Armin was convinced that it was the opportunity of a lifetime, but Eren just saw it as just another chance to fail. Nothing good could possibly come out of an internship in a stuffy office at Survey Corporation. Eren would have been content to sit and watch the remainder of his senior year pass him by. However, after one elevator trip, Eren finds himself questioning everything he thought he knew about life and himself.
“I can’t do this anymore.”

Those were the words that changed everything in my life, and I never anticipated that they would come out of her mouth. Honestly, if you had told me that my sister would betray me, desert me, and leave me with a half-dead mother and a monster of a father, I would have laid you out right then and there. Mikasa was the last person I expected to leave me, and the first to do so. Perhaps that’s why it was such a crushing blow when I finally realized she was serious.

“Eren, are you listening?” her voice quivered around the words, and I knew then that this was really happening. Mikasa had never been scared of anything before, but she was running now.

“Why?” I had to strangle the word out of my throat, and when it finally came out it was nothing but a pitiful gasp.

“I…” her voice trailed off as she hedged on what to say next. “I can’t tell you that. You don’t need to know-“

“The hell I don’t need to know!” my voice came out sharper than I had intended, but I felt no regrets when she flinched away from the sound. “You can’t just leave me here and not tell me why! You can’t abandon me like this!”

“Eren, it doesn’t concern you.” The finality in her voice told me that I should give up now. Of course, I was never one to give up on anything, especially not her.

“You’re my sister, Mikasa!” I said this as if it could trump everything she had said up until now. She opened her mouth to speak and I hurried to cut her off, stumbling over my words, “You’ve been different. I’ve noticed it, and I didn’t want to say anything to piss you off. But something’s changed, hasn’t it? Something’s wrong. Talk to me, Mikasa.”

She lowered her head and I was unable to see her face, which only angered me further. I tried to ignore the way her hand tightened around the worn leather handle of her suitcase; I tried to ignore that there was a suitcase at all. That would only solidify the fact that she was leaving and there was nothing I could do about it. There was no way in hell I would accept that.

“Mikasa!” She jumped at my cry and her eyes turned to me, wider than I had ever seen them before. My breath caught in my throat and I could have sworn I was going to choke to death on it. At that point, I might have been glad to do so. Her eyes were hopeless. As if she had explored every other option and arrived at the only choice she had. The one choice she didn’t want to make but would.

“What’s happening to you?” I could barely hear the whisper myself, even though I was the one to make it.

“He’s-“ The front door lock clicked, and Mikasa fell silent. All of the hopelessness I had seen in her was replaced with a fear I had never dreamed I would see in those eyes.

“Mikasa, what-“ Her palm slammed against my mouth so hard that I knew immediately that I would have a bruise later. My head cracked against the wall behind me, and she held me in place with her nails digging into my cheek.

“Don’t say a word,” her voice was a frantic whisper in my ear. “You didn’t see me leave. Do you
understand, Eren? You didn’t see me go.”

I tried to wrestle free of her hand, but she restrained me with an undeniable strength. “Eren. Please.”

The desperation in her voice forced my nod before I had even realized what I was agreeing to.

And then she was gone.

I jolted upright in bed with my hand pressed tightly to my throat, as if that would somehow muffle the scream that had already escaped my lips. My pulse was erratic against my thumb, and I held my hand in its place until I finally felt my heart returning to its normal beat.

At least that’s what I told myself.

Honestly, it was just reassuring to know that I still had a heart beating away in my chest. It meant that I was alive, even when I felt anything but.

I peeled the sheet from my chest; disgusted by the way the damp material clung to my sweat-soaked skin. Staring at the wet stains warping the fabric into dark crinkled creases, I realized that I would have to wash these now. It was the third time this week that I had woken up this way, and the habit was beginning to take its toll on my sheets.

Gripping the fabric tight, I rolled out of bed and took the sheet along with me. I could, at the very least, leave it in the laundry bin until I got home, where it would still be waiting when I did. I couldn’t expect my mother to clean it for me, because that would involve her leaving the bedroom. I honestly couldn’t tell you the last time I had seen her face, or even heard her voice. The most I received from her was a nod when I poked my head into her room to see if she was still alive.

She had given up caring, and so had I.

My father had been gone for almost as long as Mikasa, who he followed only days after her disappearance. He sent money for the bills, but it wasn’t needed. Mom had saved up a delicate nest egg of cash in the few years that she had worked, and her parents left her a with sizeable sum after their passing. I received a phone call once in a blue moon to update me on dad’s whereabouts. Even after three months, he still hadn’t been able to find Mikasa. I was starting to give up the hope that he ever would.

We moved into Trost Tower a month after Mikasa left, selling off the old house so that dad would have extra money on the road. Even in this city, surrounded by countless buildings, Trost was a sight to behold. It was a colossal structure, with colored navy glass that made it glitter like a sapphire in the right light. The design was curved towards the bottom, as if someone had tacked a serif font onto the letter L.

I had admired the building from afar when we visited the city, but I despised it now. I wanted to be in my old home, with my old bed and my old life. Trost represented new beginnings, and I hated it for that.

A loud beeping informed me that it was officially time to get up, and I smacked the alarm on my way past. A quick shower would be all that I could handle today, and I had decided before even seeing my comb that I didn’t give a damn what my hair looked like. It was always a mess by the end of the day; I never could seem to keep my hands out of it, especially when I was feeling stressed.

I was vaguely aware of the blue jeans and beige shirt combo that I had managed to throw together in
the brief trip to my closet. I took a moment to pray that none of my teachers were planning to give a
test, which I would undoubtedly fail if they did. I was walking in a haze today. Hell, I was walking in a haze every day.

