have forced it to happen. He plans to spread his rule across France, and surely farther across Europe. He already enforces taxes on the people of the city and expects people to willingly give up huge portions of food when we can hardly feed ourselves as it is. Thus far, anyone who has made a stand against him has been killed. Worse than that, he has his men poison their land with nuclear waste, making it impossible to use and poisoning the earth around it. We are fighting to take this power away from him. We are not a people made to be stepped on.

Once people know that they are not alone we can stand together and put him in his place. France can have a future, the world can have a future, despite the damage that the governments of the world inflicted upon the earth before our time. If we work together we can heal it and create a greater more peaceful society. We can create a society that takes care of the people.”

Oh, Grantaire was totally fucked. He felt utterly transparent when Enjolras turned his attention to him. He was practically glowing and Grantaire couldn’t breathe. Grantaire needed to shutter himself, he was far too obvious, and Enjolras was far too hopeful. “You think people will rise with you? What kind of life have you lived?” he scoffed, and Enjolras’s glow turned to something else entirely. “You think you are the first to believe he can change something? Do you know nothing of
history? No. You clearly know of history. You spoke of the tyranny of past kings, so you should know that when one tyrannous leader is knocked down there are hundreds more waiting to take his place. What do you think you will actually be able to accomplish?” Oh, the angry fire was even better than the glow because it was focused entirely on Grantaire. He desperately wanted to keep that attention on him. Grantaire wanted to burn in the fire.

“If people see that a group of power is standing with them they will stand too” Enjolras snapped.

“What if the people don’t care? Every day people use nuclear weapons even after seeing the horrors of what the radiation can cause.” Grantaire motioned pointedly at his face, “What makes you think they are even willing to change? Sure, no one wants to be forced to pay taxes, but the rest?” he rolled his eyes, “I wouldn’t count on it.”

“What do you know of the people?” Enjolras fumed, voice rising. He glared at Grantaire and the focus in his eyes was a dream. Grantaire wanted Enjolras to look at him forever.

“I know much of people.” Grantaire said, meeting Enjolras’s eyes, “More than you know of them, clearly.”

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Combeferre had some second sense that told him when there was an issue somewhere within the compound. Well, this was not actually true. Everyone was sure of it though. Whenever anyone said something along those lines they were met with an eye roll. Somehow it always seemed to prove true. Now was no exception and Grantaire was to be sure of the rumor before even hearing it. Before Enjolras could explode at Grantaire, Combeferre walked around the corner. It killed the cruel response on Enjolras’s tongue before it had a chance to begin.

Combeferre eyed them both, looking utterly unamused “Am I interrupting something?”

Enjolras turned sheepish, “no.” It was quite a look on him.

Grantaire remained silent, watching Enjolras for a long moment before turning his eyes to Combeferre. Combeferre watched, calculating, as Grantaire’s eyes looked him over. Eyes far too alert for the amount of drugs coursing through his veins. It was disconcerting. Combeferre shifted, feeling strange and almost uncomfortable under the scrutiny. “Are you quite certain? I thought I heard yelling?” he finally broke the silence and turned his gaze to Enjolras.

“A bit of friendly argument.” Grantaire finally spoke, voice gravelly and amused, “Isn’t that right, Enjolras?”

At his name Enjolras stiffened, face burning. Grantaire had a way of making Enjolras’s name sound filthy, something not to be uttered unless in private. “—yes. Yes, that exactly.” Enjolras finally agreed, still clearly caught off guard. “friendly…argument.” His nose wrinkled in distaste. “That.”

Grantaire grinned, wide and cattish—there was a word for it. Combeferre knew the word. Cheshire? Yes, perhaps that was it. A Cheshire cat grin. Lewis Carrol, Alice in Wonderland. That was the origin. He laughed, rough and sudden, surprising Combeferre, apparently Enjolras as well if the surprised look he turned to Grantaire was anything to go by. “Enjolras was just showing me to the kitchens. He says there are showers here? Are you the one who figured that out? You’re a prewar synth, aren’t you? Lots of upgrades, but the eyes give you away.”

Combeferre looked at Grantaire, surprised, “I am.” He agreed after a short stretch of silence.
“You already knew how to work the water systems, then? Is that also the reason that the air is so much cleaner here? Is the water just as clean?”

Combeferre smiled, pleasure flickering to life in his chest, “You can tell? No one has mentioned it before. I’ve been working on air purifiers to keep everyone healthy here.” He said proudly. “I’m Combeferre, by the way.” He offered his hand, which Grantaire took.

“You have?” Enjolras questioned, turning to Combeferre, “Why didn’t you say anything about it?”

Grantaire spoke as Combeferre opened his mouth to reply, “Grantaire, charmed.” He said, and continued right on, “Their lungs are healthier than mine. It’s painful to breathe in the city, it’s easier here. That’s why they can’t tell. You’re saving their lungs before they have a chance to get ruined enough to realize they need saving.”

“Perhaps the clean air can help you to heal as well.” Combeferre said softly, looking Grantaire over again, “It’s possible some of the damage isn’t permanent. The clean air could ease some of the pain.”

The gaudy confidence that Grantaire had basically been oozing flickered away like a smothered candle, the flame killing itself in the battle for air. “Yes, maybe.” He agreed quietly after the silence went on too long. He crossed his arms over his chest defensively and looked away from them both.

Enjolras cleared his throat awkwardly, “I was showing Grantaire to the cafeteria. We should probably be on our way.”

Combeferre looked at Enjolras, calculating for a moment, “Of course. I’ll see that a room is made up for him. Keep the…friendly arguments for another time.” Combeferre could feel their eyes on him as he left.

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Grantaire could feel anxiety boiling under his skin again. The conversation had been too much, too close to his fears. The synth, Combeferre, he had hit too close. Maybe the air could help him heal, but what if it didn’t? His stomach was roiling with anxiety and dread. What if it didn’t help? He felt sick. “Can I smoke in here?” he asked, already fumbling to get a cigarette from the tattered pack in his pocket.

Before Enjolras could respond with a firm, “No, absolutely not.” Grantaire was already inhaling nicotine. “Grantaire!” and blowing the smoke at the ceiling. “Put that out! Grantaire!”

Grantaire was trembling, hands shaking as he took another long drag of the cigarette, “Fuck—I will, just…merde…hold on, okay?” he leaned against the wall, dropping his head back against it hard, “I just…one second.” He rasped, taking another. The anxiety wasn’t fading. “Can I smoke outside?” he choked, “Can we go back out?”

Enjolras hesitantly touched Grantaire’s shoulder and Grantaire forced himself to look down at Enjolras. He took in the concern marring that marble face. He was causing that look, “It’s…yeah. Yes, you can smoke outside.” Enjolras said, meeting Grantaire’s eyes. “Put that out and I’ll take you up to the roof. You can smoke there.”

Grantaire exhaled shakily and searched Enjolras’s face for any signs of dishonesty. It was frightening how much he was already trusting Enjolras. He crushed the cigarette out against his jeans. “Thank you.” He whispered.
Enjolras squeezed his shoulder again and smiled at him. It was as sincere as Bahorel’s had been. What was with these people.

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Combeferre was deep in thought, carefully making a bed up for Grantaire in one of the many spare rooms. It had likely been an office once, but Combeferre couldn’t be certain. He was running the numbers. How likely was it that Grantaire could kick the addiction? What were the chances Grantaire and Bahorel would have died if Enjolras hadn’t seen them? None of the numbers were coming out how he wanted them too.

Someone cleared their throat in the doorway and Combeferre jolted, how had he not registered —“You doing okay? Need help?” Courfeyrac. It was just Courfeyrac. “You’ve been refolding that blanket for a few minutes.” He added as he stepped in to the room. “Who are you making a room for?”

Combeferre was quiet for a few seconds, choosing his words. Courfeyrac took the blanket from him and unfolded it to lay it on the bed. “Bahorel came back, he brought someone with him.” He said eventually, “Grantaire, is his name.”

“You’re putting an awful lot of thought in to this just for that.” Courfeyrac said when Combeferre offered no more information.

“I’m running numbers. I don’t like them.” Combeferre said honestly. He moved to the end of the bed to help tuck the blanket it.

Courfeyrac stilled, then offered a smile. It was painfully fake, but he was trying to stay bright. Combeferre thought again of sunflowers. Courfeyrac would have loved them. “Your numbers look bad a lot, but we haven’t lost anyone yet. I’m sure now will be no different.”

Combeferre nodded after a moment, “I hope you’re right.”

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Cosette lived in a repurposed vault. Vault’s had been big in America. They had scattered the country, according to the books she had read. In Europe, they hadn’t really caught on. Most of them were forgotten at this point. They had already been raided and there was no further use for them. They could be used for shelter, sure, but the horror stories that surrounded them tended to keep people away. Many of the superstitions of the country before the war still lingered, such superstitions had never been as strong in America. Raiders, always an exception, would occasionally set up shop, but even they seemed to move on quickly. A few vaults remained in use, repurposed for various things. She had heard rumors of one that was used as a prison of the crown. People said that Jean Valjean had escaped from it. She didn’t know if it was true or not. Her father wouldn’t confirm or deny the rumors.

She lived in the Vault with her father, Jean Valjean. Vault 24601 is what people called it. This was not really the vault number, the number engraved on the door was 387, worn, but visible. 24601 was the number branded on Valjean’s skin, and he was the one who had cleared the vault and made it safe for anyone seeking a sanctuary, be it from the city, the crown, or the wastes. The refugees living in the vault felt it had earned a name all its own, thanks to him. Cosette could not remember a time before living in the Vault with Jean Valjean. She had lived in the wastes once. He had told her the story and she had heard the rumors. Rumors of a time that Valjean and disappeared from the vault for months and had returned, haggard and exhausted, with a child. Nothing was concrete with Jean Valjean. The only thing that everyone was certain of was his devotion and love.
for his daughter.

The evening was quiet, like most. Cosette was reclined on the couch in her room by the window that looked over the vault’s main room. It had once been the office of the overseer, at least 200 years dead. She read by the light of the candles clustered together on the edge of the window and the flicker of the string lights a travelling merchant had brought to them once. Cosette had fallen in love with them and Valjean had purchased them immediately. The book was one she had read many times over, there were only so many to be found this far out in Les Deschets. The vault had had some selection, but nearly every book had turned out to be studies done by Vault-tec on things they had learned from some of the Vault’s in America. The horrors from the Vaults got old quickly, there was only so much of reading about the tests planned for the occupants that she could take. Jean Valjean had brought back as many books as he could find. Sometimes she couldn’t be sure if the things in the books were true. How much of the history textbooks that he’d found could be taken as fact? Had there really been a woman who had a home that was made of candy? A man who was a horrible beast who turned human again because of the power of love? What had happened to those people? How had those things been true? Were these things still possible? She didn’t know how to tell. She didn’t know who to ask.

Unlike most quiet evenings, this one didn’t last until morning. Valjean usually knocked, but tonight he did not. Her door opened suddenly and loudly, ricocheting off the wall. There was an edge around him that made her nervous. She straightened up and closed her book, “Papa?”

“Cosette, we must leave.” Usually neatly dressed, he was wearing a horrid mustard coat, splotched and stained, dirtied boots, a heavy pack.

“Papa, what’s happening?” Cosette pressed, setting her book aside and standing up, confused and more than a little frightened.

“Grab what you must, child, we need to leave.” Valjean said urgently, crossing the room and opening the closet to collect a bag for her. “Take only what you need.” He said, holding it towards her, “Quickly now.”

Cosette stared at him, confused for a few moments longer before jumping to action and taking the bag. “How long will we be gone?” she asked, carefully placing some of her clothes into the pack.

“It is unlikely we will ever be returning.”

Cosette froze, “Papa, why?”

“I will explain later. Hurry, Cosette.” He urged.

Knowing that this was the last she would see of her things she emptied what she had taken and carefully packed some of her prettier more delicate clothes, her favorite of her books, the doll he had given her when she was a child. She took down the string lights as quickly as she could and carefully set them on the top of her bag. “I’m ready, papa.” She said quietly.

Jean Valjean looked up from a book he had taken off her shelf, old and soft leather bound. A bible, she distantly realized, “Change into something more durable and meet me by the door.” He said quietly. He tucked the book in to his pocket and drew her closer to him. He pressed a soft kiss to her forehead and took her bag. “Hurry, Cosette.” He walked with a panicked purpose, paranoia oozing from him. Cosette wished she knew why. He kept so many secrets.

Cosette stripped out of her night clothes and pulled on clothing she had never needed to wear before. The fabric was rough against her skin, and it was heavy, plated with something that
Cosette had never ached so much in her entire life, but she kept quiet about it. Her skin itched, but...
when she scratched, it only became more irritated. It almost burned. She was certain that her feet were bleeding, they felt raw in her shoes. Her hand was tight around a gun that Valjean had told her to keep out and ready. She hardly knew how to use it. He had only taken her out to practice using it a few times. Her fingers were numb from gripping it so tightly. She was frustrated, the burning, aching, and chill from the air aside. She was frustrated because her father was yet to explain anything. Whenever she tried to question him about what was going on he would hush her. “Papa, can’t we take the road?” Cosette said softly, looking down the hill towards the pavement with plain longing.

“Too dangerous, hush.” He breathed back, looking around eyes wide. He seemed to think that a threat was right upon them and Cosette had no idea why. She had no idea what the threat even was.

“Don’t you think I should know what we are running from? How do I know what to shoot at?” Cosette pressed.

“Hopefully, you won’t need to shoot at anything, Cosette.”

Cosette sighed and flexed her fingers, trying to get some feeling back to them. “Then what is the point of me having a gun?” she pressed.

Valjean huffed a long-suffering sigh, “Cosette…”

“Papa…” She replied in the same tone. This was something they had done before and she could see him rolling his eyes in her head almost as if they were looking at each other.

“If the time comes, I believe you will know to shoot.” Jean Valjean finally replied. Cosette had thought she might not even get a response. Valjean did that sometimes. It wasn’t out of cruelty, sometimes he just didn’t know what to say so he chose to say nothing.

“Where are we going?” She asked after a time, growing colder the longer they walked. She was trembling from it, teeth clicking together.

Valjean paused his steps and looked back at her. His expression was soft and concerned, “I’m not sure yet, child. As far as we can. Somewhere safe. I don’t know where that is yet.”

“When can we stop?” she asked quietly, hugging herself in an attempt to stave off the cold.

Valjean looked across the wastelands. They were so dark, save for several small clusters of light, none of which were safe. “We can make our way to the road. We can sleep in a car.” He said finally. While that was definitely not an ideal solution, it was the best thing Cosette had heard all day.

She was to wait in the bushes alongside the road while he made sure it was safe. Crouched on the ground this way, she could feel her legs trembling. The wind was blowing through her hair, tangling it with the dead branches. The chill was biting through her clothes, making the quaking under her skin worse. The cold and exhaustion were catching up to her the longer she sat hidden in the bushes. The time Valjean was away seemed to drag as she tried to not let her mind wander too far. There was fear bubbling in her chest as the minutes ticked on, the silence was overwhelming and suffocating. She had been fueled by adrenaline before, there had been no room for the suffocating fear that was now coming to center stage, making itself known. She wished it would have stayed hidden back in the shadows off stage.

It felt like it took Valjean hours to return, though it had probably only been a few minutes. He softly rested his hand on her shoulder and jolted Cosette from her thoughts with an ill-hidden
attempt at silencing her horrified gasp. She looked at him, eyes wide and frightened, “—Papa” she exhaled with shaky relief.

“Cosette, are you alright?” clear concern marked Valjean’s face. It made him look so much older than he usually looked. Cosette wished he would never look like that.

“I’m okay, papa.” She said quietly, some of the anxiety seeping away now that she was no longer alone. “Did you find somewhere for us to sleep?”

Valjean looked at her, the concern was still evident on his face, but he answered her question anyways, “I did. Are you ready to go?”

Cosette was more than ready to go. She rushed to stand, wincing as the bush pulled her long hair, twigs and dried leaves getting caught in the dark waves. “Yes.”

Valjean plucked a twig from her hair, smiling fondly, “Soon we will find somewhere more permanent,” he promised.

Cosette wanted to ask why they’d had to leave at all, but she knew she wouldn’t get an answer. She did her best to smile at him, anxiety still thrumming under her skin. She trusted him.

Chapter End Notes

I've got tumblr! If you see any typos that I ought to fix or if you just want to talk, hit me up! I am up to taking prompts and other fun things like that. And I am super in to talking Les Mis at any and all times. 

Turquoise-Candy

Translations

Ta gueule- shut up
Tais-toi- be quiet
T’es un salaud- you’re a bastard
Chapter Summary

Baby, baby, baby, I’m a fool about love. Maybe, maybe I should go to school about
love. When it comes to gettin’ chummy, I’ll admit I’m quite a dummy. Worry, worry,
worry, woe is me. I found out that I’m the worrying kind. I go worrying right along.
Life is fine, but with a worrying mind, so many things can go wrong!

Worry, Worry, Worry

The Three Suns

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The cafeteria was more than Grantaire had expected it to be. The room was incredibly spacious. There were several tables throughout the room with chairs, that looked more comfortable than they had any right to, pushed in under their slightly battered surfaces. Glass panels made up the ceiling and let in soft white moonlight, which glinted off the polished wooden table tops. During the day, he was sure, the light of the sun shining through the glass would be breathtakingly beautiful. He could almost imagine the gold light glinting off Enjolras’s hair. He could imagine it setting dust motes glowing.

“Are those cushioned?” Grantaire asked. This was the first of the myriad of words that he was thinking which was able to make it past his lips. The moment the words left his mouth he wanted to take them back. They were foolish. There were at least a dozen better things he could have said. Could he have been more stupid? The answer to that he already knew, was yes.

Enjolras, it seemed, didn’t notice his inner turmoil. He only hummed a soft, “Yes,” in reply.

Grantaire turned to follow Enjolras, watching him carefully as he messed with a generator against the wall near the door. He felt dizzy and altogether entranced by the man. Enjolras made a triumphant sound and only a moment later the small motor began whirring. Lights began to flicker on across the cafeteria, starting at the door and flicking to life outwards. Mostly, there were string lights, though a few table and wall lamps flickered to life as well. The movement of electricity could only reach so far and some of the lights flickered back out after the initial burst.

Enjolras pushed himself back to his feet and absentmindedly wiped his hands on his shirt, “That’s better.” He said, his tone was pleased and sweet. The glow of the lights made his skin look so much warmer than the moon had. Grantaire couldn’t look for too long. He was certain that doing so would cause him to burn up. He looked back to the room, eyes wide with awe.

Grantaire had, perhaps, glimpsed some of the decadent interiors as he had walked down the streets of Central Paris, though he was almost sure that this was far more impressive than even some of the nicest places in the city. He was almost certain that the King himself had never looked upon anything as lovely.

Words that had been learned and long forgotten from years spent hiding in libraries and consuming the pages of burnt books flickered to the front of his mind, naming the pillars, the windows, the
trellises, the way the lights looked fading into the room, the way they reflected off of Enjolras’s skin and his hair. Chiaroscuro. He could almost swear that there was a nimbus around his golden curls. Grantaire was staring, star-eyed. Somehow, despite his admiration of the room, he was drawn back to Enjolras. He was staring still, and he realized with a jolt that Enjolras was looking back, mouth moving, though Grantaire hadn’t caught a word. Fuck. “I’m sorry—what?” he was choking on his words. His tongue felt thick in his mouth and he was too distracted, too in awe.

The corner of Enjolras’s mouth twitched up, hinting at a smile that felt so far from Grantaire’s reach, he distantly wondered if he was being made fun of. “Is it alright if I don’t turn on the other generators?”

“Oh—yes, that’s fine. I don’t care.” Grantaire looked back at the room. “This is…incredible. I’ve never seen anything like this.”

Enjolras puffed up, prideful, the same way he had been earlier. “A lot of work was put into it.” He said with a smile, looking over the room himself. “The luxury that the King enjoys should be available for all the people to enjoy. We do our best to make sure that the things here are as fine as possible.” He looked over, meeting Grantaire’s eyes. “Luxury and comfort should not belong only to a few.”

Grantaire had a thousand snarky remarks to make. Somehow, he tamped them down. “It’s beautiful. The work paid off.” He meant that, though he found Enjolras’s reasoning naïve. It was the correct response, Enjolras beamed at him, a sincere smile, like one that Grantaire hadn’t received since he was a child. It made him feel strangely elated. He smiled back, unused to the way it felt on his face.

“Thank you.” Enjolras said, and he turned his gaze away. Grantaire was torn between missing the sharp attention and a heavy feeling of relief at no longer being pinned under Enjolras’s scrutiny. “It’s late, so the kitchens aren’t running, there won’t be much. We have better meals during the day, but I’m sure there’s something for you to eat.”

“I haven’t had much more than noodles and chips in ages, whatever you have to spare on me will be delightful.” Grantaire said quickly, his stomach gurgled loudly in agreement. Grantaire was quick to cross his arms over it in embarrassment.

Enjolras huffed a laugh and looked back at Grantaire with a concern on his face that was battling his amusement at the well-timed grumble of hunger. Finally, he spoke, the corner of his mouth quirked the tiniest bit, “Well, we have noodles and chips that you can help yourself to.” He said. And despite that small smile, it sounded serious. Grantaire assumed that he must’ve looked as stricken by this as he felt, his heart plummeting, because a few seconds later Enjolras pushed his arm lightly and laughed, “I’m joking. Here, I’ll show you.”

Grantaire exhaled with a soft laugh, “Come on, you can’t joke with someone who has lived on those things for a hundred years.”

Enjolras’s eyes went comically wide, “Wait, are you that old?” He blurted. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to be rude.”

Grantaire coughed out a laugh and pushed Enjolras’s shoulder in the same way Enjolras had done to him, “I’m joking.”

Enjolras relaxed slightly, but frowned at Grantaire. A moment passed and he turned, “C’mon.” He started walking around the edge of the tables, brushing his fingers against the back of a chair as he went. “You’re not—are you really a hundred years old?”
Grantaire followed him, touching the same chair, letting his fingers brush against the meticulously polished top of one of the tables. “No. I’m…” he rubbed a hand over his face. Fuck, he didn’t even know the year. “No. I am not.”

Enjolras bump open a door and a light cooler than the string lights and table lamps filtered out. “This is the kitchen.” He said, letting the subject drop. “While we do have chips and noodles… we have quite a few other things as well.” His tone was teasing.

Grantaire sped up a bit and followed Enjolras into the room. There were shelves full of food, more food than he’d ever seen in his life. He’d expected there to be a lot of pre-war food. People had a tendency to live on that—so he was surprised to find that a majority of the food was fresh. Grantaire felt like he might cry. “Fucking hell, nothing looks this good in Les Déchets. How is this even possible…” Hesitantly, he slipped past Enjolras and went to get a better look at one of the shelves. There were different fruits and vegetables all carefully sorted into baskets on each one. It looked more like it belonged in one of his books than here, tangible and within reach. “These look incredible.” He lifted a Tato from one of the baskets, plump, round, and bright. “They never look like this.”

“Combeferre has been trying to figure out how to bring back old world strains of food. Those still have a lot of Tato DNA, but they are…better?” Enjolras shrugged. “To be honest, I don’t understand a lot of it. Combeferre says they are called tomatoes.”

Grantaire’s eyes lit up and he looked back at it, “Shit, that’s incredible.” He let out a breathy laugh and pushed his hair back from his eyes, “Can I… eat it? Will I take radiation?”

Enjolras quickly shook his head, “As far as we’ve been able to tell, radiation free.” He promised. “You can eat whatever you’d like. If you’ve only been living on what you said, you should probably take it slow though. It can make you sick, your body doesn’t know how to process it.”

Grantaire smiled at him gratefully and went back to looking at the shelves, carefully cradling the fruit in his hand. He wanted to try everything. He wanted to devour every shelf. He settled on taking only a few things. There would be time. At least, there would be if he was allowed to stay. The thought of being sent away made him feel sick. He hoped they wouldn’t make him leave. “Do you want anything?” He asked Enjolras. His voice was hoarse.

“No, thank you.” Enjolras replied. He was still standing at the doorway, but his voice sounded so much farther away, the anxiety pulsing through Grantaire muted him. “Are you alright?”

Grantaire flinched and turned to look at Enjolras, wide-eyed, shaken from his head by Enjolras’s hand on his arm. “Sorry?” he apologized quietly.

“What are you sorry for?” Enjolras frowned, then shook his head and pulled softly on Grantaire’s arm, “Come on, sit down, I’ll get you water.” There was a crease between his eyebrows. Worry, maybe. Most likely worry. Grantaire couldn’t imagine what he could have done to get this golden-headed stranger to waste such a thing on him. Grantaire hated himself for it, either way. He didn’t want such a look on Enjolras’s face over him. He let Enjolras lead him back to the atrium. He cradled the food against his chest and let himself be ushered into one of the cushy chairs.

Grantaire wondered if he had done something incredibly embarrassing and worrying to receive such gentle treatment from a man who looked like he could be made of marble. He dropped into the chair. His head was swimming. He hardly noticed Enjolras leave, though he registered when he returned though.
Enjolras put his hand lightly on Grantaire’s shoulder, and he was speaking. It all felt so far away, quiet and muted. Grantaire was struggling to get himself to focus on whatever it was that Enjolras was talking about. He couldn’t make any sense of it. “What the fuck are you talking about.” He finally asked, voice hoarse and strained. He forced himself to look at Enjolras, focusing too much on things that didn’t matter and not enough on what did. There were shadows cast across Enjolras’s skin, strange and warping from the way the string lights were swaying.

Enjolras half smiled, though it didn’t quite make it to his eyes, “Nothing important. I was just talking…” he lifted a glass of water. “You should drink.” He urged quietly. Grantaire’s stomach made itself known again with a low growl, “and eat.” Enjolras added with a small smile.

Grantaire sat up a little straighter and accepted the cup from Enjolras. The glass was cold in his hand and he eagerly brought it to his lips and drank some of the water. “I’ve only had cold water during the winter. This is… this is really…”

“It’s incredible, isn’t it?” Enjolras beamed, “Combeferre knew how to do it. Apparently pre-war, people drank everything cold like this!”

“That’s what all their books say.” He agreed with a small smile. He drank a bit more and set the glass on the table next to the food. Each piece was just as enticing as when he’d selected it from the shelf. He sat forward and eagerly started eating, trying to fight the fog away by staying focused.

Enjolras sat in the chair next to him, his knees pulled up to his chest, his elbows rested on them, “You’ve read pre-war books?” He leveled Grantaire with a piercing stare, wide and curious.

The look almost made Grantaire choke on his food and he quickly averted his gaze, focusing back on his food. He made a noise meant to be a yes around the tomato, drippy and flavorful. It was almost overwhelming. He’d never had food that tasted this way. He was very quickly falling in love with it, he didn’t know if he could ever go back. He finished it off and licked his fingers clean before starting on something else, all too aware of Enjolras’s eyes on him. He was self-conscious, but hungry enough that he couldn’t really care. He hoped Enjolras wasn’t judging him too harshly. He’d selected a roll of some sort. He had no idea what it was. But it was marvelous. It was soft, almost melting in his mouth with some type of sugary sweet glaze. It was sticky and wonderful in his mouth. His eyes fell shut as he savored it. This is what settled it. He could never eat anything else again. Everything else had been ruined for him.

Enjolras remained quiet, chin resting on one of his hands, letting Grantaire enjoy his food rather than pressing conversation. It was quiet save for the soft hum of the generator and the buzz of electricity through the lights. Grantaire thought that maybe he could hear the faint sound of music from somewhere out of the room, but it was distant enough that he wasn’t entirely sure. The city felt so far from this place, the near-constant sound of gunshots going off muffled like a distant memory rather than something he had to deal with immediately. It was incredible, but Grantaire couldn’t help but wonder when it would end. Places like this couldn’t stay untouched.

Enjolras finally broke the quiet when Grantaire sat back in his chair, full and sated, dazed as he finished off the glass of water. “Did you like it?”

Grantaire scoffed, “I hated every bite.” He said, voice dripping with sarcasm. He was unable to suppress a cheeky grin. “It was horrible.”

The corner of Enjolras’s mouth curved up into a small pleased smile and he bumped Grantaire’s shin with his shoe, “There will be more horrible food for you in the morning. It’s a torture device.
Take prisoners under the guise of having them here as guests, force them to eat our horrible food until they forget what real food tastes like. It’s an experiment.”

Grantaire snorted, “Well, as long as I’m being fed, I think I can handle the horrid food.”

“Horrible food in plenty.” Enjolras replied, and it sounded like a promise. Grantaire didn’t want to get his hopes up. Or rather, he desperately did, which is why he couldn’t let himself. Enjolras continued talking, unaware of the turmoil, “I can show you to the bathroom? Or, if you’d prefer, your room?”

Grantaire’s eyes lit up again, the content sleepy fog from eating well quickly filtering from his eyes,

“The baths.” He said immediately. Enjolras laughed, a sound that was musical and lovely. Grantaire could listen to it forever. He felt like he was falling. “I definitely want to try out these baths. I don’t know if I believe they are real.”

Enjolras stood up, “Well then, I’ll just have to show you, won’t I?”

Grantaire was quick to follow Enjolras to his feet, “What should I do with the cup? Should I wipe the table down?”

Enjolras took the cup from him and waved his questions away, “Nah, don’t worry about it. I’ll make sure it gets taken care of in a bit.” Grantaire watched him set it on the counter outside the kitchen.

“Come on, I’ll show you the way to the baths.” Enjolras grabbed Grantaire’s wrist as he passed to get him to follow, dropping it as they went through the doors. Grantaire missed the touch. Enjolras wasn’t physical in the same way that Bahorel had been, his touches were smaller, and incredibly rare. Grantaire was almost desperate in how much he wanted more of them. It was strange. He hated it, and worse, he hadn’t realized how touch-starved he was. Quite frankly, it was embarrassing.

They passed Bahorel in the hallway. Somehow his presence alone was a loud one. Grantaire thought that maybe he’d be able to hear him from a mile away and the man wouldn’t even have to make a sound. Bahorel beamed at Grantaire and clapped him on the shoulder, “You eat?” He laughed, and that was actually loud. Rumbling and comfortable.

Grantaire gave him a crooked smile and nodded, “You were holding out on me.”

Bahorel barked a laugh, “You think I bring the good stuff out into the wastes? I need more things to look forward to so I get my ass back here faster.”

“I can think of a thousand reasons to come back fast, food excluded.” Grantaire scoffed.

Bahorel laughed again, “Fair. Hey, I’m going to eat. Enjolras? Take care of him, don’t be an asshole.” He pointed at his eyes and then at Enjolras. “I’ll come after you if I hear you’re being rude to Grantaire.”

Enjolras rolled his eyes at Bahorel, “Shut up. I’m never an asshole.”

Bahorel scoffed, “Yeah, right. Never.” He said dryly, walking past them, tossing a careless wave over his shoulder.
“Rude!” Enjolras called after him, trying to suppress the twitch of a smile on his face. “Come on.” He said, turning his attention back to Grantaire. Every time Enjolras focused on him felt like the first time, a pleasant buzz under his skin. It made Grantaire dizzy.

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True to his word, Valjean had found a car for them to settle in. Well, more for Cosette to settle in. It was flipped, the paint was peeling off it and crumbled in dusty piles on the asphalt. She crawled in and settled on the slightly cushioned roof, shifting uncomfortably. Cosette reached to take off her boots, but Valjean, sitting with his back leaned against the outside of the car, noticed and stopped her. His voice was quiet, barely audible even in the near silence of the wasteland, “Leave them on. I know it isn’t comfortable, it’s for safety.”

Cosette bit back her complaints and obediently did as she was told, leaving the heavy shoes on and trying to make herself comfortable in the cramped space. She took off her backpack and carefully rested her head on it, taking care to not put too much pressure on the string of lights, frightened that they might shatter. “Papa…I know you don’t want to tell me, but what are we running from?” she couldn’t resist asking again, scratching absentmindedly at the raw inflamed skin of her wrists and neck.

Jean Valjean didn’t answer for a long time. Cosette almost opened her mouth again to press for an answer, but finally he sighed and shifted to look at her, calculating and almost sad. “Do you remember your life before coming to live in The Vault?” he asked, almost as though he was trying to coax a scared animal out of its den.

Cosette shifted up onto her elbows so she could look at him. Her heart was pounding hard in her chest with the realization that she might be getting some answers at last. “No…not really…sometimes I have dreams…” she said hesitantly, unsure if this was the right answer. It was the true one, and she hoped it was the one that would keep him talking.

His expression showed nothing in either direction. “You lived with some very bad people.” He said eventually. His expression was pinched in a way that made it look like he was pained to say the words. “There… is a lot to it, things that you don’t need to know, but for a very long time they wanted you back. They tracked us for months trying to take you away from me, though I paid the debts fair and square, more even.” He sighed and looked away from her, his expression pinching up even more, though it was closer to disgust now. “They feel that I still owe them for you. They want to take you back.”

Cosette stared at him, confused and fearful as pieces clicked together. They had left the vault because people wanted her. “What do they want me for?” She asked, trying to keep herself collected, to keep the fear from her voice.

He shook his head, “I’m not sure of their reasoning.”

Cosette knew that part of the conversation was closed, “Will they take me, papa?”

Valjean turned his gaze to her again, sharp and fierce. “No. They won’t.” He said, voice firm and sure. It left no room for argument. He meant it. “They will never lay a hand on you again, Cosette.”

She swallowed hard and fidgeted nervously. She trusted him, truly she did, but there was anxiety and fear roiling under her skin. “Okay, papa.” She said, her voice was barely above a whisper. She knew that it was trembling nearly as much as she was.
“Get some sleep, Cosette. We have a long journey ahead of us.” He said quietly, turning away from her. His grip on the gun in his lap tightened. “I’ll wake you when it’s time to leave.”

The sun was rising far off in the distance. In the daylight, it was clear how filthy the air was, grimy and thick. It was no wonder breathing made Cosette feel ill. She turned onto her side, obediently trying to do as her father said. She thought she would have a hard time falling asleep with the anxiety thrumming under her skin, but it came quickly. She was carried off to dreams which were haunted with almost familiar faces and things that felt as though they could be memories.

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“Do you think he needs to see Joly tonight?” Courfeyrac was speaking softly to Enjolras. He had his shoulder leaned up against the wall outside the bathrooms, his arms crossed over his chest. Combeferre stood next to him, a soft mechanical whir, as he was far more focused on running his numbers and calculations than he was on what they were saying.

“I don’t think so…not tonight… He needs a break. We can give him some so he can sleep and start him with Joly in the morning?” It sounded more like a question than the statement that Enjolras had been intending it to be. “Do you think they will be able to help wean him off? I don’t know how long he’s been using…I don’t even know how old he is.” Enjolras was rambling, an uncertain tone to his voice. He looked to Combeferre, and when Combeferre’s eyes flickered to meet his he spoke again, “What do you think?”

Courfeyrac stiffened and looked expectantly at Combeferre. He was worrying his lip between his teeth. “It could go either way.” Combeferre said eventually. The look Enjolras gave him said he wasn’t buying it and Combeferre realized he had taken too long to decide whether to lie or not. He had given himself away in the process. He sighed with something akin to frustration, “They don’t look good, but the numbers rarely look good. Maybe he will defy the odds, most of the things we do here defy them.”

Enjolras looked slightly appeased, though his expression was still tight. “Let’s just set him up for bed, then. He can start detox treatment with Joly tomorrow.” He sighed and ran his fingers through his hair, trying to push what was falling from his braid out of his face. He looked exhausted, paler than Combeferre was used to seeing him, grey under his eyes. Enjolras spoke again, sounding just as exhausted as he looked when he did, “There’s so much at risk, right now…” he clenched his jaw and pushed himself off the wall. He winced as he straightened up, back clicking with a stretch and a sigh.

“We don’t have much in the way of surplus supplies.”

“Enjolras, we have more than enough.” Combeferre interjected gently. “You don’t need to worry about that. We have all the store rooms. We will be alright, just need to make sure not to be wasteful.”

“We can start sending out more patrols for medical supplies.” Courfeyrac said, shoulder still leaning against the peeling wallpaper. “Better safe than sorry.”

Enjolras sighed and tugged at one of the curls falling into his face. “I hate to send out more people than absolutely necessary…” he paused and sighed again. He let the curl go and rubbed his hand across his face before continuing, “But it would probably be for the best. Those bastards have been coming closer in their patrols. I’m worried they might decide to strike soon…”

“Has there been any word from Eponine?” Courfeyrac asked, “She’s still stationed in the city, right? If anyone knows what the crown is planning it’ll be her.”
Combeferre gave the slightest shake of his head. “She hasn’t been in touch since her last check-in. She’s due for another in the next couple of days, but if there’s anything incredibly pressing that they are planning, I’m sure she would have sent word.” He had some doubts about whether this was true. There were at least a dozen reasons she might not have been able to. Anything out of the ordinary would be too suspicious and give her away. He’d told her to keep herself safe. It would do them no good to have a spy in the city if she was caught and tortured for information on them.

His answer seemed to appease Courfeyrac though, and Enjolras also relaxed slightly. “More patrols then, just a few. We will pull whatever supplies we can.” Courfeyrac said, “We can start moving more stuff underground. We know that they are going to attack, that gives us an advantage. They probably think we are completely unaware, and when they attack, if they think we’ve taken more damage than we actually did, we will be at a huge advantage. The more we have protected underground the better for us. We want them to think we are weak.”

Combeferre tilted his head thoughtfully, “That’s not a bad idea at all.” Courfeyrac looked pleased at the praise and Combeferre smiled back before turning his gaze to Enjolras, “We could start doing that tonight. Best to move things when they can’t see what we are doing.”

Enjolras chewed on the inside of his cheek a moment before nodding in agreement. “Get it started.” He said finally, “I’ll get Grantaire settled, then I’ll be down to help.”

Courfeyrac and Combeferre’s reactions were simultaneous.

“No.”

“Absolutely not.”

Combeferre fell quiet and let Courfeyrac continue talking, “Enjolras, you need to get some rest. We need you to be fully functioning for this. Get some sleep. You can help tomorrow.”

Enjolras opened his mouth to argue but Combeferre cut him off, “He’s right. Sleep for a few hours. We can do this without you for a little while, Enjolras.” His tone left no room for argument.

Enjolras sighed, his shoulders slumped in frustrated defeat, “Fine, fine. Just for a few hours. I need to be helping.” It was clear that the idea of not being involved and working along with everyone else felt wrong to him, but they were right. He needed to be rested.

“We will leave you to it then, Enjolras” Combeferre said and Courfeyrac pushed himself off the wall to follow Combeferre away. “Make sure you get some rest. We will see you in the morning.”

Enjolras nodded to him, his frustration still clear, “In the morning.” He agreed.

Combeferre turned and started down the hallway, Courfeyrac on his heels. Once they were out of earshot Courfeyrac spoke. His voice was hesitant, as though he wasn’t sure he really wanted the answer, “Do you really think he has a chance?”

Combeferre didn’t respond for several seconds, “I don’t like the chances.” He sighed, “I told you that earlier. I’m trying to be optimistic about it.” They started down the stairs and Combeferre started talking again, “Putting more of our supplies underground is a good idea. Go find Bahorel, let him know. I know that he just got back, but he’ll be good help. We need him in this.”

Courfeyrac gave a quick nod, “Should we get anyone else up?”

Combeferre tapped his fingertips against his thigh a moment, “Ask him what he thinks when you find him.” He decided. They left the stairwell, “I’ll wake Joly. I have a feeling that this is
something we will be glad to have done sooner rather than later.”

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Wolves, like the ones in some of her books, were hard on their trail. If she looked over her shoulder, she could see the shine of their white teeth, blood dripping from their mouths. She could hear their breathing and could almost feel their breath on her heels. Jean Valjean was ahead of her, only a pace or two, and he was holding tight to her hand, forcing her to keep moving, proving to her that even though she was certain she could go no farther, she could. She had to. She was exhausted and she couldn’t breathe. Her muscles were sore and aching. Each sharp inhale burned her lungs and every step was torment.