I paused at my mother’s room on the way to the front door and gave a small knock. There was no answer, but there never was. Cracking the door open, I poked my head in. She was sitting on the bed with her back to me, hunched over like a vulture. “Mom, I’m going to school.”

Her head turned almost imperceptibly to the right and she moved it once, up and down. That was all I could hope to get from her. An acknowledgement that she heard me, or perhaps just an acknowledgement that she was still alive. Could have fooled me.

I stepped onto the elevator and punched the button for the ground floor. Although the view was one to be envied, we were on one of the highest floors and the ride down took longer than I would like. I busied myself with my phone, typing out a quick message to Armin that I was on my way.

The doors opened up to a gaggle of women who had just finished their morning workout in the downstairs’ gym. I ducked to the side to let them in, desperate to avoid their giggling conversation.

“Did you see those abs?”

“Uhm, yes? Please, as if you could miss them. Oh, he was so hot! Let’s go back.”

“Maybe after I get a shower. I don’t want to be all sweaty.”

I rolled my eyes. Wasn’t that the point of a gym?

Armin was waiting outside on the curb next to the parking space he had managed to snag. He looked up from his phone as I approached, and dropped the cell back into his pocket, “Eren, are you feeling alright? You don’t look so good.”

“Great to see you, too, Armin.” I tried to feign annoyance at the lousy greeting, although all I really wanted to do was to get him to change the subject. It didn’t work.

“I’m sorry, Eren, I didn’t mean that the way it sounded. You just look tired,” the concern in his voice made my stomach turn. “Are you sure you want to go in today? I’m sure Mr. Botli will let you make up the test.”

So there was a test today.

I wanted to curse the heavens, but I was pretty sure they would just piss on me for it.

“I’m fine, alright?” Armin knew the snap in my tone well enough to drop the subject after that.

I got into the passenger seat of Armin’s car, dropped my head back into the headrest, and shut my eyes. However, after a minute of motionless, I opened one eye and shot a glance at Armin, “What gives?”

“Your seatbelt.” He prompted, as he always did when I got in the car. I probably should have remembered at this point, but I didn’t deem the habit important enough to learn.

“Right,” I muttered, clicking the metal into place. I hated seatbelts, no matter what level of safety they offered; I felt confined. I would rather take my chances with Armin’s driving skills and the choices of other drivers than sit with a strap against my chest, but I knew that Armin wouldn’t drive until I was buckled in.
We drove in silence for most of the trip, and I would have preferred it to stay that way for the entire drive to school. There was something gnawing at Armin; I could tell by the way he kept looking over at me, his expression anxious. A small part of me wanted to remain silent until he finally got the courage to speak, but the rest of me was too pissed off to wait, “What? What is it?”

“The internship meeting is tomorrow,” he blurted the words out so quickly I almost didn’t catch them. Even when I realized what he said, it made no sense.

“What internship meeting?”

“You know, the one for Survey Corp.,” he paused, as if waiting for me to give some kind of sign that I knew where he was going with this. I didn’t. “We talked about this two months ago. We were going to sign up for it, remember?”

“I remember saying that I wasn’t going to sign up for it, yea,” I snapped.

The conversation had come too soon after Mikasa’s disappearance. Armin, also grieving over the loss of his childhood friend, had tried to get me involved in something, anything, that would take my mind off of the fact that she had left me. I had to give him credit, he was a great friend and the only real friend I had after Mikasa had gone. It had always been the three of us, and he and I were still struggling to make do with the fact that our trio had now reduced to two.

Still, despite his best efforts, I had refused to sign up for the Survey Corporation internship. He had called it the chance of a lifetime, but I wasn’t interested in anything that had to do with my future. I wasn’t thinking about college; I wasn’t thinking about anything. I wanted to get through each day, and that was the only goal that I had set for myself. Seeing as how I was still alive, I figured I was doing well enough.

“Well,” Armin started, and the hesitation in his voice had me tense in my seat.

I slowly turned my head to stare at him, and did so until he shot a nervous look my way. Fuck.

“You didn’t.”

Of course he did.

“It’s the chance of a life time, Eren,” his voice was pleading with me, but I didn’t want to hear any of it.

“You signed me up?” My voice was rising faster than I wanted it to, and so was my anger, “I told you I didn’t want to, and you signed me up anyway? Are you fucking kidding me right now?”

“I know you’re upset, you have every right to be,” his voice was rushed but for the most part calm, as if he had anticipated my reaction. Knowing him, he probably had. “But this is a great opportunity. You need to think about your future. You need to move on.”

“I don’t need to move on from anything.” We were rolling up to Shinganshina High and my hand was already gripping the door handle. I had to get out of this car.

“She’s not coming back, Eren.”

I opened the door as Armin was pulling into his parking space. He hit the brake with a startled cry, and my door missed Jean’s heartbreakingly beautiful Porsche by mere inches.

I couldn’t make myself care.
I flung the seatbelt off like it had offended me in some way, which it had, and got out of the car. I didn’t stop when Armin called my name. I couldn’t look at him right now; I couldn’t stand to hear the sound of his voice, even as it repeated in my head like some sickening mantra.

*She’s not coming back, Eren.*

*She’s not coming back.*

*She’s not coming back.*

I failed the test, and I was okay with that. It was good to have at least one thing in my life that I knew with absolute certainty. Even if it meant my grade would sink that much further, I found some kind of solace in the fact that I could choose to fail. It was one of the only things I could control.

I walked through the lunch line with nothing but a bottle of water, and I couldn’t even guarantee that I would be able to keep that much down. My stomach was apparently practicing for the Olympic gymnast competition, and it was pulling all gold.

I blamed Armin for the anger raging inside me because I had nowhere else to direct it. I hated him for signing me up for that crappy internship in some stuffy office. I hated him for trying. I wanted him to give up, like everyone else had. Like I had.

“What the fuck is your problem?”