The wolves were drawing closer still. If the one closest to her just lunged forward, he would have her in his jaws, crushing the life from her.

Wolves were so much bigger than she had imagined they would be.

She could feel the ground shaking as they ran, the heavy pounding of their paws hitting the ground. She didn’t know how many of them there were. It seemed there were hundreds. Tears streamed down her cheeks, blurred her vision, stung her eyes. This was the end. She knew this was the end.

She glanced over her shoulder just as the largest wolf jumped forward, his glistening white teeth clamped down on her.

Cosette woke with a jolt, a hand over her mouth. It must have been to stop her from screaming. She was breathing hard, labored and panicked through her nose. Jean Valjean’s voice cut softly through her panic and he removed his hand from over her mouth, holding onto her shoulders, comforting and strong. “It’s okay, Cosette.” His voice was firm, calm and gentle, but firm. “It was just a dream, you’re alright. I’ve got you.”

Cosette took a shuddery breath, covering his hands with her own. She held tight to them, knuckles turning white from the force of her trembling grip. “Papa.” She whispered, voice hoarse. “Oh—papa.” She scrambled from the car and fell against him, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Jean Valjean hugged her, his chin rested on her shoulder, arms protectively around her back, “Hush, little one. It’s okay.” He comforted, voice low and soft. “Come now, let’s get you fed. It’s near time for us to leave. We must keep moving.” He said as her heavy breathing and her tears started to slow.

She slowly pulled away from him and settled on the ground. They ate the bread Jean Valjean had packed in silence, and when they were finished with it they had water. She was still hungry, but she didn’t dare complain.

When it came time for them to leave and Jean Valjean was pulling her to her feet, Cosette realized how sore she was. She couldn’t stifle a gasp of pain, it was torturous. “We will find somewhere soon. I’m sorry, Cosette. It won’t hurt as much once we get moving.” He settled his hand against her shoulder and squeezed in an attempt at comfort. She looked up at him and he smiled at her. She did her best to return it, she was sure it was rather poor.

Cosette had a pit in her stomach, something telling her that the wolves in her dream had been more than wolves. Perhaps this was what was to happen to them. Wolves on their trail, hunting them down. No matter what, she feared they would always be too close for escape. She didn’t know what it meant. She didn’t know if it was true. She didn’t voice her concerns. Knife sharp teeth, rancid breath, dripping blood, drawing closer. Always just slightly faster than she and Jean Valjean
could be.

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Enjolras shut the door to his bedroom behind him. He was on edge. He felt like he needed to be doing something; adrenaline was still pumping through his body. It was making him feel ill. He leaned against the door and flicked the lights on, watching as they slowly flickered to life, the soft buzz of them was familiar and calming, almost. He sat on the edge of his bed and started unlacing his boots.

He was lost in his thoughts as he undressed, staring rather blankly at the wall as he removed layer after layer. There was so much hanging on their success. He couldn’t, he wouldn’t, let his mind wander to the possibility that people wouldn’t rise with them. Things had to change and he knew in his heart it could if people would follow, but he couldn’t stop himself from thinking of Grantaire’s words. Thinking of them made him burn with anger. He had forced it to the back of his mind for a time, but now, alone and getting ready to sleep, he couldn’t help but hear it echo in his head.

‘You think people will rise with you? You think you are the first to believe he can change something? I wouldn’t count on it.’ He could hear the disdain clearly in his head as though Grantaire was standing in the room with him.

Enjolras started unlatching the clasps on the binder around his chest, hands shaking with anger and frustration. He could change things. He could. He inhaled slow and long as the constricting material slid from his shoulders. He stretched his back, eyes shut, brows furrowed. He had every ability to change things. They just needed the people to see. He knew that they would. He felt that to his core.

He untied the ribbon and elastic from his hair and ran his fingers through it, he shook out the curls. The people would rise. He would show Grantaire. The more time away from him the angrier Enjolras was becoming about his attitude. He had to prove it now, more than ever. He didn’t know why Grantaire’s tone made him so furious. He pulled a threadbare t-shirt on and crossed the room to shut off the lights.

Even as he laid his head down and pulled the blankets over his shoulders, he was seething. Exhaustion was washing over him, but his frustrated anger remained. As sleep finally washed over him, the last thing he could think was that Grantaire was wrong. He could count on it.

Chapter End Notes

I've got tumblr! If you see any typos that I ought to fix or if you just want to talk, hit me up! I am up to taking prompts and other fun things like that. And I am super in to talking Les Mis at any and all times.

Turquoise-Candy
One look and I yelled "Timber!", watch out for flying glass. 'Cause the ceiling fell in and the bottom fell out. I went into a spin and I started to shout, "I've been hit, this is it, this is it, I-T, it!"

Orange Colored Sky

Nat King Cole

“Eponine.” The quietly hissed voice roused Eponine from her sleep and she jolted upright. Eyes wide and hair askew from sleep, she searched the dark gloom for the source of the voice. Finally, they settled on a hunched shape in the window. She relaxed marginally.

“Gavroche.” She greeted softly, her voice gritty and rough with sleep. “What are you doing here?”

The boy turned his legs into the room and landed silently on the worn wooden floor. She’d have been surprised if she hadn’t known better already what kind of silence the boy was capable of.

“Summa my kids heard news.” He said, slinking towards her cupboards, catlike in his movement. “Thought it might in’erest ya.” He opened the cupboard, “Food?”

“I never have food, Gavroche.” Eponine replied quietly, sitting straighter, legs hanging off the edge of the bed. “What did you hear?”

Gavroche didn’t reply for several long seconds, leaving Eponine to gnaw at her nails and tap her foot nervously against the floor. She reached for her side table and fiddled for a cigarette to keep her busy. It was an attempt to steel the sudden rush of nerves. If one of Gavroche’s boys had heard something and he felt she needed to be informed, it couldn’t be good news. “Gavroche.” She finally pressed, his name hissed through her teeth.

The urchin continued searching through her clothes, going through every pocket and feeling at the seams, as though his sister would go to that kind of effort to hide her food from him. He made a noise of triumph and hurriedly ate some dried crumbs of bread. “Summa tha boys saw the crown headin out in the way ‘a that group ya hang around.” Gavroche said, apparently giving up on finding anything more to eat. “Said they had lotsa fire with ‘em.”

Eponine stiffened, “You sure?”

“‘nless you know of anyone else out that way?” Gavroche asked with a shrug. He moved across the room and swiped the small pile of coins from her nightstand. “Thotcha might like to know.”

She didn’t even try to stop him. “Thank you for telling me.” She said finally, voice trembling.

Gavroche gave her a dry salute and headed back towards the window. He hopped lightly up onto the window sill and turned back to look at her in the gloom. The end of her cigarette was glowing red, casting the faintest bit of light on her face. After a couple of seconds, Eponine looked up and met his eyes. His hair was a wild mess of curls. “If ya hurry, you can probably beat them out there.” He said after a moment. Before she could reply to him, he had turned and hopped out the
window, disappearing into the night.

Eponine was frozen for a few seconds, staring at the window. Her hand was trembling, shaking ash onto her lap. She finally jerked into action, mind going too quickly. Marius. She dropped the cigarette into her little ash tray and hurriedly dressed, lacing her armor, lacing her boots. She had to get moving. She tugged her hair back and tied it into a loose knot on top of her head, then tugged her cap over it. She grabbed her knife from the table and followed Gavroche out the window into the night, handle of the knife between her teeth as she climbed down the rusted crumbling ladder to the cobbled streets below.

She dropped silently onto the filthy street, staying in the shadows of the building. She held the knife tight in her hand and hurried along, shirking around the glow of street lights and entryways. She had a long way to go.

Eponine rushed, staying hidden in the shadows and taking shortcuts across the city that she was certain only she knew about, winding hurriedly through the war-torn streets.

There was a metro station nearby. She knew the system like the back of her hand, but dodging people was a little harder.

Finally, she saw the nearly acidic green of the metro entrance, rusted as it was, the green still showed through. She glanced around—people were laying on the streets and hidden in corners. Assured she wasn’t being followed, Eponine darted across the street and hoisted herself over the railing, dropping onto the garbage covered stairs. She rushed down the remaining steps, knife gripped tight in her hand.

She bounded over the turnstile, glanced around the gloom warily, then walked deeper into the metro station, knife held at the ready.

She knew which tunnels to take- and it wasn’t often that people would go this way. There were too many ghouls and other monsters down here, not to mention the raiders. They wouldn’t bother her though. Not really. Not once they saw her. She sighed, glanced around again before dropping onto the tracks. Putrid water splashed up over her worn boots, some of it soaking in at the sole. If she noticed the water at all, she gave no sign of it, not even a wrinkle of the nose. She kept on, walking along the tracks, knees bent slightly, eyes narrowed to make out shapes in the dark.

She gradually picked up the pace, too worried to pay too much attention to the noise she made as she hurried through the dark tunnels, only lit up by the occasional flickering light hung on the walls. It was because of this nervous rush that she didn’t notice the feral ghoul roused from its near-stasis like state by her noise.

It happened all at once. Eponine didn’t even know what had hit her. She was very suddenly shoved off her feet and, as her head hit the metal train rails, her vision exploded bright white with explosions of color before fading to black. She tried to orient herself, shakily tried to get to her feet. Her ears were ringing, her already limited vision was swimming in and out of focus- but god, the smell. She used the slimy stone to leverage herself to her feet. Her knife wasn’t in her hands, something she only distantly was able to realize over the throbbing in her skull, the ache in her mouth, and the taste of copper on her tongue. It must have been thrown from her grip when she’d hit the rails.

Everything around her was turning. She didn’t have a chance to straighten up before the creature was on her again. It had overshot the first time, crashed into the wall behind her. It had been able to figure out where it was far quicker than she was. She was down again, the back of her head cracking again against the rails. It was a struggle, but she forced her knees to her chest and
slammed them against the chest of the ghoul attacking her. It staggered back several steps, toppling backwards as it’s calves caught on the rails. It wasn’t much time, but it was enough. The ringing in her ears was starting to fade to a dull roar. Fuck. Fuck. She really had screwed up. As she clambered back to her feet and the word tilted around her. She felt like she was going to throw up, the contents of her stomach were roiling like mad and the throbbing pain and dizziness didn’t help at all. The creature was on her again before she truly had time to get her bearings. She wished desperately for her knife, but wishing would do nothing. She knew that better than anyone.

She shoved her hands out in front of her, catching the rotting creature’s face. With the force that he was moving towards her, her fingers sank into his flesh. Her stomach heaved as she smelled more than felt the ghouls rotting blood gush around her fingers where she’d torn through his scarred flesh. The radiation that he was emitting was making her feel sicker by the second. She shoved hard against his marred face, gaining some ground in the suddenness of her movement. They stumbled forward several steps and with a rush of adrenaline she slammed him down against the ground, using the tracks tripping him up for leverage. She bashed his head against the ground over and over until, finally, it went still under her. The ghouls blood drenched Eponine’s clothes and dripped from her hands. She scrambled back from the creature, shaking like a leaf. She’d had to fight things off this way before, but she never felt much better for it.

She gripped at her stomach head swimming from the radiation and the bash she’d taken to the head. She leaned heavily against the stone side of the wall. Her mouth tasted of blood. She dropped the side of her head against the cold damp stone. It was grounding. The smell of the ghoul on her hands rushed over her again in a wave and before she could think about it she was retching stomach acid and blood onto her shoes.

She spat and coughed blood and spit onto the ground before straightening up. She ran her tongue over her teeth, cringing as it ran over the bloodied welt on the inside of her cheek, and her eyes filled with frustrated tears of shame as it ran over a bloodied empty socket near the front of her mouth. Of course. Because she wasn’t missing enough she had to be missing one of the front ones too. She didn’t have time for this, though. She swallowed down her feelings. She had no other choice. She straightened up and shut her eyes for several seconds against the way the world swayed around her. She had to pay more attention this time. She forced herself to move. She scanned the ground for her knife, collected from a puddle of stagnant reeking water, and headed off again.

*Marius*

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Most of the compound was asleep when it happened. It came late at night, an attack against an enemy with its’ back turned. Explosions shuddered through the building as The Crown launched its first real attack against them.

Burning heat, blinding light, and crumbling stone. The foundation of the building held, somehow, through these explosions as they had to the ones hundreds of years before. Many of the people living here had forgotten the terror of attack. Some of the people had come here when they were young and had grown up without the constant threat of attack, always too well protected.

The building shuddered and groaned, walls that had been built up in an attempt to withstand such things, collapsed as they were hit with grenades and bullets. The fires were stifling. They had strict protocol and jobs for what to do in such events, but in the end panic won out and they took far more damage than they might have if people had been more prepared.

It was a blessing that Combeferre had started moving more of their supplies underground. It made
it possible for them to lick their wounds without much of the scramble that would have happened had they lost as much as they would have the previous night. They gathered in the cafeteria. The glass ceiling had crumbled under the blow and most of the glass had been swept to the side. There had been some scorching, but it was contained quickly enough that it was in good enough condition.

Joly flitted from person to person, ignoring his own needs. He was limping rather badly and there was blood dripping from a cut on his forehead, but he was somehow able to ignore that for the time being, taking care of everyone else. No one, not even Musichetta or Bossuet could get him to calm down for a moment.

Guiltily, Enjolras took the blame for the attack. Always a martyr, the man blamed himself for what was completely out of their control. “We should have had more people in the city to warn us if the crown planned to move. I didn’t want to risk having more people in the city. I should have sent more people there. We would have been safer.” He stood on a table near the front of the room, all eyes were on him. He anxiously ran his fingers through his hair, tugging curls back from his face. “But now we know that they are ready to attack us. They damaged us and they caught us by surprise, but they won’t next time. We are far better prepared just knowing.”

“Was it the king? The crown did this, right? Is there someone else who would want to shut us down?” Someone called from the crowd.

“It almost certainly was. We haven’t searched the grounds, we won’t until morning. We won’t know for sure until then.” Enjolras replied with a glance towards whoever had spoken. He scanned over the crowd, shoulders relaxing slightly as he located familiar faces. “We will post more guards tonight and in the morning, we will start to clean up from this. We all need some rest, and we all need some medical attention.”

“We knew this was coming eventually—why weren’t we better prepared for it?”

“We weren’t fortified for this kind of attack. I couldn’t have known!”

“It had nothing to do with how well guarded we are. There was no time—it all happened too fast. We’ve never been directly hit before.”

“We will put ourselves back together. We know better what to expect. We didn’t lose everything. Much of our resources are under ground. We will be better fortified next time. We will be ready next time.”

“What do we need to do?” Combeferre spoke up. He climbed onto the table and stood next to Enjolras, “Where do you want us to start? We have a lot of work to do, especially now that we know the cowards won’t hesitate to attack us blind.”

With Combeferre’s calm voice cutting through the nervous jittering panic, people stilled, turned their attention to Enjolras, waiting expectantly for an answer, for hope. It was something he felt he couldn’t provide, but Enjolras straightened up anyways, jaw clenching and unclenching. He looked out across the room. Dozens of faces looked back up at him, everyone relying on him to keep them safe and to keep this from happening again. “We need to rebuild what was destroyed, but stronger. We need to start sending out more patrols to collect more ammo and guns. We won’t stand for this. It’s time he falls. For too long we have been living under tyranny. No longer!” his voice rose to a shout. “There is no reason we have to stand for this! They do not own us! They don’t own any of this. It’s time they are put in their place! Paris is for the people! Paris has always been for the people and it’s far past time we take it back from our oppressors!”
Cheers and shouts of agreement broke out across the room, an overwhelming roar of excited energy and anger. Enjolras met Grantaire’s dark eyes across the room. He was beaming as he climbed off the table, though his bright expression faltered at the displeased look that met him. Grantaire didn’t look happy in the slightest. He didn’t even look impressed, and Enjolras didn’t know why—he couldn’t even begin to wrap his mind around why that bothered him as much as it did, like an icy lump in his stomach. He watched with building frustration as Grantaire stood from his seat in the back of the room and left. People were too busy talking with a dizzying mix of excitement and anger to notice the stranger slip away.

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There was a bitter taste in Grantaire’s mouth. The attack…well, that was to be expected. That didn’t faze him in the slightest. All those people though… they had ambitions higher than they could possibly meet and, like sheep, they were following a leader to slaughter. A leader who spoke such beautiful words, a leader who even Grantaire couldn’t help but be inspired by. He had half a mind to walk to into battle alongside the man just to listen to him some more. Grantaire hated it. It made him feel sick. Sicker. His head had been throbbing since he’d woken to the earth trembling bangs and explosions, the pieces of plaster from the ceiling falling onto his bed, getting in his hair and eyes. That could be attributed to the withdrawals, but some of it… was definitely Enjolras.

“Grantaire—” And of course, the man himself had to cut through Grantaire’s irritated thoughts. “Grantaire, why did you leave?”

With an irritated huff Grantaire turned around and glared at Enjolras, frustrated with himself more than anything. Frustrated with his inability to not want the attention. Because, God, he wanted it. The very idea that Enjolras had followed him out here made Grantaire’s heart pound, made him infuriatingly dizzy. “What do you want? Why do you care?” he snapped, angrier than intended, but the throbbing in his head kept him from feeling too sympathetic about it.

Enjolras wheeled back, eyes going wide. “I thought that…” he shook his head, and Grantaire got to watch as Enjolras rebuilt walls that Grantaire hadn’t known were down. The man straightened up, his expression painfully neutral. “Don’t you care?” He asked. His voice was icy and detached. Grantaire almost cringed against it, and he very suddenly wanted the fire back, not this cold indifference. There was such a change between the two and he preferred the heat. “We can change things here, Grantaire, do you care for nothing? What use is that? What use are you?” Enjolras’s voice was harsh, and he looked him over with something far too close to disgust.

Grantaire looked for several long silent seconds, like he had been slapped. Everything inside of him wanted to shrink away to nothing under that look, he felt like nothing at all. “You’re bound to lose. You’re leading all those people to their deaths because you have some outrageous idealistic belief that you can win. Enjolras, you’re a bug trying to stand up to a giant about to crush you with his boot and for some reason you think you can win against it?” Grantaire spat. He was trembling, he didn’t know with what. His head hurt so badly he thought he might throw up, or maybe that was the look that Enjolras had him pinned under. He could hardly tell the difference. “Not only are you going to get yourself killed, but you’re going to get anyone who stands with you killed, all those people who believe in you, their families, their children, Enjolras this is so stupid. You’re so stupid.”

There was the faintest flicker of hurt behind Enjolras’s expression before it turned more and more disgusted, “You’ll see.” He said, when Grantaire’s rant hand ended. He sounded so cold.

With a sinking feeling, Grantaire realized that rather than making Enjolras see how outrageous the risk was, his words were pressing Enjolras to prove that they would succeed even more than
before. “I guess we will.” Grantaire said faintly. He turned away from Enjolras, away from all of this. It was all such bullshit.

Grantaire found himself in search of the doctor, and luckily there were signs for that. He felt, to put it lightly, like shit. To put it dramatically, as he had to the doctor, he felt like he’d been hit several times with a croquet mallet and left for dead in a ditch.

Joly had looked at him for several long seconds, face becoming increasingly concerned, before his friend (Grantaire thought he might have been introduced by the name Bossuet, but he couldn’t really remember), touched his shoulder and said. “He’s coming off Med-X, you can’t expect him to feel good.”

Joly seemed to relax with this reassurance that Grantaire had not actually been beaten with croquet mallets and left for dead. “Well, that, we can treat just fine.” He was bustling around the room with all sorts of confidence that Grantaire was quickly losing. “Onto the bed.” He ordered, “get, get.”