My head snapped towards the voice and found the asshole that it belonged to. Jean Kirschtein.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me,” he snapped, “What is your fucking problem?”

“I’m not in the mood, Jean,” I would have loved to hit him. Really, I would. “Get out of my way.”

“Not until you explain why my boyfriend is practically in tears,” he said, effectively reminding me of why I couldn’t just beat his ugly horse face in. He was Armin’s boyfriend, a fact that I had to drill into my head each and every day. What the hell had Armin been thinking?

“You know damn well why,” I retorted, and my eyes took a brief instant to search the cafeteria for Armin’s face. Nowhere to be seen. “He signed me up for that stupid internship.”

“So?”

“So, I didn’t want to sign up for that shit! I told him that two months ago. It’s not my fault he didn’t hear me.”

“Oh, he heard you. You’re too loud for anyone not to hear you,” he said, letting me in on the fact that I had been yelling. I tried to ignore the stares that were turning in our direction. “He just cares about you too much to let you waste away. He wants to help you do something with your life. Can’t you see that? He wants you to give a damn.”

“He should worry about himself. He’s not my fucking family.” Even as I said this, I knew the words weren’t true. By the look on Jean’s face, he knew the same. There was no anger in his expression, just pity. I hated that even more.

“Look, Eren,” he said through a sigh, “We all miss Mikasa. We’re all upset about it. But you can’t
just let everything pass you by. If she’s gonna come back, then she’ll come back. Don’t throw your life away waiting.”

“This isn’t about Mikasa!” Another lie.

“Bullshit.”

I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks as anger boiled in my belly. How was it any of his business? What the hell did he know? Not that he wasn’t right on the money, of course, but I would never admit that to him or anyone.

“Just stay out of this, Jean,” I said as I started to walk past him.

He stopped me by grabbing my arm, and I wondered somewhere in the back of my mind if he knew how stupid of a mistake that was. The look on his face told me that he didn’t care.

“You’ve always been a fucking asshole, even before Mikasa left. I know we don’t get along, and I don’t care if we do.” Jean took a breath and released my arm. “But I do care about Armin, and I’m not going to sit here and watch him cry over you. I get that you’re hurting, all right? I get that. But he’s hurting, too, and you have been nothing but an asshole to him since the day she left. I’m tired of picking up the broken pieces of him every day. So you better get your act together, Jaeger, or stay the fuck away from him. Either way, I’m done seeing him hurt.”

I really was a fucking asshole, wasn’t I?

I stood there in stubborn, stony silence, but it wasn’t necessarily by choice. What could I really say to that? I had used Armin for everything since the day she left; both for comfort and as an emotional punching bag. I had no excuses to cover my ass this time. I hated to admit it, I really did, but Jean was right.

“Fine, whatever,” I shoved a hand through my hair and avoided looking at Jean. “Whatever, okay? I’ll go to the stupid internship. If he wants it that bad, then fine. Whatever. Whatever.”

“Say whatever again.”

The teasing lilt in Jean’s voice did nothing good for my mood. I shot him a pointed glare, cracked the lid on my water, and chugged half its contents into my empty stomach.

“Come on, Jaeger,” Jean said and slapped me on the back. I had to choke down the water before it spluttered out of my mouth. “Armin’s waiting in Miss. Hill’s classroom.”

Miss. Hill was a gullible young teacher who just happened to have the world’s comfiest couch. Jean had made a habit of flirting his way into the room during lunchtime hours, and I was baffled by the fact that Miss. Hill still hadn’t caught onto the fact that he and Armin were more than a little cozy together. Whether she was aware of Jean’s preferences or not, we had all benefited from the arrangement as half of second period’s English congregated there on a daily basis.

“Yo, Eren!” Connie held up his hand in greeting when I walked into the room with Jean. “Didn’t think you were gonna show today.”

“Did you bring food?” Sasha questioned from her perched position on the couch’s armrest. Her eyes were already scanning me for any hint of a crumb.

“You already ate, Sasha!” Connie’s voice was far more incredulous than it should have been.
Sasha’s insatiable appetite was practically the school mascot.

Watch out, Sina Titans. We have the Shinganshina Stomach.

“I know, but I’m still hungry,” Sasha sighed, her shoulders sagging a little as she moped.

“You’re always hungry,” I muttered, folding my arms. It was the first thing I had said since entering the room, and I tried to ignore the hopeful look in Armin’s eyes when he looked up at me.

“Hey.”

I hated the uncertainty in his voice. I knew he was waiting for me to go off on him again. To be honest, I wasn’t sure if I would to be able to stay calm, but I was going to try.

“I’m still pissed off at you.” Oh my god, I sucked. I couldn’t even manage a hello.

“Yea, I know you are,” he said with a small, shy smile. He was still walking on eggshells, but I could see he had more confidence now. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have.”

“No, you should have,” I interrupted him with words I didn’t believe. “This is good for me. I need this.”

No, I didn’t. I needed to crawl into a hole and die, but that was never going to be an option. Besides, I wasn’t the sulking type. I was far more likely to scream, yell, and throw a fit, just as I had been for months now. In truth, all I wanted to do was track Mikasa down and kick her ass for walking out.

“Really?” The smile that brightened Armin’s face made me want to believe the words I had said. In that moment, I could see why Jean had fallen for him so quickly. Armin was my daily reminder that I had no idea what was going on in my pants.

“Really,” I said, and it took all of my efforts to keep my voice optimistic. “So the internship meeting is tomorrow. Where at?”

“It’s just a general meeting in the cafeteria,” Armin’s voice was chipper now, “Just to go over the basics of the internship. We’ll be going to Survey Corp. a few days after that. They’re going to give us the exact date tomorrow.”

“Sound great.” The hell it did. “I’ll be there.” Dragged, kicking and screaming.

What the hell had I gotten myself into?

“Are you sure you don’t want me to come up?” Armin had his hand on his keys, ready to pull them from the ignition as I got out of the car.

“Nah,” I waved my hand dismissively, “I’ve got a lot of homework to catch up on and I want to veg for a bit before that. I didn’t get a lot of sleep last night.”

In truth, I just wanted to lock myself away in my room for the night and attempt to figure out how my life had turned out this way. I didn’t need the person responsible for the change sitting there in my living room.

“Alright,” Armin’s tone told me he was more than a little suspicious. I couldn’t blame him. I didn’t do homework. “Listen, I have my cell on me if you need to talk.”
“Armin,” I started, but that was all I had to say. Telling him to drop the subject wouldn’t be necessary.

“Make sure you wear something nice tomorrow,” he quickly changed the subject before rolling up his window. The look he gave me was probably unintentional, but I suddenly felt self-conscious about my clothes.

I watched him pull off into traffic and then turned to enter the building. There was a black limo idling on the curb, but I didn’t give it much thought. Trost Tower housed more than a few elites and it wasn’t uncommon to see limos and expensive town cars coming and going.

I threw my bag into the corner as I entered my bedroom and flopped face first down onto my bed. A loud groan escaped my chest as every ounce of anger I had bottled up today was released. I felt like someone had popped a cork on a bottle of poison and I was drowning in some vile liquid.

Speaking of which, I was starving.

After much negotiation, my stomach managed to convince my legs that some kind of movement had to happen. I dragged myself into the kitchen, scratching the back of my head along the way. I had skipped both breakfast and lunch, and the lack of food was finally taking its toll on my body. It had made me irritable, which I usually was regardless, but the dizziness was an unwelcomed side effect.

I could feel my stomach rumbling in excitement. I opened the fridge. I was going to have some…

I searched the shelves. Some…

“Some nothing,” I muttered, my brow furrowed in confusion. When was the last time we had gone shopping for food?

Slamming the fridge door shut, I walked to the front door. Like hell I was going to get into an argument with my mom over this now. The sun was already starting to set and I didn’t have the energy to yell. I just wanted food.

I repeatedly smashed my finger against the upside down triangle as I stared impatiently at the elevator doors. In a foodless haze, I was convinced that abusing the button would send the doors flying open. With any luck, doughnuts would pour out when they did.

With a pleasant ding that made me want to shoot it, the elevator opened its doors.

“Finally!” The word was nothing but a frustrated growl as I walked onto the elevator. “About fucking t-“

I stumbled, and barely managed to keep myself upright.

The person standing in the elevator was short, but undoubtedly male. He had a body that most girls would kill for; a slender build with nothing but perfect muscle definition. He didn’t have the curves of a woman, nor would I ever have described him as too skinny. His body looked as if it had been carefully thought out and then chiseled from stone by some Renaissance sculptor.

I could see the lines of his abs through the tight material of his black shirt, and it wasn’t until he cleared his throat that I realized I was still standing awkwardly in the elevator doors.

I looked up, and my mind went blank.

His black hair was parted down the middle and didn’t stop until it reached his shoulders. I had to
remind myself that he was a man, which should have been obvious by his angular features. I had seen men with long hair before, but I had never seen any that made me outright question my sexual preference.

His steel blue eyes narrowed. He was wearing black eyeliner, and somehow that just wasn’t fair.

“What are you staring at? Get in.” His voice was sharp on the command, and I felt it like a jolt of electricity through my body. I stepped onto the elevator before I had even realized I obeyed the command.

The doors chimed happily once more as they finally shut, and the sound woke me from my haze.

“Sorry,” I muttered, and leaned into the corner furthest from the man. The button for the ground floor was already lit.

“Is it a habit?”

I looked up at the question, confused, “What?”

“Staring at people,” he explained, regarding at me with a passive expression that told me he wasn’t actually interested in the answer. “It’s creepy.”

“I wasn’t staring,” my voice was defensive despite the fact that I knew what I said was a complete lie.

“Sure, kid.”

His patronizing tone pissed me off almost as much as the word ‘kid’ did. Almost.

“Whatever. Am I not supposed to stare at what you’re wearing?”

He looked down at his own body, and I saw the corner of his mouth lift just slightly. He was wearing a piece of tight black fabric that couldn’t legally be called a shirt and leather pants that clung to his hips in a way that was by all means criminal. There were boots on his feet and his nails were painted black. If I had to guess, he was some lowlife thug that had wandered in from the streets. But if that was the case, what was he doing on the top floors of Trost Tower?

“Do you live here?” The question was out of my mouth before I could catch it.

The look in his eyes told me he wasn’t sure whether I was smartass or just stupid. After a beat, he seemed to decide on the latter, “Smart as a whip, aren’t you, kid?”

I tried not to grimace when I heard the word.

“I sure hope that’s not how you try to pick up girls,” he continued, and I could almost hear the amusement coloring his voice. I didn’t look up to see if emotion was mirrored in his eyes. “Do you always state the obvious?”

“You could be visiting,” I offered. After a few moments of silence, I looked up to meet his incredulous stare.

“On the top floor?” The condescending tone in his voice made me want to dig a hole and take the express route down. “Do I look like some high class hooker?”

“Not high class, no.” Goodbye, brain. You’ve officially become useless.
The glare he fixed on me could have froze Hell and sent the Devil skating for his life. I didn’t know how such a short person could make me feel so small, but he managed to do so in that one look.

The elevator chimed. I was ready to bolt out the doors the second the gap was big enough, but he caught me before I could. He put a hand against the panel and his fingers curled around it to keep the door from closing. I was waiting for him to hit me; beyond certain that was where this was going.

But I never was good at knowing how things were going to turn out.