Grantaire obeyed, trying his hardest to ignore the sinking feeling of dread in his gut. Joly kept talking, oblivious to it. “We have a few different things we can try on you. We need to get it out of your system, that’s the most important part.” He said it like that was something simple, which Grantaire found kind of ridiculous, because it really didn’t seem simple at all. Grantaire was too lost in his own thoughts to register much of Joly’s rambling, he wasn’t sure he wanted to hear any of it anyways. False hope. Of course, the people who were around Enjolras, who spoke so high and mighty about unrealistic and lofty goals as if he’d already succeeded in reaching them, would believe they could fix Grantaire. He didn’t want to get his hopes up. He wrinkled his nose in distaste, still tuning out Joly as he explained what he was going to be doing to Grantaire. He was already certain they would fail. He couldn’t bring himself to care, and he certainly couldn’t bring himself to hope.

There was suddenly a prick in his arm and he jolted, let out a surprised yelp as if he was in pain, “What was that?”

“If you’d been listening to me, you would know.” Joly muttered, “It’s going to clear the Med-X from your system…” he was silent for a moment as he disposed of the need, “and it’s really going to suck.” He stuck a glass of water out to Grantaire. “But it’ll feel better later. It’ll be worth it.” Grantaire nervously took the glass and downed it. “When will it start working?”

Joly hummed and glanced out the window, “Any minute now. You’re going to want to lay down.”

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Once Enjolras had calmed down a little bit he knew he needed to apologize. He’d been way out of line. He eventually found him in the medical room. Struck to the bone with a shocking amount of worry, Enjolras tried to push his way into the room but was stopped by Musichetta’s arm blocking his way. “What’s wrong with him?” Enjolras asked, still trying to get past her.

“He’s detoxing. There’s a drug that we can use that triggered his body to reject what was left of it in his system. He’s sweating it out, mostly.” Joly replied from near Grantaire’s bed.

“But he’s crying. Why is he crying?” Enjolras asked.

“It doesn’t feel good.” Joly replied patiently.

“Is there something that will help?” Enjolras pressed.

“It’ll help if he doesn’t use it again.” Came Musichetta’s dry reply.
“Joly” Enjolras was clearly frustrated, looking past the doctor at Grantaire on the hospital bed. The man was drenched in sweat. Enjolras could see it practically puddled around him on the sheets. His shirt was nearly translucent with how wet it had become. The man was writhing, breathing pained. He seemed completely out of his mind. His curls were damp and splayed across the sheets, he’d bitten his lip to the point it was bleeding. “He’s hurting- surely there is something.”

Musichetta stepped up behind Joly, towering at least a head and a half over her boyfriend. “Enjolras, I know it’s hard to see. This is the only way to get it out of his system quickly and efficiently. Once this is done, the rest won’t hurt nearly as bad. Please, don’t question what we have to do. Medicine isn’t your area.”

Enjolras tried to peer past her, brows furrowed with concern, “Are you sure we can’t do anything?” he asked anxiously.

Musichetta let out a long-suffering sigh, “Yes, Enjolras. If there was an easier way we would have taken it.”

“We injected him over an hour ago, it should be nearing the tail-end anytime now. You can visit him then, Enjolras. Go do something important, please. Or was there something else you came for?”

“I just…wanted to check on him.” Enjolras said, clearly frustrated.

Musichetta tilted her head, looking intrigued by this. Joly spoke before she could, “How is your chest? You bind too often.”

Enjolras flushed and looked avoidant, “It’s fine.”

“Are you stretching?”

Enjolras shrugged half-heartedly.

“Enjolras.” Joly snapped. Stunned by the tone, Enjolras looked back to him. “You need to take care of yourself, what are we going to do if our great leader can’t lead us because he’s suffocated himself, broken his ribs, and punctured a lung, hm?”

Enjolras flushed angrily, “I’ll do better.” He muttered, scowling at the ground. He knew Joly was right, he just didn’t particularly want to hear it.

“You should go some days without binding, it’s bad to do it all of the time, Enjolras.”

“I know.” He muttered.

“Then do it, please. Or we are going to have you writhing in one of these beds too.” Joly snipped, crossing his arms irritably.

Enjolras scowled and peered past Joly one more time, “He’ll really be okay?” he asked, some of his irritation slipping away, replaced with concern. “He doesn’t look good.”

“Enjolras.” Said Musichetta, amused and annoyed, “He will be fine, let the doctor do his work, hm? Now, I know you have something better to do. Get out of here.”

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Eponine knew as soon as she was out of the metro that she had arrived too late. She could smell the smoke, acrid and sickening. Bile was rising in her throat and she stumbled forward jerkily before
breaking into a full-on sprint. She hardly had the energy for it, every step made her feel like she was going to crumble. She raced to the gate, eyes wide and panicked. They couldn’t be— and he wasn’t. Oh, thank god, he wasn’t. He sat in the booth near the gate talking amiably with another person. He was alive and well. Maybe he hadn’t been hurt at all. Eponine sagged in relief. “Monsieur Marius.” She called a little breathlessly through the bars.

He straightened up and looked around at the sound of his name. When his gaze fell on her his eyes went wide and worried. “Eponine.” He was out of the booth in a moment, his companion on his heels. “What happened to you?” He must have pressed the button to open the gate, because it was coming open and she was nearly toppling over.

“Do I look so bad, monsieur?” she laughed, heart pounding in her chest. She felt giddy around the throbbing pain. “That that’s the first thing you ask of me?”

“Courf—go tell Joly, I’ll bring her—Combeferre too, he should know.” Marius ignored her words. He caught her before she collapsed to the ground. “Hurry, please.” He pleaded. He struggled to scoop her up. His nose wrinkled slightly at the smell, “Mon Dieu, Eponine, what’s happened to you?” He asked again.

Eponine could hardly focus on any of it. Monsieur Marius was holding her. She could rest her head against his chest. She pressed her palm flat over his chest and beneath it she could feel his heart beat. If she pressed her ear a little closer she could even hear it. “I’m okay, monsieur…you don’t need to worry about me.” She murmured. Her eyes fell shut and she pressed closer. Being so near, cradled so gently by Monsieur Marius…Eponine felt like she could make pretend that she was precious to someone, was precious to him. He was always so soft with her, she imagined maybe that’s what it would have been like to have an older brother, or perhaps even a lover. Everything was so muddled. Monsieur Marius was so kind.

Marius exhaled through his teeth and stood up. She was limp in his arms, and perhaps if she’d lived a better life she would have been heavy, but as it was, he was practically lifting a child, starved on the streets. “We’ll get you to see Joly, just hold on, it’s alright, ‘Ponine.” He said. His voice sounded so far away, but at the same time she could feel it in her bones.

“Really, monsieur. I’m okay, now.” Eponine murmured softly. He didn’t respond to her, maybe he hadn’t heard her. She could hear the screech of the gate closing. It was so soft here. Warm. Safe. She so rarely felt that way, if ever. She gripped onto the front of Marius’s shirt with her hand. She wanted to tell him again, that it was okay. He didn’t need to worry, but consciousness was slipping from her and soon everything went black and silent. Marius.

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When Grantaire eventually came back to himself, there was no attention on him, in fact, two people in the room seemed incredibly focused on the doctor, who was checking his tongue in a mirror. “You really think it’s okay? Look, it’s kind of white there...” he was saying.

“Joly, darling, I am certain it’s okay.” Said the girl, her legs were crossed at the ankle and she was looking at him with immense fondness that Grantaire could practically feel.

“But I think my throat is closing up.” Joly insisted.

“Just drink some water.” Pipped the other. Bossuet, Grantaire remembered. “You haven’t been around anything that would make your allergies act up.”

“Here, mon amour,” Musichetta said softly. She stood from the bed and filled a glass with water
for him. “See if this helps you feel better.”

Joly accepted the glass and took a sip.

“More.” Said Bossuet softly, smiling at Joly as though he hung the sun and was something more than precious.

Joly obediently drank more.

“Better?” asked the woman.

Joly hesitated and then nodded, “You were right. I just needed some water.”

Musichetta pressed a kiss to his cheek, and then Bossuet did the same. Grantaire felt a wave of surprise. He must have made a noise, because they turned their attention to him. “Oh, you’re awake. How are you feeling?”

When Grantaire spoke, his voice was hoarse and scratchy. “Earlier when I said I’d been hit by mallets…I think I really have been now.” He said, cringing as he spoke the words. He felt like his mouth was full of sand and dust and he’d never had anything to drink in his life.

Joly laughed, seeming to forget about his own ailments for the time being. He held a glass of water to Grantaire’s mouth and Grantaire drank like a man dying. “You’ll feel better soon, here take this.” He pulled a bottle from his pocket and emptied a pill from it into his palm and offered it to Grantaire who hesitated only a moment before taking it. “This is Musichetta.” He introduced while Grantaire swallowed down the pill.

“Charmed.” Grantaire said dryly, “What will that one do to me?”

“If you try and use Med-X it’ll make you sick.” Joly said sweetly.

Grantaire spluttered, too late to undo what he’d taken. “What? Why?”

“It’ll help break the addiction. You’re still going to want it, even though you went through most of the withdrawals just now.”

“How sick is it going to make me?”

Joly shrugged, “About as sick as you just felt, honestly.”

Grantaire felt himself go pale. “Wonderful.”

“See? Now you don’t want to take it, and when you want to you’ll think about how bad you just felt. It all works out.” Joly said with a cheeky grin.

Grantaire scowled at the ceiling. “Can I still smoke? Cigarettes?”

Joly shrugged, “That should be fine. I mean, you shouldn’t, they are horrible for you, but they won’t make you sick.”

Grantaire exhaled a sigh of relief.

“Enjolras was here to see you.” Musichetta said casually.

Grantaire stiffened, “Why?” This was it. He was getting kicked out.
She shrugged, “He seemed worried about you.”

That wasn’t what he expected to hear. “Why?”

“You tell me.” Musichetta replied dryly.

Grantaire didn’t get a chance to tell her, or even speculate the matter. The door to the hospital room swung open and crashed against the wall with a head-splitting crash. “Joly—it’s Eponine, she’s in pretty bad shape. Marius is bringing her.”

The doctor was on his feet in an instant, dropping his tongue mirror without a thought. He was bustling around the room, limping rather badly as he tried to clear a bed. Bossuet was with him in a moment, and Musichetta was handing him his cane. “We’ve got it sweetheart.” She said softly, pulling down the blankets.

Grantaire recognized the man as the one who had let them in when he first arrived, and he looked to be in quite a state, but his nervous panicked energy aside, what really caught Grantaire’s attention was the girl in his arms. Her dark mess of hair was matted with blood, she looked ill, and as though she’d never had a good meal in her life. Somehow, she looked to be no older than 14, but at the same time far older. He laid her out on the empty bed next to Grantaire’s. Her head fell limp towards him, blood trickling from her pale, dry lips. He could hear her breathing, a painful dry rattle that shook her whole body. Grantaire couldn’t pull his eyes away from her, but the curtain was pulled shut, and he was left shaken and worried over the fate of a stranger.
Finally found a fella almost completely divine, but his vocabulary is killing this romance of mine!

"I tried to get back in time to warn you" the cracked and broken voice roused Grantaire from his restless sleep. He wondered how he’d fallen asleep at all. The stranger in the bed next to his had been sobbing through most of the night. He assumed, perhaps they’d given him something. He distantly remembered Musichetta holding something to his lips and having him drink. That felt as much like a dream as falling asleep.

"It's okay, Eponine." And that was Combeferre, Grantaire knew his voice and he could hear the faint mechanic whir if he listened for it. "We had suspicions that they would be attacking. We weren't hit as bad as we might have been."

"I should have known about it sooner." Eponine said desperately. She was crying again. "I didn't know about it-Gavroche told me, monsieur. I tried to get back in time. I tried to get here." She sounded delirious, her words were slur ed together, raking sobs interrupting her words.

"Hush now, Eponine. It's okay. You're here, you're safe." Combeferre said softly, "We are just glad you're safe."

"I'm so- so s-sorry, monsieur." She blubbered pathetically, "I failed-" Despite not knowing her, Grantaire ached for her.

"You didn't fail. You did your best, Eponine." Combeferre said firmly, kind in a fatherly sort of way. "Rest now."

"Wait-" Grantaire could see her jolting up in bed as Combeferre moved away and it made him cringe in sympathy. He could imagine how such a jerky movement must have made her head spin. "Marius-is Marius okay?" she asked in manner that could hardly be considered coherent, "Has he come to see me?"

Combeferre lightly pushed her back against the cushions, "He is okay. Marius has a lot of work to do right now. I am sure he will visit you when he can, please, rest now." Combeferre smiled softly at her, "You need rest, Eponine."

This time, when he turned to leave, she didn't argue, though she stared hollowly after him for what felt like a long time after the infirmary doors swung closed. She cried herself to sleep, sobbing delirious exhaustion and drug-induced apologies for whatever she seemed to think she had failed.
As her crying abated, Grantaire found himself dozing again. His head was throbbing, and he felt so very sick, but somehow, sleep fogged his mind and he was gone again.

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Enjolras stopped by the infirmary again. He didn't know why. He didn't know why he was drawn back to it.

A quiet voice somewhere deep in his head mocked, 'To him.'

God, he really didn't want it to be him. His guilt had been eating at him. The things he had said to Grantaire were swirling around in his head. The hurt that he must have caused. He could imagine how hearing such a thing would have hurt him. He could still see the sting of it on Grantaire's face when his mind wandered there. It was haunting him. It was disrupting his work. The guilt of it all was heavy on his shoulders. It pinched his lungs, weighed down on them like a boulder, made it hard to breathe.

It was hard to think.

'What use are you?'

Enjolras wanted to turn the question around and aim it at himself. 'What use are you Enjolras. How can you say such a thing to another person? What use are you?' The guilt was making him dizzy. He wished that he hadn't let his mouth run, but it was too late. He'd spat acid and poison at Grantaire-God, he wanted to apologize. He needed to apologize.

Part of Enjolras was terrified to face the man at all. It was cowardly, he knew, and he despised himself for it. Yet, it would be so much easier to just leave everything as it was. Sticky and uncomfortable, it shouldn't have mattered.

It did matter.

He pushed open the door to the infirmary and peered in, tense and ready to flee.

Jehan was perched on the end of an empty bed, knee bouncing and a book in hand. They looked up when Enjolras came in however and smiled, small and knowing. "Enjolras." They said quietly, closing the book. "He's there." They nodded towards the bed Grantaire was in, as if Enjolras wasn't already staring at it. "Sleeping it off, still."

The tension pulsing through Enjolras dissipated and he sagged, disappointment or relief, he didn't know. "Does it usually take so long? He's been here for days...Is he okay?"

"He's alright. Not feeling great, to be sure, but he's definitely been in a worse state. Joly knows what he's doin',' Jehan said with a smile. "I'm sure we'd be aware if there was reason for worry, Enjolras." They slipped off the bed and left the book there, the stem of something poking out of it, Enjolras assumed as a place-holder. He was going to ask what it was, he had so many things roiling through his head. So many questions and things to say, all going a thousand miles an hour and none of them making the slightest bit of sense when put together.

Jehan was pulling Enjolras into a hug, then, stilling his mind with a confused jolt. "He's alright. You can talk to him when he wakes up. Would you like to stay? You can rest a while. You look like you could use it."

Enjolras might have almost been offended on another day, but he was thinking too quickly to have the room for it now. He hadn't been sleeping. He felt like he had been hit by the blast of some of
those weapons yesterday. Like he had been caught in the crossfire and crushed under the weight of
one of the collapsed walls. He had no doubt he looked similarly, even if he didn't want to hear it.
He shook his head. "There's work that needs to be done. I can come back another time."

Jehan frowned, "Enjolras, there are other people who can do the work." They said softly. "You can
rest a while."

Enjolras pulled away, shaking his head, "Later." He said quietly. He glanced towards the sleeping
form of Grantaire and he slumped in exhaustion, pushing blonde curls away from his face with a
trembling hand. He glanced at Jehan and offered a weak exhausted smile, forcing himself to
straighten up as he spoke, forcing himself stronger again. "Sorry for interrupting your reading,
Jehan. Have a good afternoon."

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It must have been several hours by the time he woke again. The sun was shining in through
windows high up on the ceiling, igniting the dust motes gold. Grantaire shut his eyes for a moment.
Everything was so sterile, and clean. It didn't feel real.

"Oh good, you're up. I really didn't want to wake you." A voice he didn't recognize chirped from
somewhere to his left.

Grantaire peeled his eyes open again. They felt so dry. He looked to the end of his bed when he felt
the weight of someone dropping onto it. A mess of red hair and freckles, a cheeky grin, perched
primly on the white linen. "Who are you? What?"

"Oh! Jean Prouvaire, at your service. Jehan, to my friends. And who are you?" They said, grin
splitting wider, they stuck a hand out to him.

Grantaire blinked, taken aback by the peppiness. He shook their hand, "uh…Grantaire."

"Pleasure to meet you, Grantaire!" Jehan firmly shook his hand, "Musichetta and Bossuet bullied
their lovely doctor, Joly, to bed. It was quite the battle, I assure you. So, I'm here to keep watch on
the two of you for a while. I was supposed to wake you to make sure you drank some water, but
you didn't much look like you'd want me to."

Grantaire turned his gaze to the curtain obscuring the girl, now pulled open so that Jehan could see
them both. She looked better than she had last night, stitched and bandaged, washed as clean as
they could get her in the hospital bed. Grantaire was still thrown by her age. What could have
happened to a child to make her look so ancient. "How is she doing?" He was surprised she was
still alive. Maybe that was part of what had made him so worried the night before, that the girl was
more likely to die in the night than survive. But there was a slight rise and fall to her chest, and her
breathing was soft now, rather than ragged as it had been before. Sleep softened everything about
her, so rigid and feral while awake.

"Ep is a hardy one, she'll be alright." Jehan said. They were suddenly by his head, a glass of water
in hand. "Here, drink up. You're mighty dehydrated after the night you've had, sir." They offered
him a small smile and helped him sit up enough to drink.

Grantaire settled his back against the cushions and drank gratefully, surprised by how thirsty he
was once he began.

"Woah there, slow down. You'll make yourself sick." Jehan said. Their voice was mellifluous.
Grantaire thought it might be the kind of voice books and songs were once written about. He
wondered when the last time was that someone had written a book.

Jehan set the glass on the wobbly side table. There was a small radio on it, face flickering. Grantaire wondered if it worked. "What is it that you do here? I haven't met you yet." Grantaire asked, distracted and rather distant, voice less hoarse now that he'd had something to drink. His focus was everywhere and nowhere, jumping quickly from thing to thing.

"I work in the gardens." Jehan said, expression lighting up. This was something they were clearly passionate about and Grantaire settled a little more against the cushions, ready and hoping to spend quite a long time listening to Jehan talk. They continued speaking. "I came here towards the beginning, when the cause was hardly an idea. I started reading some of the books and Combeferre talked to me about them. We decided to do more careful breeding of the plants like people used to, try to get them radiation free."

Grantaire whistled softly, impressed. "You helped do that?" He asked.

Jehan beamed and nodded, a few coppery curls falling from their thick braid and into their face. "I did! And this is supposed to be a secret..." they glanced around the room conspiratorially, "So don't tell anyone, but we are trying to grow flowers now, like the ones they had prewar!" They were beaming. Grantaire was impossibly endeared. "Wouldn't it be beautiful to have roses and daffodils?" They sighed and dropped onto the edge of Grantaire's bed. "We aren't having much luck so far, but I know that Combeferre will find a good base to start with!"

Grantaire smiled fondly at them. This was a good change from Enjolras's scathing attention. He didn't know if he preferred it, but it was sweet, and it was sincere. Grantaire was so unused to sweet sincerity. He didn't know what to do with it. "I'm sure you will be successful. You've already done the impossible with the food."

Jehan grinned at him, eyes crinkling at the corners. Grantaire thought that Jehan must smile often, "Thank you, Grantaire."

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Cosette did not like being alone, and she had been alone for days.

She would not have minded it back at the vault, but hiding out in an overturned car, dirty and suffocating from the filth in the air, it was unbearable. She was starting to fear that Valjean would never return. She wondered how long she ought to wait before moving on her own, she couldn't stay forever in the wasteland.

How long could a person live on dried food and sips of water in the stifling, suffocating heat? And the torturous storms that started up every couple of hours, with rain that burned Cosette's skin and left angry looking welt's where it managed to touch. Harsh winds that blew sand and dust that clung to her clothes and filled her lungs, whipped and tore at her hair and cut at her skin. It made her filthy, she could feel the weight of the grime on her, a thick uncomfortable layer covering her everywhere. Cosette was sure that if she managed to live at all, she would never be clean again.