“‘I’m not a hooker, kid.’” The word stung more than it should. “‘But if I was…’”

He leaned into me then, and I felt the air rush out of my lungs. His lips brushed against the lobe of my ear, and suddenly I didn’t know my name anymore. I didn’t know anything anymore.

“If I was,” he repeated in a deep, husky voice that turned my insides into jelly, “You could never afford me.”

The elevator doors were closed before I realized he had gone.

Suddenly I wasn’t hungry anymore.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Wow... just wow. I still haven't gotten to the point that I expected to be at by the end of the first chapter! Not that I'm complaining or anything - I enjoy everything the characters have to say, but damn. I've been looking forward to what's coming up, but we're not quite there yet. Next chapter, definitely.

Oh! And as for the last word of this chapter... I'm just going to add in that I tried to write so many different endings, and that is literally the only thing that Intern!Eren was giving me. Sometimes you just need an expletive, I guess.

Thank you to everyone who gave me a kudos or a follow on Tumblr! ^_^ If you have any comments/questions about the chapter or the characters, feel free to ask me at lootibles / lusty-levi on Tumblr.

The hallway was dark, save for the strip of yellow light that spilled across the floor from the kitchen. I watched as two black shadows danced around in it, gliding in and out before coming together in a screaming, black mass.

“This is your fault!” I heard my mom scream, and I tried to focus on the dark shapes still moving in the light. I tried to will them into nothing more than objects. I couldn’t take their screaming anymore.

“My fault? You live here, too. She left you, too!” My father’s voice joined in, and the illusion of shapes was shattered.

I leaned into the wall and closed my eyes, wishing it would stop. Wishing that Mikasa would walk through the door, laugh off this sick joke, and return things to the way they were. I had been strong before this. I had been a person before she left. Now I didn’t know what I was.

“She didn’t leave because of me,” my mom’s voice was menacing, accusatory. I had never heard it that way before, and something about her tone chilled straight down into my core.

Was it because of me? Had Mikasa left because of something I did? I had to admit, the thought had been plaguing me since the moment she crawled out the window two days ago. I could be the cause of everything. Everyone always told me I was a little shit, and perhaps she had come to realize the same thing. Maybe she couldn’t deal with it anymore.

I slid down the wall until my ass touched the floor, and it sent a cold shock up my spine. My hands were in my hair, twisting the strands around my fingers as they curled and my nails dug into my scalp. I rocked in place, but was not consciously aware of the movement. My insides were frozen, and my mind was lost. The only thing I could focus on were the screaming shadows still moving across the strip of light on the floor.

I stared, willing them to leave.

“What are you staring at, kid?”

My head snapped up towards the sound and I winced when my eyes caught the light of the elevator.
I pressed the heels of my palms against my eyes, rubbing them as I tried to adjust to the sudden brightness. What was going on? I could have sworn I was sitting in the hallway of my house.

My old house that I had moved out of. Three months ago.

“Are you just gonna sit there like that?” The voice spoke again, and I could practically feel the deep reverberation thrumming through my body, sending my heart into a hurried beat. “It’s creepy.”

I stumbled as I stood up, hands still pressed to my eyes. “Shut up.”

“Oh, it speaks,” the voice was amused.

“I said shut up.” First kid and now it? I wasn’t sure if I was moving down the totem pole or not.

“Why don’t you make me?” His tone was playful, but there was danger in it, floating just below the surface.

I dropped my hands to my sides and shot him a deadly glare. Or rather I tried to make it seem deadly, but I’m pretty damn sure it was caught between awe and arousal. His beauty was intimidating; to the point that I was sure it would kill me if I stared at him for too long.

“You’re staring again, kid.” I really hated that fucking pet name.

“So what if I am?” I challenged, and almost faltered when I saw sick curiosity light his eyes.

“Suddenly you have such an attitude,” he took his time with the words, his voice deliberately teasing, “Where was that earlier?”

“I called you a low class hooker. That didn’t count?” I asked, and somewhere in the back of my mind I wondered how I had suddenly become so fearless around him. I had barely been able to form words before.

“Ah, how could I forget,” his tone was flat, humorless. I tried to ignore the way his glare sent shivers through my body.

“So, how much do you cost, anyway?” Again with the bravery. I was on a roll. Granted it was a roll straight down a steep hill and into an early grave, but hey. Beggars can’t be choosers.

He stared at me for a long moment, and I started to think of the ways I would like to die if he was kind enough to let me choose.

“Oh?” The sound was deep, throaty, and sent a shock straight down into my groin. He was on me before I had time to process that he was even moving. His lips were at my ear and his hand was sliding down my stomach and towards a part of me that throbbed harder than my heart. “That depends on what you want me for.”

My guttural cry was smothered in my pillow. I laid there in silence, my mind slowly turning on and adjusting to the realization that I was in my bed and it had all been a dream. I couldn’t stop the frustrated moan that left my lips, and I quickly jerked my blanket back over my head to block out the sun. Fuck school, I was not leaving this bed. I could miss one day.

A loud buzz sounded from my bedside table, and I slowly pulled the cover back to stare hatefully at my phone. Armin’s gleeful face was flashing on the screen, waiting for me to answer. I argued with myself, lost, and fumbled to answer the phone before the call ended.
“Yea?”

“Eren, are you almost ready? We’re going to be late for the meeting,” his voice was concerned, cuing me into the fact that I was already running behind. But for what?

“Meeting?” I muttered, pinching the bridge of my nose. Damn it, my head hurt.

“Oh, come on,” his voice was exasperated. “The internship meeting.”

So much for staying in bed all day, “Right. Yea, right. I’ll be down in a second. Hang on.”

“Hurry up,” was his answer, and then the line went dead.

I tossed my phone back onto the dresser and pulled back the sheet to find the mess I had made. I would be washing these again today, but for once it wouldn’t be from a nightmare.

Damn that attractive midget.

I rolled out of bed and into the world’s fastest shower. Armin was patient, for the most part, but I knew he would never let me live it down if we were late for this meeting. I had myself dressed and out the front door in record time, although my hair was still wet and I wasn’t entirely sure my clothes were suitable.

I heard the elevator chime and stepped into the blessedly free space, pushing the button for the ground floor. My eyes drifted towards the corner that the man had occupied the night before and I tried not to recall my dream. And failed.

I had never given much thought to my orientation before, mostly because I had never felt a strong attraction to anyone. Armin had been open about his sexuality since the first week of high school, and I had never shot down the possibility that I might share the same interests. Now I was sure I did.

The doors opened on another gleeful chime and I walked out, promptly slamming right into the bare, muscular chest of the very man who had been occupying my mind since last night. His hands caught my upper arms before I could stumble backwards and fall on my ass. I tried not to linger on the way his fingers were curled around my biceps.

“Watch where you’re going, kid.” The world’s worst pet name stung almost as much as the reprimand.

“Sorry, I’m in a hurry,” I hated apologizing, but I was the one who ran into him. I chanced a quick glance at him to find his hair covered by a fluffy white towel. There were small beads of sweat glistening on his chest and shoulders. He must have come from the gym.

“Yea, definitely a habit of yours,” he said.

“What?”

“Staring,” he released my arms and gave me a sharp flick to the forehead, “Stop it. It’s creepy.”

He didn’t wait for my response and walked past me to get on the elevator. I turned and watched at the doors slid shut. I would have thought about following if my pocket hadn’t begun to buzz.

“I got ready as fast as I could.” I said to Armin as I walked outside. He still had the phone to his ear, but pocketed it when he saw me. There was a mixture of relief and annoyance in his eyes.

“I just don’t want to be late. It’ll make a bad impression,” he paused for a beat, looking me over,
“‘That’s what you’re wearing?’”

“Be happy I have clothes on,” I said as I spun him towards the car and opened the passenger side door. I sunk into the seat and remembered my safety belt for once.

The drive to school was quick and free of traffic, which was surprising for a Friday morning in this city. Armin had already informed our first period teacher that we would be missing class for the meeting, so we were able to go directly there.

Jean flagged us down when we entered the room and pulled Armin into the seat beside him. Why was I not surprised that Jean had been roped into this as well? Hell, he was probably the one who told Armin about it in the first place. I dropped into the empty seat next to Connie and waited for the teacher to drone on about how exciting and important an opportunity this blah, blah, blah.

“You’ll be expected to dress nicely, of course,” the teacher gave me a pointed look, which immediately pulled me out of the daydream I’d been having.

“What do you mean by that?” I snapped before my brain could catch up. “What’s wrong with what I’m wearing?”

“I didn’t say there was anything wrong with what you’re wearing,” she said hurriedly, but her voice was a little too defensive for that to be true, “We would just like for you to be a little more… coordinated.”

I heard Jean snicker to my right and had to remind myself, yet again, that Armin would not be thrilled if I rearranged his boyfriend’s face.

“Were your eyes even open when you got dressed this morning?” Jean spoke up, clearly not ready to let the subject die there. “Plaid pants? I get that you don’t have any style, but did you really have to steal the pants off a senior citizen?”

That fucker.

My nails were biting into my palms, and my knuckles were turning white. Armin couldn’t have liked the horse face that much; he might actually appreciate some rearranging after all.

“Jean,” Armin warned and Jean leaned back in his seat. He kept the smug smile on his face. I wanted to wipe it off with my fist.

With a herculean effort, I turned my attention back to the teacher. I spent the rest of the meeting in stony silence, determined to drown out the babble with my own thoughts. It worked, more or less. I didn’t realize the meeting was over until Jean pushed down on my shoulders, jolting me out of my reverie.

“You looked like you wanted to pound my ass,” Jean said with a laugh.

“I figured I’d leave that to Armin,” I retorted. Armin squeaked beside me and I glanced at him to see his cheeks reddening with embarrassment. I couldn’t help but smirk, “So, when are we going to start this thing?”

“Weren’t you listening at all?” Connie leaned back in his seat to look at me. He raised one eyebrow before flashing a grin, “‘Cause I wasn’t either.” He turned to Armin, “So, when are we starting?”

“I can’t believe you weren’t listening,” Armin started.
“Sure ya can,” Connie was still grinning from ear to ear, “It’s us. And we’d be lost without ya, honey.”

“Don’t call him that,” Jean said with a frown.


“Oh yea, you’re definitely the smooth talking type,” Marco laughed.

“Smooth as silk,” Connie said with the same stupid grin still plastered on his face.

“If that silk were sandpaper,” I interjected before turning back to Armin, “Seriously, when does this shit start?”

“On Monday,” Armin’s cheeks were still flushed, “Which means you have the weekend to get something halfway decent to wear.”

“Yea, gramps. If they see you in those pants, they’ll probably just send you home,” Jean smirked.

“I believe that’s called ageism,” Armin followed up. I groaned.

“You, too, Armin? What did I ever do to you?” I was pretty sure I already knew the answer.

“Probably the ass comment,” Marco offered, reading my mind. Jean laughed heartily, smacking Marco on the back.

Armin was red again, and suddenly I felt better.

“Come on,” he muttered, rubbing at his cheeks, “We need to get to class.”

Armin glanced towards Jean and Marco, and then looked away just as quickly. I met his eyes and he gave a barely noticeable shake of his head before turning his gaze down towards the ground. What the fuck was that about?