She didn't know how much time had passed since they had left the vault. Days? Weeks? It was all a blur. She was often hungry. They had little food and Valjean insisted that they eat as little as possible to make it last until they found somewhere better for her to stay.

He always said her, never them. Cosette disliked that nearly as much as she disliked being alone, but when she had interrupted him with a soft, "Us, you mean? For us to stay?" Jean Valjean had looked so sad and tired that she didn't mention it again. She just hoped that when they'd gotten to
wherever he had in mind, he would stay after all. She didn't want to be without him.

But maybe he didn't have anywhere in mind. He was always off looking for wherever this place to stay, never giving more information. Cosette had no idea where he was, where she was, or what was happening. He was always so secretive. Why had they had to run? Questions unanswered. At this point, all she knew was that she was so very thirsty, very sore, and hurting. Everything hurt so badly, and she just hoped that Valjean would return soon.

Her nightmares persisted, worse than they had been before she was alone. The wolves getting closer. Sometimes they looked almost human. Sometimes she was sure that they were. Valjean kept quiet about her past after that first conversation, but the more she focused on it, the clearer and more horrible the faces became. She only wished she knew why, though something told her she didn't want to remember.

At the same time, she did. There were gaps in her memory and she didn't know why, but pieces were coming back in warped dreams that she couldn't make any sense of. She wanted to ask Valjean about it, though she didn't know how to explain any of what she was seeing, or maybe she was remembering. It all left her in quite a panic. She just knew that she didn't want to be alone anymore. Every noise made her hope Valjean was near, she could see him in everything, and it was never him. She hoped that soon, he would be back. She hoped he was safe.

She hoped that soon they would be somewhere safe again.

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Grantaire was drifting in and out of sleep for most of the day, feeling like he was floating half the time. The other half of the time he felt horridly ill. Every part of his body felt cold and achy, tense and unforgiving. The thought of food made him nauseous. The thought of anything at all made him nauseous.

Eponine woke sometime in the early evening, mumbling nonsensically, voice slurred and thick. If it was from her missing teeth, or the pain killers, Grantaire wasn't entirely sure.

Joly was at her side in moments, helping her drink water and murmuring softly to her, re-explaining the situation, from what Grantaire could make out. She must have forgotten.

"Shock can do that, it's okay that you don't remember. What's important is we're safe, and you're safe." Joly said quietly, confirming Grantaire's suspicion.

Eponine didn't seem appeased, but she sank back against the cushions, looking a mess.

"Can you keep her company? Keep an eye on her? I'll be back shortly." Joly said when Eponine finally started to truly relax again.

Grantaire hummed softly in agreement and sat up a little more. "Of course."

Eponine was tugging at her snarled hair, making frustrated distressed noises as she tried to tear her fingers through the matted curls.

Grantaire cleared his throat which made her jump and stare at him with wide anxious eyes. "I could brush your hair for you, if you'd like." He said, voice gravelly. "I used to brush my sisters' hair, it was a lot like yours."

Eponine stared at him, hesitating. Finally, she nodded and looked down at her lap.
Grantaire got himself out of bed, swaying dizzily for a moment. As his vision cleared, he came closer, then paused, looking around, sure that there was a brush somewhere. With a quiet noise of triumph, he found one on a side table several beds down. He returned to Eponine and perched on the edge of her bed, "Think you can sit up for me a bit?" he asked.

Eponine grimaced, but did as he asked, holding her pillow in her lap, shoulders hunched.

Grantaire started working the brush through the ends of her matted curls, humming softly as he worked the brush through, gentle as he could.

Despite the tugging at her hair, Eponine managed to doze off, slumped back against him while he brushed her hair. He could have worked for hours, he had no idea, but eventually, her hair was in a much better state, although frizzy, he had most all the knots worked out of it and untangled.

He was considering braiding her hair when, from the doorway, someone cleared their throat. Grantaire jolted, stiffening up and frightening Eponine awake. He looked up, eyes wide, and relaxed immediately.

"Putain-you scared me, you bastard." Grantaire muttered.

Bahorel laughed and walked in, "Sorry, sorry, I didn't mean to." He said, lifting his hands in defense, "I was trying not to, actually."

Grantaire gently moved the now dozing again Eponine off of him and settled her against the pillows. He slipped off her bed and pulled the blankets over her. "I suppose I must forgive you." He said quietly, easing himself down on the edge of his own bed. "About time you visited me, I'd thought perhaps you'd forgotten me and we weren't friends after all." He dropped back onto the sheets dramatically, "Was breaking my heart, Bahorel."

Bahorel barked a laugh and dropped onto Grantaire's bed, "Me? Forget you? Never! But I'm a busy man, I can't allot all my time to you. It would be a scandal, think of the rumors."

Grantaire snorted and rolled his eyes, wincing against a twinge of headache. "Whatever would you do." He said dryly. "Bahorel, Musain's most popular, seen spending too much time with waste of space Grantaire."

Bahorel frowned at him, disapproving, the joking air between them ruined with that. "Well, now you'll never be rid of me." He said dryly. "You up to eat with me? Dinner is soon."

Grantaire hesitated a moment, and Bahorel spoke before Grantaire could even consider voicing the question.

"Enjolras will be there." He wiggled his eyebrows and, in a mocking imitation of Grantaire's voice, "Is he an angel? Mes Dieux-Bahorel. How could you have not told me of his celestial beauty, you traitor!"

Grantaire shoved Bahorel's arm, flushed in embarrassment. "Tais-toi! I don't sound like that!" He said, affronted and embarrassed.

Bahorel laughed, "Whatever you say, Grantaire. So, dinner, you up for it?"

Grantaire ducked his head and nodded after a moment, though he hardly felt hungry.

"Good, come on, Joly will be back in here in a few to watch her, she'll be alright without ya." Bahorel said, clapping Grantaire's shoulder and helping him off the bed.
Courfeyrac let out a sigh and leaned up against the ledge. Combeferre could tell he was exhausted in every line of his body. There was a stiffness to his body, coiled tight like a spring. There was a tightness to his expression, usually so easy and open. Combeferre wanted to ease the worries away, but he knew he couldn't, not honestly.

"This is happening, isn't it?" Courfeyrac asked eventually. He pulled his gaze away from the smoggy skyline and looked at Combeferre. The hazy light softened him.

Combeferre looked back for a long moment before replying. "Yes, I believe so. I don't think we will be able to get out of it, not without giving up, leaving this place…"

"We couldn't expect anyone to leave their home like that." Courfeyrac whispered, expression crumbling. "What are the chances we make it out of this alive, Combeferre?"

Combeferre didn't reply for a very long time, the silence between them stretching until Courfeyrac wondered if he would get an answer at all. He didn't know which would be worse, an answer, or the silence.

"I don't know." He said eventually. He looked to Courfeyrac, who was looking back, expression miserable. "Not good." Combeferre admitted in a whisper, moving closer to Courfeyrac.

"I didn't think it would be." Courfeyrac whispered. He looked away and rubbed his hands over his face. "At least we can know that we tried our best to make something better for this city, for all these people." He said, waving his hand meagerly across the skyline. "Perhaps they will find hope in that. Hope in what we did…”

"You're talking like Enjolras." Combeferre said affectionately, drawn closer in spite of himself.

"Enjolras is right, you know?" Courfeyrac said, a laugh startled out of him. He looked to Combeferre, smiling sadly. "I believe in him. Look at what we built because of him." He said quietly. "In a better world, think of what he could have been."

"I think of it every day." Combeferre replied quietly. His hand was on Courfeyrac's cheek. Combeferre couldn't pull his eyes away from the dark copper against Courfeyrac's sun-kissed, freckled, skin. He moved his thumb a little and Courfeyrac shivered. When his tongue peeked out to wet his lips, Combeferre's attention was drawn there instead, cataloguing the way Courfeyrac's mouth looked, so close. Plush, bright, bitten raw from stress, chapped. "I think of what you both could have been in a better world. I think of it every day." He said.

Courfeyrac was moving closer to him, and Combeferre knew he should stop this, knew that Courfeyrac really deserved someone flesh and bone and blood—but he didn't want to stop it.

The door slammed open and Courfeyrac startled, jerking away, eyes wide and surprised, blushing. "Marius-" he said, breathless and surprised.

If Marius knew what had been happening, he didn't give any sign, though Combeferre doubted if the young man would connect the dots with such a thing. Especially once he spoke, frazzled, nervous.

"I was looking for Enjolras, but I can't find him-" he panted, "I'm-I'm glad I found you guys-There are…there are kids here? At the gate-I don't know if I should let them in…”

Combeferre frowned and looked to Marius, his eyes flickering as he computed the information,
flickered through probabilities and numbers. "Children?" he asked, moving away from Courfeyrac to follow Marius. He looked to Courfeyrac, "You should find Enjolras." He stated. Courfeyrac looked a little flustered still, he nodded quickly.

Marius was already out the door, starting up the hallway. "Yes." He confirmed, "I didn't know what to do. They say they know Eponine, but…but with the attacks, I didn't know if it'd be better for us to send them away?" He was rambling a bit as he went down the stairs two at a time.

Combeferre didn't know either. He hated when he didn't know things. Whichever way he ran the number though, they seemed certain of the children's demise. "I'm not sure they are any safer out there than they are in here." He said eventually, frustrated.

Marius paused at the door outside, frowning and jittery. Combeferre being unsure was not a good sign. He swallowed and pushed the door open, leading the way across the grounds to the little gate booth.

Just as he had said, children were here. There had never been children under the age of at least sixteen here, and Combeferre was rather thrown when he looked at them. The girl couldn't have been more that twelve, and he doubted the boy was more than nine. "Hello," he greeted after a moment. "Marius tells me you know Eponine?" he asked.

The girl nodded, hiding behind her mess of curls and lifting a cola to her lips, sucking through the straw to avoid speaking.

The boy was more outspoken. "Our older sister, she is." He said, very matter of fact. The bottle of soda that Marius had given him was already gone, sitting on the counter next to him. He slipped off the counter, landing with a clunk on the worn wood. "She get here in time? I'm the one that told her 'bout it."

Combeferre hesitated, "She got here near enough." He said eventually.

Gavroche sighed and shook his head. "Figures she wouldn't make it." He muttered to himself. "So, can we see 'er?"

Combeferre still didn't know where they would be safer. He hated that he didn't know what to do to spare their lives.

"Yes, you may." He said finally, impossibly torn. "Please, follow me. She's in the infirmary, she arrived in bad shape."

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It took a lot not to go check on Grantaire again. Enjolras didn't know why it was eating at him so much. He wanted to apologize for what he had said. He could hardly focus on anything else, the words kept replaying through his head. He felt so guilty which was something he simply wasn't used to. He didn't speak so cruelly to people. How Grantaire had managed to push his buttons, Enjolras had no idea.

Focusing on his work usually came so easy, documenting everything, making sure that things were in order. Enjolras was generally so good at it, but he hadn't been able to get much of anything done since their argument. Grantaire had been in the infirmary for days. And due to Enjolras's distraction, the loads of work and repairs that needed to be done had fallen almost entirely onto the shoulders of Courfeyrac and Combeferre. It was all accompanied by small smiles and a clap on the back, assurances that it was all okay, no one minded. "Don't worry, me and Feuilly can take over
on the walls, Enjy. You need to get some sleep."

Enjolras didn't want to get any sleep. He was so frustrated. He just wanted to work, he wanted to be doing something useful. He wanted to focus on anything else. But, Grantaire's hurt expression kept flickering into his mind and forcing any semblance of getting anything else done away. He hated it. He hated Grantaire.

He finally had to relent, when Combeferre, with no small amount of frustration, told him he was messing up inventory. And then later, at Courfeyrac's insistence, along with an awful lot more tugging and dragging than Enjolras would have liked (not that he was making it any easier for himself).

Enjolras sat down at his usual table with his usual meal. The most unusual bit about it was Courfeyrac's tight grip on his arm the entire way through it. He was clearly trying to make sure Enjolras actually went down to dinner, actually got food, and actually sat down to eat it. Enjolras sighed and shrugged him away irritably. "I'm here, I'm here, I'll eat." He muttered, equal parts annoyed and grateful that Courfeyrac cared so much.

He really, really wasn't in the mood to eat, however. He poked a bit mopily at his plate and begrudgingly forced himself to take a bite. He could feel Courfeyrac's eyes on him, and with a short exhale through his nose he turned and looked at Courf as he chewed, then proceeded to make a show of swallowing. "See? Eating." He dropped his mouth open and pointed at it, acting very much like a child.

This earned him an eye roll, but Courf finally let him be and started eating his own food, starting to chatter a bit. Things fell into something more normal and comfortable with Courfeyrac's cheerful chatter, and some of the stiffness eased from Enjolras's shoulders as he let himself be pulled into the comfortable ramble.

His attention was sharply yanked away from Courfeyrac, however, when he heard the rather raucous laughter of Bahorel across the atrium. Grantaire was at his side, looking sickly, but smiling. Enjolras felt dizzy, sick, almost.

From across the room, Grantaire's eyes found him, and for a second, they met. Then, Enjolras was looking away, cheeks burning with embarrassment or shame, he didn't know which. With some anger, he took another bite of his food and looked at Courfeyrac, who wore an expression mixed with amusement and surprise. With a fierce glare, he kept on about what he'd been talking about before rather than teasing, which Enjolras was grateful for.

He couldn't help from noticing Grantaire and Bahorel sitting nearby, though, joining Joly and Bossuet. Musichetta, he assumed, wasn't too far behind. He couldn't keep from glancing in Grantaire's direction, and apology itching under his skin.

Grantaire seemed to be pointedly ignoring him, looking everywhere but at Enjolras. It was infuriating. It was embarrassing or something-Enjolras didn't understand the way it made him feel.

He was so frustrated. Maybe he needed sleep after all. He wished the buzzing anxiety under his skin would allow him to. He took an angry bite of his food, avoiding looking at Courfeyrac, he didn't want to see his expression, knew it would just frustrate him further.

Grantaire was laughing, loud and irritating, joining in on the kindly meant teasing and jokes of the others, falling right in with them. It almost seemed as though he'd been there for years rather than barely a month. He fell in with them so easily. A missing piece to a puzzle that Enjolras had never realized wasn't finished. He didn't like it. He didn't like how easily Grantaire was to fall in with
them, while he and Grantaire could hardly keep a conversation civil.

He didn't like that it mattered. It was a confusing sort of feeling that he was utterly unused to. He didn't have the words to explain it.

"I mean…why stay here for that, though? You all are going to die. You're hardly an insect to them. You'll be crushed and kicked aside." Grantaire's voice pitched louder, and Enjolras was pulled from his head to pay attention, cheeks burning as he looked to Grantaire.

Grantaire was looking back, dark, dark eyes swallowing Enjolras whole, drowning him, before he kept speaking. "It's a deathtrap, and frankly, I've never heard anything so foolish." He said sharply. He was saying it so pointedly, eyes boring into Enjolras, "No one will remember that you did this." He said.

"Grantaire-" Bahorel said sharply, his expression, amused at first, no longer.

Grantaire glanced briefly at Bahorel and stubbornly finished his thought, sneering at Enjolras as he spoke, "When the lot of you die, it won't make any difference at all. So, what was the fucking point of throwing away your lives?"

Enjolras was on his feet and out of the atrium before he could hear what Bahorel had to say, seething and hurt.

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"Mam and Da' were arrested again." Gavroche announced, nudging Eponine from the pain killer induced drowsiness, bleary and confused, as he bounced on the end of the bed.

He looked impressed for a moment and bounced a couple more times. "Merde."

"Language, Gavroche." Eponine slurred sleepily, though she looked faintly more alert and even forced a frown despite the bruising to her face.

"You look like hell." Azelma said quietly, still nursing her soda in the door way. The top of her straw was chewed. "What happened to ya?"

Eponine looked to her younger sister and her face twisted into something that might have been a smile, though it quickly faded due to the pain. "Hell." She said, voice scratchy and low. She scooted over a little, expression twisting in pain. She relaxed back against the cushions with a pained exhaled and patted the space on the bed next to her.

Azelma hesitated in the doorway a moment more before hurrying over and slipping onto the bed with her sister and offering the bottle of soda. Eponine accepted and took a sip from the gnawed straw before passing it back, shutting her eyes against the faint burn of the carbonation.

"Why...why are you guys here?"

Gavroche shrugged, "Some old guy gave me somefin' for some information, told 'im bout this place, I did. Thought maybe 'zelma and I should come stop in when 'e seemed so excited abou' it. B'sides, it's not like we've got anywhere ta go righ' now anyways."

"They...they're under attack here. It's...not safe." Eponine said, head back, gazing blearily at the ceiling.

"Not safe anywhere." Gavroche pipped back. "'sides, I like me a fight. I'll show 'em."
Eponine tried to huff a laugh but it just came out strained. "I'm sure you will."

"Why do you talk like that? So Proper?" Gavroche asked, sprawled on his back on her bed, mouth full of bread. "You don't talk it home."

Eponine flushed in flustered embarrassment. "I don't talk any different-" she argued, though it sounded weak.

"'s the people here." Azelma said quietly, she'd sank down on the bed, her head rested on Eponine's thigh. She looked up at her and smiled, small. "They talk all bougie-like, so you do too. Wanna be like 'em, right?"

Eponine looked away, back to the ceiling and shrugged half-heartedly. "Not like it matters." She still looked the way she did. She'd always stand out against them.

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"There's a child here-two of them, actually." Combeferre said. "I let them in."

Enjolras looked up from the papers he was scrawling on, his fury made it easier to focus on his work than before. His hands were covered in ink. He'd smudged some on his nose, on his cheek. His hair was askew. He looked rather wild, utterly unkempt. "This isn't a safe place for children right now." He said. "War is brewing. There shouldn't be children here." He sounded cold. Stiff. His gaze was a thousand miles away. Enjolras looked like a man who had lived through dozens of wars and was reliving them all at once. Haunted, detached.

"They need our help, Enjolras." Combeferre said firmly, trying to keep Enjolras's attention on him and away from whatever upcoming battle he was imagining.

"We hardly have anything we can offer them." Enjolras replied with no small amount of frustration. He looked back at his mess of papers and pinched the bridge of his nose. "No matter how I figure it, we don't have enough supplies. I've gone down and taken inventory a dozen times over. We don't have enough weapons, we don't have enough food. Most of the bedding and wood we were keeping in the storehouse to the north was destroyed by fire. The greenhouses were nearly destroyed, we don't know when the next attack will come, we won't have the time to replant and replenish the stores. We don't have enough to feed the people already here for the coming months. We were already threatened with a food and water shortage, with winter so near. We will already have to send parties out to scavenge, and that risks making everyone sicker from radiation." He waved his hands helplessly as he spoke, pushed his wild curls away from his face. His braid was loose, red ribbon barely clinging to it. He looked desperately to Combeferre, "With everything that was destroyed? There are far safer places for them right now. They shouldn't stay here."

"I wasn't telling you so that you could choose what happens." Combeferre sounded irritated and that gave Enjolras pause, Combeferre rarely sounded that way. "I told you so that you could know there are children here. Nothing more. We aren't sending them away. They are Eponine's siblings, if they leave, it's her choice, not ours, Enjolras. The both of them are set up in the infirmary so they can stay with their sister."

Enjolras clenched his teeth. "They should go somewhere safer." He insisted, pushing his hair back from his face and looking up at Combeferre, expression pinched with distress. "Children shouldn't be here at all. Anyone not prepared to lose their lives to this needs to go somewhere else. I don't want to lose children to the crown. I expect the rest of Paris shall rise-perhaps even more of France. But, I suspect we won't live to see that. You're the one who had me read of revolutions throughout history. We both know there is little hope for us." He slammed down a hand in frustration, he was
trembling. "Anyone not prepared for that needs to leave. Kids can't be prepared for that." He snapped, getting more upset with every word.

Enjolras was unsure he'd stopped shaking since the attack the previous day. He didn't know if he'd ever be able to stop. He had seen the effects of his politics first hand, now. He had seen people, people who trusted him to help them, injured and bleeding. He'd known it was inevitable, but he couldn't shake it from his head. It was all on him. Everything that had happened thus far, everything that would happen. "I don't want the blood of children on my hands." Enjolras choked out, frustration breaking and leaving way for the distress and fear he was feeling to show. It was hard to breathe. He was acutely aware of the tight fabric around his chest and the way it restricted his lungs. He was shaking, panic bubbling in his chest as he tried to take a deeper breath. It hurt to breathe, like something was stabbing between his lungs. "Send them away, Combeferre- please-they needn't die here." He forced himself to speak, holding tight to the edge of the desk to try and still his shaking.

Combeferre was silent and Enjolras forced himself to look back up at the doorway, though he desperately didn't want to. Combeferre looked pitying, a frown to his mouth. His eyes were flickering. After a silence that made Enjolras feel like he was suffocating, tears stinging at his eyes, Combeferre finally spoke. "Okay, Enjolras. I will..." He turned to leave but paused with his hand on the doorknob. When he spoke again his voice was soft with concern, "Please, Enjolras. You need to get out of this room, just for a little while. Don't make me get Joly involved." Before Enjolras could respond, Combeferre was gone.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry my updates are so few and far between. This chapter took forever...because i wanted to write the next one. The next one is nearly finished and should be up soon, and the final chapters are pretty well worked out as well, so I should be finished with this pretty soon! Thanks for sticking around. Hope you enjoy! If there's anything you'd like me to touch on please let me know! I'd love the feedback.
Crazy He Calls Me

Chapter Summary

"Like the winds that shakes the bough, he moves me with a smile. The difficult I'll do right now, the impossible will take a little while. I say I'll care forever, and I mean forever, if I have to hold up the sky, crazy he calls me. Sure, I'm crazy. Crazy in love am I."

Crazy He Calls Me
Billie Holiday

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Panic woke Cosette, and she grabbed for the gun she’d been left with, eyes wide and wild as she swung and aimed it at the person who had awoken her. There was a sob trapped somewhere in her chest, panic. Panic.

Jean Valjean looked at her, expression calm, hands raised, “It’s just me, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten you, Cosette.” He said. His voice was low, grounding, soothing. Cosette immediately lowered her weapon, took a shuddering breathe and fiercely wiped at her eyes.

“Papa.” She said softly, “I’m sorry—I’m glad you’ve returned…’I’d…’I’d thought you were—that they had—” Her heart wouldn’t stop pounding. She viciously wiped tears from her cheeks with trembling hands. “It doesn’t matter, you’re back now—” She’d been having a nightmare, but the more she tried to grasp the tendrils of what it had been about, the faster it seemed to dissolve like smoke beneath her finger tips. The fear of it all remained though, trapped beneath her skin, a tight knit anxiety, worsened by the fright of being woken.

“I’ve found somewhere for you, Cosette.” Jean Valjean said softly, brushing her hair away from her face, “I’m sorry I was away so long.”

“Somewhere for us?” Cosette asked, stiffening, the fear strengthening in her chest.

Jean Valjean looked rather sad and turned away. He pulled her bag nearer to him, “Let me fix up your hair, little one, we can leave soon, I’d like to sit here with you, just for a while.”

Cosette hesitantly did as she was told and pulled her knees up to her chest, resting her chin on them while Valjean started brushing the gnarls from her hair with the utmost care, singing softly under his breath while he worked, a lullaby she recognized from long ago, though the words she couldn’t recall.

This felt like an ending, though she didn’t know precisely why. It felt like something horrible was looming on the horizon, starved—just waiting, waiting to swallow them whole.

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“Grantaire, what were you thinking? Why would you talk that way?” Bahorel asked. He was wound tight, trying not to explode. With a sinking feeling of guilt, Grantaire realized that the line he’d been trying to cross belonged to more people than just Enjolras. “After everything that we’ve done to help you—”

“We really need morale,” Jehan cut in softly, sweeter than they had any right to after what Grantaire had been spitting, “for you to talk that way around everyone was really uncool.” Jehan they continued sagely, floating alongside them. Their pants were baggy, baggy enough that they might have been a skirt. Grantaire realized that their fingers were linked with Bahorel’s, with an unsettling feeling of jealousy, though not necessarily of either of them. “We are all working really hard, Grantaire. Everyone who lives here wants to make this cause succeed. It’s cruel to talk that way just because you don’t think it will work. Many of us are frightened enough as it is.”

“This isn’t just about Enjolras, who I know you were trying to rile up.” Bahorel continued before Grantaire was able to muster an apology. “Every single person here is risking their life for this. We all believe in it, Grantaire.” He rubbed at his face, exhausted and frustrated and clearly trying very hard not to get angry. “Every single day, I go out and risk my life for this, trying to recruit and spread the word, collect supplies. All of us are risking our lives, from spying in the city like Eponine, to doing what I do out here. You trying to piss Enjolras off? The way you were talking? Grantaire, that hurt every single person who overheard. This is important to us.”

Grantaire felt like he’d been slapped. He hadn’t meant to hurt Bahorel. He hadn’t wanted to hurt anyone, not really. He’d wanted Enjolras’s attention, that was all—But he always had to fuck it up, didn’t he. With no small amount of self-deprecation, he thought, that at least in this, he was consistent. He would always fuck things up. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean—”

“I know you didn’t, Grantaire, that’s why I am telling you.” Bahorel said. He stopped and turned abruptly to Grantaire. He took Grantaire’s face in his hands and forced him to look at him, despite how much Grantaire seemed to not want to. “I like you, Grantaire. You’re a good man, though you try not to be—I can tell. I don’t put up with people who aren’t. You don’t need to put up these sharp walls here. Grantaire, you’re safe.”

Grantaire turned his face away. He felt like he’d been stung, tears burned at his eyes. “Bahorel—” he said, voice thick. “I’m not good—I’m really not.”

“Yes.” Bahorel said sharply, turning Grantaire’s face back to him. “You are, Grantaire. You are kind. Why do you try to cover that up? You are good, R.”

“You brushed Eponine’s hair, helped her calm down.” Jehan chirped softly, smiling at Grantaire from over Bahorel’s shoulder. “Do you think someone cruel would do that for her? Do you think anyone before you, has done something like that for her, Grantaire? We do what we can, but…”

“You are instinctively kind, Grantaire, you saw she needed help and you did what you could for her. You are not the cruel man, you try to pretend to be. Stop trying to be.” Bahorel said, firm, but not unkind.

Grantaire clenched his jaw shut. He hated feeling. He was too emotional to handle this. He desperately wanted a drink. He shook his head, “I’m not.” He argued weakly.

Bahorel pulled him into a tight hug, which Jehan was quick to join, flowery and sweet. “You are a good man, Grantaire. You can be a good man.”

“You just need to let yourself be.” Jehan agreed.
Grantaire hid his face against Bahorel’s shoulder, after a moment, breathing shuddery and raw. Finally, he whispered, “I… I ought to apologize to him…”

They didn’t have to reply for him to know that they agreed.

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He’d been bullied into a break. It might as well have been forced upon him.

‘Enjolras, get some exercise without that blasted binder on or, I swear, I’ll lock you in the infirmary myself. If I hear Joly worry over this one more time—One More Time, Enjolras—’ So, Enjolras was walking the grounds.

Musichetta followed through on her threats.

Enjolras knew that for certain.

This walk was the only reason he came across them, entering through the gate, talking with Marius.

As Enjolras walked closer, there was an uncomfortable tingle of recognition, though he couldn’t place precisely why—but there stood an older gentleman in a tattered and atrocious colored coat, and behind him was a girl who stood, jumpy and frightened. She clung to the sleeve of the mustard yellow coat—and Enjolras wasn’t sure why, but he was almost certain that he knew her.

Something about her felt so familiar. He felt a kinship to her that he couldn’t figure out. She glanced at him, half hiding behind black hair, messily falling from a loose braid into her face, pieces of twig and leaves poking from it.

The man was introducing himself to Marius, as Enjolras came closer, and though he knew it was rude, he interrupted. “It’s not often that we get visitors.” Or, that had once been true, the past few days said otherwise. “How can I help you, sir?”

Marius jolted in surprise and looked Enjolras’s way. He offered an embarrassed smile, rubbing awkwardly at the back of his neck and stepping to the side. There was a strange look about him, but Enjolras didn’t put much thought to it. There was often an odd look about Marius.

The man turned his attention to Enjolras and after a moment, he smiled, it was a kind sort of smile. Enjolras offered his hand, and the man took it. His hand was leathery and worn, far warmer than Enjolras’s, far bigger as well. “I was hoping my daughter and I might find a place to stay.” He said, voice soft. “We’ve been travelling a long way, and I suppose… we seek sanctuary here.” He looked over Enjolras’s shoulder towards Le Musain. A smile was quirking the corner of his mouth and shining in his eyes, suggesting that he found something about what he’d said amusing.

Whatever the joke was, Enjolras didn’t understand it.

Enjolras looked them over once more and swallowed hard, still trying to place the girl. “I’m afraid this isn’t the safest place, right now. We’ve drawn some unwanted attention recently.” He replied, feeling a little embarrassed to admit to it. “From the crown.” He added shortly, explanation enough. “Somewhere else would surely be more secure than here.” He was already going to have the blood of children on his hands by the time this was through, the thought of more innocent blood lost in a battle that wasn’t their own made him feel ill.

“You may stay.” He agreed. His eyes trailed to the girl again, brows furrowed. “Would you like to eat? Or wash up?”
“That would be wonderful, thank you. We truly appreciate your hospitality.” The man settled his hand on the girls’ shoulder. “Come, Cosette.”

The name made something in Enjolras’s chest jolt. Cosette. Cosette. He knew—he knew a Cosette. The world felt like it was swaying and twisting. Enjolras felt horridly sick, because he knew this Cosette.

Suddenly, everything felt very foggy. When he spoke, his voice sounded miles away. “Marius, if you’d please show them in?” He asked, “Courfeyrac can help you, if you’d like it, get a room ready for them…” He wasn’t entirely sure that the words he was speaking were coming out properly.

Marius gave him a concerned look, “Of course, Enjolras.” Confusion colored his expression for several seconds before he turned to the newcomers. “Please, I’ll help you both get settled.”

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Cosette glanced over her shoulder as they were led away from the gates, eyes on the messy blonde braid and hunched shoulders of the person who had greeted them. What had Marius called him? Enjolras? Cosette frowned, still holding to her father’s sleeve. Something felt strange, but she wasn’t sure what.

Her attention was pulled away from that as they entered the building. It hadn’t looked like much from the outside. Parts had been scorched and crumbling, and it hadn’t stood out much from the rest of the city, from what she had seen of it. The inside though, was something entirely different. Cosette let out a gasp, dropping Valjean’s arm and walking forward to see for herself, eyes wide as she looked up at the glass ceiling of the atrium, looked around at all of the plants. She had never seen so much greenery in one place before. The smell of the plants, the smell of food. “Wow…” She breathed, turning and looking with a wide smile at her father. “Papa—it’s like a fairytale.”

Marius’s eyes were on her, wide and adoring. There was a blush coloring his cheeks. This was something that Cosette did not notice, though Valjean didn’t miss it.

He turned his attention to his daughter, wiping away the irk at someone looking at her in such a way, ever protective, “It is, isn’t it?” He said with a smile. “It’s lovely, I’ve never seen a place like this before…”

It was then that Cosette looked at Marius, eyes shining, “The boy outside said there’s a shower?” She questioned eagerly, “Can you show me where?”

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Enjolras dropped heavily against his study door and sank to the floor. His whole body was shaking. He couldn’t breathe. He tugged at the buttons on his shirt desperately, tearing them off in his desperation to get his shirt off of him, and then his binder, stripping off the restrictive fabric as quickly as he could, ignoring the way it dug into his arms as he yanked it off. He was desperately hoping that having it off would help. He was desperate for some relief from what he was feeling. He hoped desperately that getting his binder off of him would bring some kind of relief, take the weight from his chest—

It did not.

He curled onto his side, face pressed against the tile, breathing ragged, trying to stay calm. Trying,
trying, trying. He couldn’t. He’d pushed it all away for so long. Combeferre had helped him, helped him cope with it. Everything the synth had taught him was useless in the face of whatever this was—The breathing exercises, the counting, everything was gone. He couldn’t remember—he could remember too much. He couldn’t breathe.

Dark, musty rooms. Radiation sickness. Freezing nights, skin raw, frost bite coloring his skin, shaking apart, clinging to her.

Clinging to Cosette—So long he’d put it away.

They were hidden away in the back rooms, hoping to be forgotten. Praying to nothing in particular and everything they could, to just be forgotten a little while more. The longer they were forgotten, the better. No cleaning, no beatings.

No being shoved into rooms with cruel people who had paid, well or not, it hardly mattered to them. Payment was payment. Greasy, fowl-smelling, filthy people with rough unforgiving hands. Bloody lashes and painful bruises—everything hurt so badly—Enjolras let out a silent sob, shaking apart on the floor of his study.

The door was opening, suddenly, but Enjolras wasn’t registering it. And then there were hands on him, so unlike the ones he was remembering. Soft. Gentle with him in ways no one there had been.

“Enjolras…Enjolras—what’s wrong? What happened?” Enjolras tried to blearily focus on the person holding him with such care, brushing tears away, petting him like he mattered, not like some piece of property to be used and thrown away—Grantaire. There was so much concern on his marred face and in his cigarette rough voice.

Enjolras couldn’t answer though, simply shaking his head. He leaned desperately into Grantaire’s touch, mindless to do much else.

Grantaire helplessly held Enjolras, sobs still raking through the man. Curled up and trembling this way, Enjolras seemed so much smaller, and so much more helpless than Grantaire would have ever been able to imagine him. “Let’s get you out of here, okay? Let’s get you some air, Enjolras.” He whispered soothingly, petting Enjolras’s back, trying to help. He wanted to help. He didn’t know what was wrong, he didn’t know how to help, but he wanted to do his best. Enjolras should never look this way, so afraid, so broken. “Will you come upstairs with me? I can take you to the balcony, get you some water.”

“St-stay with me—” Enjolras choked out, panicked and holding tight to Grantaire’s shirt. “Please—don’t, leave—not right now.”

Grantaire had just meant to come apologize. “Okay.” He whispered, voice thick. “I won’t leave, Enjolras. I’ll stay with you, okay? Let’s go outside, it’ll help you not to feel so trapped, Enj.”

Enjolras looked up at him, bleary and lost. Grantaire knew the look. “Okay.” He whispered. It broke Grantaire’s heart, but he was still surprised that Enjolras would agree with him, even in this state.

Grantaire helped Enjolras to his feet, realizing with a jolt that he was shirtless, chest bruised, angry, and red. He glanced around, saw the tatters of Enjolras’s dress shirt. He wondered if Enjolras would need to talk about this, as he stripped off his t-shirt and got it over Enjolras’s head and helped him into it. “There, that okay?” He asked.

Enjolras nodded, not speaking another word. He was hunched in the loose shirt, holding to himself
with one arm, and taking Grantaire’s hand with the other. He gripped so tightly to it that it hurt.

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Eponine had been released from the infirmary at last, and with a kiss to the forehead from Musichetta and a tight hug, had been told to get some food. Eponine didn’t much like doing as she was told, but food certainly didn’t sound like a bad suggestion to follow.

It wasn’t one, for in the Atrium, she found Marius. He smiled at her when he noticed she’d come in. Eponine’s heart fluttered in her chest and she smiled back at him. “You’re looking well, ‘ponine!” he said, straightening up the table as he spoke to her. “I’m glad to see you up and about, I was worried. You’d taken quite a beating.”

Eponine flushed and ducked her head in embarrassment, “I’m doing alright now, monsieur. No need to worry about me.” She said. Despite saying so, the knowledge that he’d worried about her made her dizzily pleased.

“Oh, ‘ponine, of course I worried.” Marius said, “My friend was hurt. I’ve every right to worry about her.” She thought she might die, but Marius kept talking. “I’ve told you, you can just call me Marius.”

Eponine flushed and messed with a strand of her hair. “Sorry…Marius…” she amended, smiling to herself.

“I’m just setting up for a quick meal, some people came from the wastes today. Would you like to join?” Marius asked. His voice was so kind.

Eponine nodded so quickly she almost fell over from making herself dizzy. “Yes, please. I would love that…Marius.”

He pulled up a chair for her with a smile, “Here you are.”

Eponine bounced on her feet a little. Her face broke into a shy grin and she ducked her head, hiding behind her hair, hiding, what she did not consider to be a pretty smile at all, made up of chipped and missing teeth. “Thank you…Marius.” She said before settling on the edge of the chair he’d pulled for her.

Marius gave her a dopey, kind smile before heading back into the kitchen.

Eponine watched him through the window, smiling to herself, chin rested on her hands, thoughts wandering.

“Where…uh, where is papa?” a voice interrupted Eponine’s thoughts, and she looked to see who had come.

Cosette’s hair was still wet, falling in waves down her back, leaving damp spots on the back and shoulders of the dress she was wearing. Eponine couldn’t recall the last time she had worn something so beautiful.

“He asked if he could rest, I showed him to a room.” Marius said in explanation, leaning over the counter to speak to her more easily. All of his attention was on Cosette, his expression one of awe. When Eponine looked to him, jealousy sprouted immediately in her stomach and she hurriedly looked away. Such an expression she didn’t want to see. She had already known she didn’t stand a chance—she knew what her life had made her look like. She knew, but it stung nonetheless. She wondered if it was too late to decline dinner.
She knew that it was.

“Did you have a nice shower?” Marius asked, coming out the door of the kitchen, balancing plates of food for the three of them and joining Eponine at the table. He set a plate in front of her, then one next to him for Cosette and in front of himself. He pulled out the chair for her with a flourish of his arm. It was ridiculous—but Eponine still wished the same had been done for her.

Cosette hesitated, seeming unsure about joining them when her father wasn’t around. Eponine selfishly hoped that she wouldn’t. The draw of the food must have been stronger than the mistrust of strangers, however. Cosette walked the rest of the way to the table, steps light and on her toes, bare and silent on the tile. She eased onto the chair, her legs folded delicately beneath her. “Yes, it was wonderful, monsieur, thank you.” She said politely.

Marius smiled, “You can just call me Marius, no need for such formalities. I’m glad that your shower was nice, Cosette.”

The name Cosette made Eponine double-take, eyes wide as she reexamined the girl. She inhaled sharply and stood up, “I’m…I’m not feeling very well—I think I better go back to bed—thank you, monsieur.” She said in a rush, already hurrying away.

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Grantaire propped the threadbare pillows from the rusting porch chairs against the metal barrier and helped Enjolras down, before sitting next to him and adjusting the pillows a bit to make it more comfortable for them to sit against. “There, the air is better, isn’t it?” he asked, smiling weakly at Enjolras, trying to keep the concern from his expression. What could have possibly rendered Enjolras to this?

He doubted he’d be rewarded an answer if he asked.

Enjolras glanced fleetingly at him, expression still lost, and nodded mutely, leaning against Grantaire’s shoulder, knees pulled up to his chest. He turned his head out towards the city a bit, taking a shuddery breath and turning his face up towards the sun, feeling the breeze against his skin and through his hair.

“Do you… want to talk about it?” Grantaire asked softly, gaze stuck on Enjolras, hardly even aware of the fact Enjolras was laying against him. Seeing Enjolras in this state was too concerning ot notice something like that.

Enjolras shook his head and curled in tighter on himself, gripping tighter to Grantaire’s hand.

“Okay, that’s okay, we don’t have to.” Grantaire said quickly, wanting to smooth the distress from Enjolras’s face. “I just wanted to offer—I’ll listen, if you want me to.” He amended.

Enjolras stole a fleeting glance at Grantaire’s face before looking away from him and breathing a barely audible, “thank you.”

“Do you…I can talk? To help get your mind off of it?” Grantaire offered in a helpless rush. “Or I can shut up and be quiet—Whatever you need.”