I didn’t have the chance to talk to Armin for the rest of the school day, although it wasn’t for lack of trying. Every time he saw me in the hall, he turned and walked the other way. I couldn’t find him anywhere in the cafeteria or Miss. Hall’s classroom. I was close to breaking into the principal’s office to scream his name over the loudspeaker to get his attention when he caught me at my locker.

“I’m starving,” Armin muttered, his expression morose. “Do you want to go get something to eat on the way home?”

I wanted to call him out on the fact that he was acting as if he hadn’t just avoided me all day like I had a severe case of leprosy. His face stopped me from doing so. “Yea, sure. Where do you wanna go?”

“That new burger joint?” he had a hopeful lilt in his voice.

“The one with the big ass burgers, right? Yea, sure, I could eat some titans,” I said with a laugh, slamming my locker shut.

Colossal’s had just opened up a few weeks back, boasting some of the largest burgers in the city. They had aptly named their burgers ‘Titans.’ All of the students at Shinganshina High had made it a personal challenge to eat as many as their stomachs would handle. I was still trying to get past two,
but I was proud of that. Fitting one in was impressive enough.

“What would you like to order?” Annie’s face was as pissed off as it always was when I stepped up
to the counter. I wasn’t quite sure whether that face was reserved for me or if it had stuck that way
from years of use.

“Well, the Colossal Challenge does look tempting…” I drawled, hoping for a laugh or even a smile.
The Colossal Challenge involved eating a burger the size of five regular titans, with a one-pound side
of fries. I would need an army to take it down.

“Do you have thirty bucks to blow on something you’ll probably only eat five bites of?” Her
expression didn’t change as she said this, trying to make it clear that I was wasting her time.

“Just one titan and a side of fries,” I said with a roll of my eyes.

“That’s what I thought,” she spoke as she typed in my order. I paid and moved over to the side to let
Armin through.

I watched Annie’s expression alter just slightly as she spoke to Armin. Her eyes were softer, and I
could almost make out the small curl of her lips. Maybe that expression really was just reserved for
me.

“She’s kind of a bitch,” I muttered to Armin as we walked to an empty table with our trays.

“She just hates working here,” he explained, taking a seat, “If you hated being somewhere for most
of your week you’d be really pissed off, too.”

I didn’t bother to point out that I hated where I was, both in school and out.

“So, what’s up with you and Jean?” I decided to turn the conversation on him instead. Armin almost
gagged on his soda and set down the cup, coughing to clear his airways.

“What?” He spluttered between coughing fits.

“Earlier today, during the meeting,” I watched the color drain from Armin’s face and almost lost my
nerve. “You gave him a really funny look when he was talking to Marco. Is everything alright?”

“Yes! Everything’s fine! It’s just,” Armin looked down, picking a sesame seed off his bun. He let out
a sigh before continuing, “I mean, they’re really close. I guess it has me a little nervous. They’ve
been friends since they were kids, and they have a tight bond. I’m worried.”

“We have a tight bond, and you don’t see Jean getting worried that I want to plow your ass,” I said
with a grin before biting into my burger.

“Oh, gross! Don’t say that!” Armin waved his hands in front of himself, as if he could shoo the
imagery away. “Jean knows we’re not like that. I mean, he knows you’re not like that.”

Now it was my turn to choke. I coughed hard before grabbing my soda, chugging down a few gulps.
Armin stared at me, his expression becoming increasingly suspicious.

“Eren?”

“Sorry, went down the wrong pipe,” my voice was raspy and I cleared my throat before speaking
again, “So, Marco’s gay?”

“Huh?” Luckily my blunt comment was enough to derail Armin from the previous topic. I wasn’t
ready to talk about sexual fantasies with attractive elevator midgets yet. “Ah, yea. He actually told Jean about it this week. It was a pretty big deal.”

“And now you’re worried that they’re being more than buddies,” I said this with a nod, not really questioning Armin’s train of thought. I sipped on my soda.

“Well, yea. It’s kind of hard not to, I guess,” he murmured, casting his gaze down at his plate. Color stained his cheeks, and his hands clenched into fists at his sides. He gave a small huff, clearly frustrated with himself, “I’m a bad person for thinking that, right? I shouldn’t blame Jean for having friends.”

“You’re not, though. Not really,” I took another bite and paused to chew before continuing, “You’re jealous. That’s normal, right? I’d probably be jealous, too.”

“Yea, but you’re the hot-headed type. I would expect you to be jealous,” Armin said with a small smile.

“I guess so,” I admitted, “But it’s still normal. Have you talked to Jean about it?”

“No. No, I can’t,” Armin fidgeted with his paper napkin, giving a quick shake of his head to back up his words. “I don’t want him to know about it. I don’t want to get into a fight over this.”

“Armin, if I noticed that you’re upset then he probably has, too,” I paused, considering what I had just said. Jean was kind of thick, “Nah, never mind. He’ll never notice.”

“I can handle it. I’ll get over it,” Armin’s voice was timid, and I knew he didn’t believe the words himself. “If it gets worse, I’ll talk to him. Okay?”

He looked up at me then, his eyes pleading. I held up my hands, “Hey, your secret’s safe with me. I’m not about to blab anything you say to horse face.”

“He doesn’t look like a horse, Eren!” his voice was defensive, but he was smiling now. “Jean’s sexy!”

“Oh yea. Sexiest horse alive,” I gave him a wink, “You ride ‘im, cowboy.”

“Eren!” Armin hid his face in his hands to block the blush that was now coloring his cheeks. I laughed and took another bite of my burger.

The sun had long since set when Armin finally rolled up to Trost Tower. We had gone to the arcade after Colossal’s, and threw away a few hours and dollars into the machines. It was a Friday night, so there was no curfew. Not that there ever was in my house, but I still lived under the illusion of one.