Enjolras swallowed and was silent for several seconds, which felt like several minutes or hours to Grantaire. Then he nodded a little, “you can…talk…please…” and then a little bolder than before. “Nicely.”
“Nicely.” Grantaire agreed quickly. “Of course—” He was pretty sure he could feel Enjolras roll his eyes, but he was just pleased to have gotten a hint of a smile to cross Enjolras’s anxiety bitten lips.

Rambling came easily to him, and so, after lighting a cigarette, Grantaire began.

Literature first, as he knew it was something Enjolras was somewhat familiar with, though that quickly spiraled into dozens of other tangents. Grantaire could hardly talk about just one, such focus was lost on him. He had endless amounts of useless information bouncing around in his head, and it spat out forward easily as he talked to Enjolras. Classic art, Architecture, plants, music and dancing—things so lost to society that they might as well have been alien topics. They existed, the city was proof, but not the way that Grantaire spoke of it. Such things were unimportant now. They existed in ruins, unnoticed and meaningless. Grantaire thought, sometimes, that perhaps this was the reason they interested him so much, as he lived the same sort of existence.

Enjolras’s hand was in his. His grip was still tight, but Grantaire could feel the tension slip away the longer he talked. The anxiety induced trembling, that hadn’t stopped shaking through Enjolras since Grantaire had found him, slowed and eventually stopped. He sank heavier against Grantaire’s side, and his ragged breathing slowed to something normal. The crushing grip on Grantaire’s hand loosened, though Enjolras didn’t let go. Grantaire had thought about it so much, that he didn’t think as his thumb started brushing against the back of Enjolras’s clammy hand. Back and forth, back and forth. Enjolras’s breathing hitched, and Grantaire nearly stopped, mortified at his unintentionally bold intimacy. At least between them. But then Enjolras exhaled slowly and relaxed a little more.\n
Grantaire felt the mortification slip away, and he kept talking, eyes drifting back to Enjolras. Always back to Enjolras. The wind was blowing through his mess of curls, hardly in a braid at all anymore. The sun sank lower in the sky, and still, Grantaire rambled. Enjolras was ignited gold by the sunset, and Grantaire could hardly breathe. The sun slipped behind the war-torn buildings of Paris, and the nimbus of golden light faded.

Enjolras let his head fall against Grantaire’s shoulder, loose limbed and soft. His eyes were drooping sleepily. Grantaire trailed off, voice hoarse, a small mountain of cigarette butts sitting to his side. Enjolras moved his thumb, hesitant, but trying to mimic Grantaire.

Grantaire nearly jumped out of his skin.

“I can re-braid your hair, if you’d like.” He blurted out, heart pounding in his chest.

“You know how to braid?” Enjolras asked, thumb stilling. He straightened up a little, looking at Grantaire doubtfully, eyeing the disorderly mess of curls on his head. The amount that Enjolras was looking like Enjolras again was an incredible relief.

Grantaire shrugged, “No, I just offered because I was pretty sure you’d say no.” He replied sardonically.

Enjolras rolled his eyes at the tone. “Prove it, then.” He said, a slight smile quirking the corner of his mouth.

Grantaire shrugged, maneuvering Enjolras so that his back was to him. Enjolras huffed a laugh and shrugged Grantaire away, situating himself.

Grantaire lit another cigarette, holding it between his teeth and humming softly as he started carefully untangling the braid, brushing it out carefully with his fingers. Hardly the best way to do it
but carrying around a hair brush was not something Grantaire had made a habit of.

Enjolras kept dozing off as Grantaire worked gnarls from his hair, head occasionally tipping forward, waking him with a jolt. Grantaire smiled fondly, but sped up his work, though he thought he could brush his fingers through Enjolras’s hair for eternity. He carefully braided the wavy curls into the tight French-braid that Enjolras was usually sporting. Still humming, he tied the rather tattered red ribbon into a careful bow.

He crushed out his cigarette, “There, all done.” He said softly.

Enjolras was half asleep and he murmured a quiet thank you as he sank back against Grantaire’s chest. His eyelashes cast shadows on his cheeks from the flickering fairy lights. He was all soft lines, delicate, and more peaceful than Grantaire had ever seen him. Whatever thoughts had been plaguing him, whatever thoughts seemed to constantly be, were gone for now, leaving way for calm, for sleep. Grantaire could have stayed forever. He wanted to stay forever. He could have died happily this way.

He had helped Enjolras, and he almost felt useful for it.

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The quiet click of her door latching shut was enough to wake Cosette. The smallest of noises seemed to be able to wake her these days. Her sleep was uneasy and plagued with nightmares on better nights. She often couldn’t differentiate what of the nightmares was fake, and what was a memory. She just knew, that rarely did she come out unscathed. The anxiety of it throbbed constantly beneath her skin, making her more restless, even in the safety of a place like this where all of the faces seemed to be friendly.

She sat up, bleary with exhaustion. The weeks spent out in Les Déchets made it easier to wake, though. She was soon very nearly alert as she flipped on her lamp. It took her a few moments to notice if anything was different, and she thought perhaps she had been imagining the noise. Nothing appeared different. And then, her eyes fell on small orange and cream tape sitting on the desk against the far wall.

Cosette straightened up, rubbed at her eyes, and got out of bed, shivering as her bare feet touched the cold linoleum floor. She walked to the desk and lifted the tape, inspecting it, brows furrowed. Written in black ink, so faded it was almost illegible;

To My Dearest Euphrasie

Cosette frowned, she hadn’t been called that in…she didn’t know how many years. She was quite more awake, suddenly. She set the tape back down on the dresser and hurried to redress, tying her thick black hair back into a braid. She snatched the Holo-Tape off the dresser and hurried from her room.

Cosette’s heart was pounding in her chest in a way that was almost painful, her grip tight on the tape. She needed to know what was on it. There were so many questions that she had, almost entirely unanswered, and this tape could be the key. If anyone had a way of playing the tape, she was sure that the synth would. She needed to find him.

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Enjolras woke alone sometime later on a comfortable mound of pillows, a blanket over his shoulders. The smell of cigarettes was lingering on him, which he found he didn’t mind, was
almost grateful for. He was still wearing Grantaire’s loose t-shirt. With some hesitance, Enjolras lifted the hem of the shirt and hid his face against the fabric, taking a shaky breath, smelling Grantaire on the fabric. He dropped it, feeling dizzy and embarrassed despite no one being around to witness what he’d done.

Though he could hardly remember the time spent with him, he knew that, somehow, he had enjoyed it. A plate of food sitting on the ground next to him with a heart on the napkin. Courfeyrac had visited, then. He pushed himself up a bit, bleary but not as exhausted as he had been. He reached for a piece of bread off the plate and nibbled at it as he pushed himself to his feet, back clicking as he stretched and looked out over the city. Smoggy, but beautiful. He loved the city. His city.

His thoughts drifted to Grantaire, remembering little pieces of his rambling, the rambling and humming that had sent Enjolras to sleep. He reached up and fiddled with his braid, smiling slightly. He’d been able to braid after all…

He sighed quietly and finished the piece of bread before tidying up the pillows. He wished that he could focus on what he needed to, so much was happening, there was so much they needed to be ready for, but his mind kept leading him back to Grantaire. It was an unending frustration. Even more frustrating, because some of the time, Enjolras didn’t mind it as much as he knew he ought to.

A figure walking from the main doors managed to snag his attention. He straightened a little, eyes narrowed as he watched the person head towards the gate. No searches were scheduled, no one should have been leaving.

The man walked under a beam of light near the gate, mustard coat and grey hair becoming visible for several seconds before he was in shadows again. It was the newcomer. Enjolras frowned. The man walked to the guard booth, stood there for several minutes, Enjolras could only assume he was talking to whoever was scheduled to be in the booth. Combeferre, he thought. And then, at last, the gate creaked open and the gentleman disappeared into the shadows of a near-by building, and with that, he was gone, swallowed up by the night and the wasted Parisian streets.

Enjolras continued to think of this as he went back inside. He rifled for a book, checking that it was indeed Combeferre that was meant to be stationed in the guard booth, all thought of the matter was gone. He trusted that Combeferre wouldn’t have let the old man out if his numbers suggested it would bring danger. The gentleman didn’t live here, so Enjolras supposed there was no reason for him to stay. Besides, there was little time to dwell on it. No secrets had been divulged to the man, nor did his absence leave them unprotected, so Enjolras had no reason to be concerned. He wondered, why the man would leave his daughter, though.

With cold coffee set to the side, the matter as settled as it could be for now, and the man out of mind, Enjolras’s mind drifted back to his work. Or, he had meant it to. He had so much to focus on, so much to plan. But, with the smell of Grantaire’s cigarettes lingering in his hair, he found it quite hard to focus on much else. Soon, even with the caffeine in his veins, Enjolras was falling asleep on his desk. His face was pressed against the sleeve of Grantaire’s shirt, breathing in the smell of him that lingered on the soft fabric. Music was playing in his head, a tune that he’d rather not admit, was trying it’s very best to sound like one of the songs Grantaire had been humming when he’d done Enjolras’s hair. He could almost swear that he felt the phantom touch of Grantaire’s fingers running through his hair as oblivion washed over him.

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Cosette bounced on her feet as the synth—no, Combeferre, his name was Combeferre—messed with a screen. “Sorry, we don’t use these much.” He murmured, finally getting the small computer
screen to light up. He reached to her, hand open and waiting for the tape.

Cosette hesitated a moment before relinquishing it to him. “It’s alright.” She said softly, at least she could watch it at all.

Combeferre put the tape into the player, and moments later it flickered to life on the screen, the face of someone who looked strikingly like Cosette. It started playing almost immediately and Cosette was immediately entranced, so much so, that when Combeferre murmured he’d leave her to it, she didn’t even hear him.

The woman on the screen looked distracted, looking up at someone behind the camera, there was some dialog, muffled. The woman looked down at the camera, gazing straight at Cosette. And she didn’t know why, but tears were burning her eyes. The woman was sickly thin.

The woman’s hair was short and choppy, as though it had been cut off uncaringly with very dull scissors. It was thick though, black and wavy. Cosette had a feeling in her gut that if the woman’s hair was longer, it would look very similar to her own. She smiled into the camera, exhausted, but kind.

“Euphrasie, my darling daughter.” She said softly, her voice a weak rasp despite the smile in her eyes and the rather ruddy blush to her cheeks. Cosette put a hand over her mouth, muffling a quiet gasp, a near whimper. She was looking at her mother, she had hoped, but hadn’t dared to actually consider it as possible. Her mother continued speaking. “By now… by now Monsieur le Mer has gotten you from those people, and he is surely bringing you back to me.” Her smile grew a little hazy, dreamy. “They’ve told me often how sick you are…I wanted to go and get you myself but —” she broke off, coughing into her elbow. When she straightened back up, Cosette noticed specks of red on her sleeve before her arm was lowered back out of frame. “Well, I’m not doing too well myself.” She smiled weakly again. “But soon… soon I’ll be seeing you again, my love and I’m certain that if anything will heal me it will be to see your face again… The doctors here…they are excellent, no matter how sick you are, they will be able to make you better too, I am certain.”

Her expression fell, then, from hopeful to distressed, “But I am getting sicker. I’ve gotten worse since Monsieur left, and…and while I am going to hold on as well as I can, and these doctors truly are very good, I wanted to leave something for you… just in case.” She smiled weakly before looking down at her hands for several long seconds. When she looked back up at the camera, tears glistened in her eyes. “I want you to know about me. I’d have liked for us to be friends. I’d have liked to raise and care for you myself, but Euphrasie, you must understand…” her expression crumpled a bit. “I wasn’t in a place I could take care of you. I only planned to find work, to find somewhere safe and to come back to get you…that isn’t how it happened. Nothing could be so easy.” She whispered. “But…I’ve found somewhere now, and that wonderful kind man went to get you and bring you back here to me. I know that he will take care of you if I can’t. I love you, Euphrasie, so much. My only hope is that you can grow up knowing that.” She blew a kiss to the camera, looked to the person behind the camera and gave a small nod. The screen faded to black and the tape ended.

Cosette was still covering her mouth, tears streaming down her cheeks as her mother faded from view.

---

Azelm was lounging on the bed, snacking on food and sodas that Gavroche had swiped, when Eponine returned. Gavroche was nowhere to be seen, but Eponine wasn’t surprised by this, he tended to wander.
Something about Eponine must have shown her distress because the moment Azelma looked up at her she was on her feet, food set aside, “Eponine? What’s wrong?”

Eponine looked at her sister, feeling herself crumple.

“Ep? What is it?” Azelma sounded significantly more worried as she asked it. She pulled her older sister into a hug. “What happened?”

Eponine shook her head and hid her face against Azelma’s shoulder, trying not to cry. It was such a stupid thing to cry over. She’d known she stood no chance. She really had.

Azelma pulled Eponine towards the bed, brows furrowed with concern. “Sit down, what’s wrong, ‘ponine?”

Eponine sank onto the edge of the bed and pushed her fingers through her hair, distressed, upset, a thousand other emotions, all of which she knew were foolish ones. She hated herself for having them.

Azelma put a bottle of soda into her hand, a sweet roll in the other, “Tell me.” She urged.

Eponine stared at the things in her hands for several seconds before setting them both on the nightstand. She couldn’t stomach anything right now. God, she felt pathetic. She swallowed hard, “Do you…do you remember the lark? Maman used to call a girl who lived with us that…”

Azelma nodded slowly, “Who got that doll?” Eponine nodded miserably. “…Why?”

“She’s…she’s here…she’s with Marius… got here today…” Eponine rubbed at her face, ignoring the painful press against her bruises, almost reveling in it. “Zel, you should have seen the way he looked at ‘er…You’d think she’d hung the sun in the sky—”

Azelma scowled and grabbed Eponine’s hands, cutting off the descriptions before they could continue. “Stop it, ‘ponine.”

Eponine looked up at her, expression miserable and teary. Azelma’s own hardened, and in a fierce voice she spat, “Fuck that, ‘ponine! That’s some bullshit. You deserve better! He’s gotta be blind and stupid not to see you! Not worth a fuckin’ second!” she said, furiously. “You been here the whole time! He can’t appreciate you? Doesn’t deserve to even know you!”

Eponine let out a breathy sob, tears spilling down her cheeks.

Azelma shook her head fiercely and spoke again before Eponine could start. “Fuck him, Eponine. Fuck that.”

---

Far across the city, a general who had worked closely with the King was poisoned. He’d spoken out for the people of Paris, for France herself. He was certain, that in time, he could change much of the terror that people in the city faced.

The man had been in contact with Enjolras, telling him of the changes he was pushing forward. What they spoke of would be considered treason.

The man didn’t make it through the night.

The news of General LaMarque’s death would reach Enjolras eventually, but by the time it did,
already there would be a battalion assembled, ready to march on the traitors. Maps and information would have already been discovered hidden in LaMarque’s home. If only the man had known to destroy everything, but death comes for all and none can know when.

Chapter End Notes

Goodness! So sorry for the long time between updates. Life has been a bit crazy. We are gettin near the end here! Thanks for bearing with me!!
Everyday you love me less, I love you even more

Chapter Summary

"Heartaches by the number, troubles by the score
Everyday you love me less, each day I love you more
Yes, I've got heartaches by the number, a love that I can't win
But the day that I stop counting, that's the day my world will end."

Heartaches by the Number
Guy Mitchell

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Grantaire leaned up against the study door. The tremor to his hands from coming off the Med-X was still there, leaving him feeling a little ill, a little weak, most of the time. But he felt better, if he was going to be honest with himself. He wasn’t very good at that, but he could be. He felt better. There was a weight off his shoulders without such a strong draw back to the drug. He couldn’t, and that was that, and it was better this way. He knew that it was. Now, if only he could work himself up to knocking, to apologizing. This was making him feel sicker than the withdrawals were. Well, that wasn’t true, it was psychosomatic, but still. He felt sick. Anxious.

Breathe, come on, Grantaire. It’s just an apology, you can do that, at least. That is easy. He’ll either slam the door in your face or he will accept it. You owe him one as much as he owes you one, the prick—no stop. Apologize. Just apologize.

Hand trembling, he knocked on the door. There was the muffled slide of a chair on the other side, likely done accidentally in surprise at an interruption, Grantaire thought. “Yes? You can come in?” Enjolras said. He sounded…flustered.

Grantaire pushed the door open and looked at Enjolras. Enjolras, whose perfect hair was askew. Who had had red marks on his cheek from sleeping on his desk and was clearly only half awake. His fingers were stained with ink, which had gotten on his face when he tried to push curls from his eyes to better see. Grantaire’s apology died on the tip of his tongue, shame quickly swallowed with concern, “Enjolras, you need to sleep. You’re a mess.”

Enjolras huffed in frustration and his tired, dazed expression quickly turned to one of contempt. He shot a glare at Grantaire. “Thank you.” He muttered, “Much appreciated. What do you want?”

“Enjolras, really, you should sleep.” Grantaire pressed. He stepped farther into the room and put his hands on the edge of the desk, brow furrowed with concern, “You need to rest, you’ll do better by your revolution that way.”

Enjolras huffed in annoyance. “What do you care anyways?” he shot back, glaring up at Grantaire.
Even though he was angry and irritated, his expression and posture, softened with exhaustion. “I already know that you don’t.” He sighed and looked away, shoulders hunched defensively. “What did you come here for, Grantaire.”

Grantaire wanted to argue but he huffed a sigh instead, “I wanted to apologize. The things I said, the things I did—it was out of line.” He said after a few seconds of quiet. “I was…reacting in the moment rather than to what I actually felt about the situation and I shouldn’t have. I don’t really think those things of you. I’m sorry.”

Enjolras jolted in surprise and looked up at him, his brows furrowed. “Grantaire…” he seemed to be struggling with words, swallowing some down, trying to choose carefully, for which Grantaire was thankful for. “I didn’t…I didn’t mean it either. I was going to apologize while you were in the hospital, but they wouldn’t let me in and then…” he trailed off, looking frustrated. “I don’t think you’re worthless.”

Grantaire smiled at him weakly, thankfully. “I appreciate that.” He said softly. They fell into a rather stiff silence which Grantaire broke very suddenly, making Enjolras jump. “If you won’t sleep…do something fun with me.” He said suddenly, “Just a short break.”

“Something fun?” Enjolras asked warily.

“Yeah. We can go dancing. I saw a record player somewhere. We can dance.”

“I don’t know how.” Enjolras said quickly. “And—And no. I’m busy.” He spluttered, speaking quickly. Grantaire realized after a moment, with a dawning feeling of surprise and endearment, that this was not a brush off as he might have taken it were Enjolras more awake, but rather embarrassment, perhaps only recognizable through the exhaustion.

“Awh, come on, Enjolras. Trust me. It will be fun.” Grantaire urged. “With all that’s been going on, let yourself have a bit of fun.” He was holding onto one of Enjolras’s hands, light enough that if the man had really wanted to pull away he could. “You deserve it, Enjolras.”

Enjolras was flushed up to his ears, looking frustrated. Avoidant, even. The plait that had been tight in place for the past several days was falling loose, fly-away curls all over the place. He looked so soft this, rather than stone-cold. Grantaire’s heart was pounding, hyperaware of the fact that Enjolras had not pulled his hand away yet.

“I don’t understand the point.” Enjolras muttered.

“There doesn’t have to be a point, Enjolras. It’s fun.” Enjolras didn’t look convinced, his jaw tight, brows furrowed. It felt rather pathetic in an endearing way. He reminded Grantaire of a mopey cat. “Come on,” He pressed, hoping for Enjolras to give in. “Just for a little bit. If you absolutely hate it, we can stop.”

Enjolras let out a heavy sigh and his shoulders slumped. Grantaire knew he had won. Enjolras glanced fleetingly at Grantaire, “You’ll have to show me how.” He reminded, as though this would make Grantaire change his mind.

Grantaire beamed. “I think I can be a rather decent teacher.” He promised.

He led Enjolras from the office by the hand, to the stairwell and up a few floors. He showed them into a room that Enjolras had never frequented. He knew some of the others did. They must have shown it to Grantaire. Grantaire let go of Enjolras’s hand when they got in and he hurried over to the jukebox to select a song, bouncing a little as the tune started up. He turned back to Enjolras,
“Alright, you ready? We’ll do an easy one first, okay?”

Enjolras looked doubtful and…nervous. Grantaire was incredibly endeared. “Okay… follow my feet, alright?” he asked, turning and standing next to Enjolras.

Enjolras looked unconvinced and nervous, brow furrowed, jaw clenched like this was a puzzle or a test and he had to figure out the answer to it somehow. Grantaire tapped his feet in time with the music for a second before starting. “It’s just like steps, alright?” he asked, putting a foot forward and then stepping back, putting a foot back behind him, then forward a step. The sequence repeated in beat with the song.

“That’s dancing?” Enjolras asked, almost blurted out, watching Grantaire do it a few more times before following his lead.

“Well, it’s a little more.” Grantaire admitted, “This is the basic step, once you have it…” he trailed off. It would be easier to show Enjolras instead of trying to explain it. He twisted his feet with each step, mostly staying on the balls of his feet.

Enjolras bit his lip, “I don’t know if I can do that.”

Grantaire laughed, “I know that you can. You can do anything you put your mind to. I bet you’ll be better at it than me.” He said with an obvious fondness, his eyes were crinkled in the corners. “Let’s stick with the basic step a few times, and then you can try it with the twists. I’ll help you. It’s okay.”

Enjolras still looked doubtful, an expression that didn’t suit him, and Grantaire was eating it up. He loved this sleep-soft Enjolras more than he was prepared for.

“Where did you learn to do this?” Enjolras asked eyes on his feet as he carefully tried to move them in time with Grantaire’s. In the background the song switched to something new and Grantaire paused before helping Enjolras fall into beat to the new tune.

“I was staying somewhere once, an old theatre, I guess. They had some old tapes with people dancing this way…I watched and learned how.” Grantaire shrugged, clearly struggling to keep to the basic step, his feet were aching to twist and bounce with the music the way they were supposed to. “People used to go dancing all the time, pre-war.” He said.

“I can’t even imagine being able to do things like that…not having to…worry about things like…” Enjolras flailed his hands, trying to encompass everything, “This.”

Grantaire hummed in response instead of responding the way he wanted to, that Enjolras didn’t need to worry about all these things, that he was choosing to. It was a tired argument. He took Enjolras’s hands, stilling them, and changed the subject. “I think you’re ready to learn the twists. It looks harder than it is. Stay on your toes and twist in and out.”

Grantaire moved to Enjolras’s side, “Watch my feet and move yours in the same way.” He instructed softly. “In and out. It’s just like this over and over again, and then we add in that same step from before.”

Enjolras bit his lip and hesitantly followed, brows furrowed with concentration, unsure and awkward on his feet.

“There you go, yes, just like that—” Grantaire praised as Enjolras started to get a handle on the twisting movement. “I think we can add that step back in, okay? We’ll go slow, ignore the music—once you’re used to it, we can go with the beat.”
Enjolras did not think he would ever be used to the movement, he was stiff and rough where Grantaire was smooth and loose. Tension was in every line of his body.

“Loosen up.” Grantaire breathed softly, “You’re thinking about it too much, Enjolras. Let your body listen to the music, it will know how to respond, you don’t need to think.”

Enjolras made a frustrated embarrassed noise, nearly tripping himself in his attempts to match Grantaire. “I can’t—”

“You can.” Grantaire interjected, cutting Enjolras off. “You can”. He moved in front of Enjolras and took his hands again, rough thumbs brushing against the backs of Enjolras’s less-scarred hands. “Follow me, you can do it. Who knows, you might even enjoy it, if you let yourself.”

Enjolras looked up at Grantaire, eyes wide, brows furrowed and an argument on his tongue.

“Follow me.” Grantaire repeated, voice low, effectively cutting off the argument before it could be voiced. “Your feet will move with mine, if I step forward, you step back, and vice versa, okay?”

Enjolras scowled, and looked frustrated at Grantaire’s shoulder, and then down at their feet with a huffy sigh. “Okay.” He agreed.

Grantaire rolled his eyes fondly and squeezed Enjolras’s hands before starting, leading the way careful and patient until Enjolras finally started to fall into the rhythm of it. Grantaire started them dancing with the beat of the song playing on the record player, “See? You’ve got it.” He praised.

Enjolras flushed, trying unsuccessfully to suppress a smile as he followed Grantaire’s lead.

Grantaire let go of one of Enjolras’s hands and led him in a spin, making Enjolras laugh, trying to catch his balance before falling back into step with Grantaire, growing more comfortable and bold as the record spun its course.

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Enjolras was nowhere to be found, and Combeferre just hoped that it was because he was asleep somewhere. Everyone was busy working; Combeferre had made sure that everything that had been damaged was being attended to, and anyone who’d been left without a job was working on their defenses. They hadn’t been well enough prepared. The casualties had been minimal, but Combeferre knew they could do better. They had to be able to. He hadn’t figured it out yet, but he was sure that he could if he just worked hard enough to find the solution.

But for now, he followed along after Courfeyrac.

The man walked up the stairs ahead of him, a bounce in his step. The tread of his shoes left dark spots on the floor from picking up the drywall and plaster dust that had settled over the floor from the attacks. “I was up here the other day when I first saw them.” He chattered excitedly. “I think it could be helpful, in some way? You’ll know, though.”

Combeferre had no idea what Courfeyrac was talking about, but he smiled, endeared, and followed after him, “Well, once you show me, we shall see.” He said softly.

Courfeyrac beamed at Combeferre over his shoulder and continued up the stairs, flight after flight, until they were on the roof. He bounded across the metal plating to a long since abandoned pigeon coop and turned to Combeferre, smiling wider. “You said there haven’t been any birds in here in ages,” he said quickly, “Probably not since before the war; but Jehan mentioned having seeds that birds might be able to eat and they gave them to me to put in here, and look!”
Combeferre followed and peered through the mesh wire door into the coop where a few malformed and irradiated pigeons were crowded together, dirty feathers trembling with each soft coo. “Wow…” Combeferre breathed, intrigued. He sank to his knees with a clunk, which startled the nesting birds.

Courfeyrac beamed, “They turned up this morning! I’d hoped that you’d like them!” he said, bouncing a little on his feet.

Combeferre gently opened the door and reached in, letting the startled birds study his fingers before gently stroking one. It seemed uncertain for a few moments, before letting out a soft coo and settling, dirty feathers puffing up around it. “This could give us the opportunity to communicate more quickly with other settlements.” He said softly, “If they set up coops as well…” He pulled his hand back and closed the door, smiling up at Courfeyrac. “You're brilliant, Courf.” He praised, sounding breathless despite the fact he couldn’t breathe at all.

Courfeyrac blushed and ducked his head, curls falling to hide his face, “I just wanted to try and do something helpful, you've been so worried—I wanted to do something that would make you smile.” He rambled, trying to diminish his idea with humility. He had a tendency to sell himself short in that way.

“You came up with something brilliant. I’d never considered doing this.” Combeferre said firmly, smiling as he got back to his feet. “Brilliant, Courfeyrac.” He cupped the man’s cheek, watching his golden skin flush redder from the contact. He could hear Courfeyrac’s heartbeat.

“Thank you,” Courfeyrac breathed, embarrassed. He stared at Combeferre with wide honey eyes, pupils expanding slightly. Combeferre brushed his thumb over the freckles of Courfeyrac’s cheek, studying him. Courfeyrac sucked in a shaky breath. “Ferre—” he breathed, “Can we—will you—kiss me?” he asked, struggling with the words.

Combeferre paused, met Courfeyrac’s eyes, and smiled faintly before closing the distance between their mouths, enjoying the sounds Courfeyrac made in his embrace.

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The music stopped, the record clicking as it continued to spin. They were close, somehow their Charleston had shifted with the next song, something slower than the last, and they were simply rocking together, Grantaire leading, his hand heavy on Enjolras’s lower back as the drifted in a slow circle.

He was so close.

Enjolras felt dizzy. It was something new that he didn’t understand at all.

He pulled away and swallowed hard, “I have a lot of work to do.” He said quietly. His heart was pounding. “Thank you…for teaching me this. I really needed the break, I think.”

Grantaire reached out, holding onto Enjolras’s hand. “Come on, you can get back to work in a bit, Enjolras.” Grantaire pressed. His gaze was soft, but Enjolras could feel it like a shock to his core. He didn’t think it was pleasant but in the same breath he didn’t want Grantaire to stop looking at him like that. He felt short of breath. Maybe he had been wearing his binder too long. “You’re working too hard- some good food and a shower won’t hurt… Let yourself relax, just a little.”

“I’ve wasted too much time as it is.” Enjolras argued weakly. He pulled his hand from Grantaire’s grip. “There’s so much to do. So much that I need to make sure is written down…they could attack
again at any time.” He ducked his head. “We have to be ready. I need to make sure we have everything we need to be ready. There is so much to do.”

Grantaire looked like he wanted to argue more, but Enjolras was certain if he gave him time to that he would give in, so before he could hear a word past, “Enjolras—” he was out of the room, letting the door fall shut behind him with a loud, hollow, clunk that echoed in the empty hallway.

Chapter End Notes

Updates whom? Not I. But! This is almost finished, actually! I had so much planned for this universe, but alas, motivation? We are not acquainted. I'll post up the ending soon, and I've future drabbles that may go up in the future too! Until then, have a lovely day! Thank you for reading!
Chapter Summary

*Why does my heart go on beating*
*Why do these eyes of mine cry*
*Don’t they know it’s the end of the world*
*It ended when you said goodbye*

*The End of the World*
*Skeeter Davis*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Grantaire woke to a note beneath his door, scrawled in Enjolras’s impeccable handwriting.

“Thank you for your help and for a distraction.
—E”

Clearly one for conversation. It made Grantaire smile, regardless, touched that he’d been left a note at all. He’d never have expected one.

He rolled out of bed, dressed, and started making his way down to the cafeteria, sleep rumpled. Halfway down the first of several flights of stairs, he froze, hand tight on the railing. He turned on his heel and took the steps back, practically sprinting, he threw open the door to Enjolras’s study.

Three sets of eyes found him in the doorway, various expressions of surprise and irritation at his interruption. He spoke before any of the three could.

“Move on the crown.” He said, voice gravelly and thick with sleep.

“What?” The look Enjolras gave him was irritated, angry, almost. Grantaire didn’t quell. He shut the door behind him and stepped further into to the room.

“You’re giving them the upper-hand by waiting to recover like this.” He said firmly, “They probably have people spying on you within these walls. They knew the weakest points to strike to cause enough damage that we’d back off and lick our wounds. But, if you strike first, small, focused attacks on the places we know they are keeping their forces…” he walked to Enjolras’s desk, pushed notes aside to clear the map pinned beneath everything. He pointed at the red areas with force as he spoke, “Areas where they keep their firearms, the soldier’s bunkers, their food…”

“They won’t expect it.” Combeferre said, watching Grantaire, calculating.

“Not if it looks like business as usual here.” Grantaire agreed. “Small groups of the usual people who go out to scavenge, nothing could look different. We’d have to assume that they know everything going on within the walls. That’s how they’ll decide when to attack us.”
“How do we know you aren’t the spy?” Enjolras challenged, arms crossed over his chest, glaring.

“Bahorel found me dying in the middle of Déchets. How could I have been planted here? What are the chances of that?” Grantaire retorted sharply, “It’s a good idea, don’t be angry that you’re not the one who came up with it.”

“That’s not—!” Enjolras started furiously. He was cut off by Courfeyrac pushing papers to the floor. “Hey!” he said, offended and flustered.

“I think that could work.” Courfeyrac said, ignoring Enjolras. “These are quite close to some of the usual routes we take to get out of the city to scavenge. “Even if the groups are being tailed, there’s no reason there would be enough warning for the camps to arm up in time to prepare for an attack, especially not a remote attack.”

“If someone could sneak into the camps and set charges on their supplies…if we set them off remotely, there might not even be proof it was us at all.” Combeferre said. The mechanical whir grew louder with his thinking the idea through.

“It’s risky. Anyone who goes out has to be aware that it’s a potential suicide mission!” Enjolras argued, angry at the prospect. “Everyone needs to be ready and willing to risk their lives, but to go into something simply to die—we can’t ask that of our people.” He set the flung papers and books on the corner of the desk. “It’s a good plan, yes, but that’s a lot to put on these people who simply want a better life. We’ve promised them better. To send them out to die is cruel.”

“Bring in those you trust without any hesitation.” Grantaire said quietly. “Tell it to them straight. I’ve seen the people who live here. They will volunteer to protect what you’ve built together.”

Enjolras looked at him and Grantaire felt like the man could see him right through. He slumped slightly, in defeat. “Combeferre?” he asked softly, half a question, half an order. Grantaire was victorious in this, he didn’t know if he ought to be happy for that or not.

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“You’re…you’re leavin’?” Eponine asked, confused, sitting cross-legged on the end of a hospital bed. Joly was looking over her wound’s, cleaning what needed it. He seemed pleased, which she supposed was a good thing.

Marius looked at her from the doorway, quietly explaining the situation to Musichetta. He smiled at her, and even after the talk with Azelma, her heart soared for it. “Yes, just a quick scavenging mission.” He replied, fidgeting with the front of his coat.

He was lying.

Eponine frowned, but nodded, “Monsieur…stay safe.” She said quietly. Before she could think on it, she was off the table despite Joly’s argument. She wrapped her arms around Marius’s middle, hid her face against his chest.

He seemed surprised a moment, but he returned the hug. She could feel his chin rest on top of her head, her clean brushed out curls. Tears burned at Eponine’s eyes, and she hugged him tighter, “Stay safe, M-Marius.” She repeated against his shirt, embarrassed as she felt the tears spill over, dampen his shirt.

It was surely only moments, but Eponine longed so desperately to stay in that moment, with Marius holding her like she mattered, that it could have been eternity as well, desperately clinging to every second, even as she loosened her grip on him, knowing she was overstaying her welcome within
his space.

Marius looked at her, a hand uncertainly on her upper arm. “Thank you, ‘ponine.” He said, touched, surprised, maybe. She wanted those eyes to never leave her. She knew it was selfish, unfair to wish for. “I’ll be back before you know it.” The corner of his mouth quirked into a smile. “No need to worry for me, ‘ponine.”

She viciously wiped away tears and laughed breathily, wanting to argue that there was so much reason to worry. That there was reason for the tears. But there wasn’t the time. Someone from the hall shouted for Marius.

He glanced out, looked to her a moment and gave her a smile. “Worry not.” He said, and it sounded like a promise, though Eponine knew it wasn’t and there he could promise no such thing. He pressed a soft kiss to her forehead, as a sibling might do, she reminded herself even as her heart leapt with hope at it. He was gone before she could respond, door slamming closed in his wake.

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Grantaire watched them leave, feeling a little sick to his stomach as Enjolras’ jacket disappeared from sight, fading into the shadowy Parisian streets. He gripped the balcony railing and kept watching, desperate for some kind of sign that he wasn’t wrong, but he knew it could be days before he would know anything at all.

A few groups had left, hours apart, heading with their instructions to destroy weapons, ammunition, food, any sort of supplies that could be held over them, used against them. And then a fifth group, Enjolras, Combeferre, and Courfeyrac, left from the tunnels, heading towards the capital.

"If we are truly to escape this, we need to kill the King.” he had said, a tremor to his voice that Grantaire had focused on for the rest of the discussion. “I’m going for him.”

Because of-fucking-course he was.

Grantaire crushed out his cigarette and slunk back inside, bristling with anxiety. This had been his idea. Anything that happened, it was his fault. He’s had some batshit idea in a stairwell and people could die because of it. Enjolras could die because of it.

He was going to be sick.

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Enjolras stayed in the shadows, Courfeyrac and Combeferre close behind as they slunk through the shadow-y, stinking alleys. They had to make as much ground as possible before dawn. They couldn’t risk being seen by anyone. Safehouses were dotted over Paris, abandoned buildings that were long since looted bare, places no one would look—they were to hide at those, keep cover, keep to the alleys, keep hidden and unrecognized.

A woolen cap was snug on his head, hair hidden beneath it, makeup smeared on his face to make him less recognizable. Everything they’d been fighting for hung in the balance, now. This move; there was no failing. Failure meant the fall of everything they’d done. It meant ruin; meant torture for any who had been ‘with’ him.

He couldn’t fail this. Everything hung on him. The weight of it was suffocating, and for a moment
he found himself thinking back to his dance with Grantaire. The lightness he had felt for that short time being guided by scarred hands.

He missed that. He hated to admit it to himself. He really did. He almost wished he’d stayed, just a while longer. What else might Grantaire have shown him?

He thought of Grantaire’s hand on his back, of Grantaire’s hands in his hair, rough skin against his hands, his face; those dark, bloodshot eyes, looking so intently at him, like when they’d danced. That look had felt heavy in an entirely different way and Enjolras paused, gloved hand against the cracked brick. He took a breath. He had much more important things to focus on.

If there was ever a wrong time to fantasize, well, he thought it must be always, but most especially now.

“Enj?” breathed Courfeyrac, breath hot against Enjolras’s ear, asking what was wrong—

Enjolras shook his head and exhaled slow. Nothing was wrong. He stepped forward, and they kept moving, Grantaire forced onto a backburner, as much as his gravelly voice could be.

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Enjolras was distracted, Combeferre could tell, but by what, he wasn’t sure. He had been distracted for days now, at least since they had left. Combeferre had an inkling it was Grantaire, but who could say but Enjolras himself. Combeferre wasn’t going to heckle him to tell.

Enjolras was pacing across the room, expression miles away, but the usual furrow of his brows was absent, his shoulders not nearly so tight. So Combeferre left him to them. He didn’t have the heart to pull Enjolras from something peaceful, even if there were things they needed to discuss. Grantaire, or the free world, Enjolras deserved a moment of peace.

Beside him, Courfeyrac fished the last of their packed food from his bag, setting aside some for Enjolras before eating the rest. He was practically vibrating with nerves. Combeferre gently settled his hand on Courfeyrac’s knee, which seemed to calm him slightly, as he finished his meager meal.

He nodded towards an empty room off to the side, once the food was gone, and Courfeyrac nodded, looking a little relieved at the prospect of escaping Enjolras’s pacing.

The moment they were through the door, Courfeyrac’s mouth was on Combeferre’s, shaking hands clinging to him. Combeferre was pliant, holding Courfeyrac back, letting the nervous energy pour onto him, accepting it, hoping, that he was soothing it slightly.

Courfeyrac pulled back, panting, looking wild and lost as he searched Combeferre’s face, tracing the faint seams with a shaking finger. “Chances we make it?” He whispered. Now was as good a time as any to cry, but Courfeyrac’s eyes were dry of tears. He was afraid but resigned.

Combeferre shook his head and kissed Courfeyrac’s forehead. “Let’s not think on it.” He said back. “Let’s think of things more pleasant. We have some hours…let them be enjoyable.”

Courfeyrac melted slightly in the embrace. He nodded against Combeferre, “Tell me something.” He said, eventually, arms around the synth’s waist. “Something about the old world…”

Combeferre held him close, and together the rocked, an almost dance as he spoke, painting a world with his words, one where plants thrived, and the streets weren’t reeking with the dead. Courfeyrac let himself get lost in the words; and he breathed in time with the cadence of Combeferre’s carefully chosen words.
For now, there was peace, in this dilapidated room, in the arms of the man he loved, there was peace, unbroken and untouched by the war just beyond the crumbling walls.

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Enjolras crept out at dusk, leaving his sleeping companions behind, entwined together on the couch. Even Combeferre did not rouse as Enjolras slipped out the window and onto the street.

His friends did not need to die tonight. This was something he could do alone.

Chapter End Notes

Hey there! Short chapter, here. I hope that one day I can come back and tidy this guy up, but I make no promises. The next chapter is the last one, though I have a few little side one-shots in the process that I'll upload as they finish/come to me! I hope you've enjoyed this. It was a project I've enjoyed, despite how hard it's been for me to get it finished.

If you have any requests in terms of character's you'd like to see in oneshots, feel free to let me know! Thank you for reading!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!