“Maybe we can go shopping tomorrow and find you something decent for Monday,” Armin offered as I got out of the car. I wasn’t sure if the comment was meant as another joke about my fashion sense, but I shot him a glare either way.

“Yea, I’ll call you,” I shrugged my backpack higher onto my shoulder.

I walked into the building, grateful that it was late enough to avoid any more stares. Although I still wanted to flatten his face, Jean wasn’t exactly wrong when he said that my pants looked like I had mugged the elderly. I had every intention of cutting them up and lighting them on fire the moment I was in my room. What had I been thinking about this morning?
I stepped on the elevator, pausing when I heard, “Hold up!”

I knew that voice too well, despite the fact that I had only heard it a handful of times. I started mashing my thumb against the button to close the doors, praying that they would shut and save me from the humiliation of being seen in these pants by him.

Then the clouds opened up and God said, “I hate you, Eren Jaeger.”

The man’s hand swiped through the closing doors and they responded to his will, sliding open once again. He stepped inside and fixed me with a glare that made my blood run cold.

“Are you deaf?” He growled. Then his stare caught sight of my pants and his eyebrows shot up, “No, scratch that. Are you blind?”

“I wasn’t paying attention when I got dressed this morning,” I said in a tone that was more defensive than I would have liked.

“Were you paying attention when you bought those things?” He pointed at my pants. “Where’d you find such a gem, Mad About Plaid?”

“I… what? No! Wait,” my mind was struggling to maintain balance as embarrassment heated my cheeks, “Is that really a store?”

He gave me a supercilious smile and I felt my knees buckle. I hadn’t seen his mouth do more than a small twitch until now, and the sight of any emotion altering those otherwise stony features entranced me. His patronizing voice was just barely enough to remove me from my fixation on his lips, “Why, do you want to go? Don’t have enough hideous pants lining your closet already?”

“My mom bought these! I don’t even like them!” I sounded like a petulant child.

He had a twisted yet indulgent smile; the sort of expression adults reserve for children, “Sure you don’t.”

“I don’t!”

“Then why are you wearing them?” he challenged.

“I told you, I wasn’t paying attention when I put them on!” I tried to turn the conversation on him, “Besides, it’s no worse than what you’re wearing!”

Okay, that was a lie. It was one of the biggest lies I had ever told, and it was clear by the expression on my face that I was nothing short of turned on at the sight of him. It was an immense achievement that I had managed to hide just how aroused I was. I didn’t want to give him another reason to comment on my pants. ‘Party in Plaid’ was all I could hear.

“Don’t knock the clothes,” he snapped, and I could tell I hit a nerve.

“You look like you live in a club,” I sneered, wanting to dig a little deeper.

He was wearing a black fishnet shirt, the material clinging to him in a way that showed each and every hard, muscular ridge of his abdomen. His nails were still painted black, although I only caught a glimpse of them before he curled them into fists and folded his arms. He leaned back against the same corner he had occupied the night before, and the elevator began to move. I hadn’t noticed he had pushed the button for his floor.
“You say that like it’s a bad thing,” he said, his steely blue gaze trained on me.

“Well, no one really dresses like that,” I shrugged, trying to mimic his stance by folding my arms.

“I do,” he pointed out, his expression passive, “And so does everyone where I work.”

“Where do you work?” I couldn’t keep the intrigue out of my voice. He pissed me off, but I was desperate to know more about him.

“The Wall,” his voice curled the words in a slow, sensual way and a smirk quirked the corner of his mouth. I felt like I was missing out on some relevant piece of information.

“And what’s that?” I rolled my eyes, trying to seem like I didn’t care at all. I did.

“Oh, right,” his tone catty; something I had never heard from a man before. Somehow it worked for him. “You’re not old enough to know what that is yet. My mistake.”

He said this with a little roll of his eyes, and I felt the anger boil up inside, “Whatever. We can’t all be fifty.”

“Coming from the brat wearing grandpa’s pants,” he put a hand to his chest, feigning hurt, “Ouch, my heart.”

I let the comment on my pants slide, “How old are you, anyway?”

“Twenty four,” his voice was dismissive as he curled one hand towards his face, looking at his nails, “Which would make me twenty years older than you.”

“I’m not four!” I yelled, stung.

“You sure act like it,” he threw back. He gave a flick of his wrist and pointed one long finger at the line of numbered buttons, “Gonna check your floor off or what?”

I stared up at the numbers ticking past as we continued our ascent and realized we had already passed my floor. Shit. Where did he live, anyway? I turned my gaze back to the numbers and felt my eyes widen when I spotted the glowing PH. I spun to face him.

“You live in the penthouse?” I gasped, incredulous. How did a guy like him get into the penthouse of Trost Tower? There wasn’t a club in the city that would generate enough wealth to manage a feat like that.

“Yea, so?” he raised one perfect eyebrow, as if to say it didn’t matter at all.

“So, you’re rich,” I blurted out, “Really rich. Or you’re visiting someone who’s really rich.”

“Would you drop the hooker shit?” he snapped, “It’s my place. I live here. I’m not visiting anyone. Got it?”

The tone in his voice keyed me into the fact that I needed drop the conversation immediately, if not sooner. “We already passed my floor.”

“You’re a real brain trust,” he muttered, his gaze lifting to the number as the elevator chimed our arrival. The doors slid open and I felt my breath catch in my throat at the sight of the white marble foyer. I couldn’t even see the other end of his apartment, but what I could see was decked out in opulence. I had to remind myself that I was not allowed inside, and it was almost impossible to keep my feet rooted in their place.
“Are you even listening, kid?” The look he shot me led me to believe he had already asked me something more than once. He was holding a small gold key in the lock above the PH. “What’s your floor?”

“62,” I said, watching him hit the button.

“The age you need to be to wear those pants. Got it.”

He stepped out of the elevator and I felt myself moving forward after him. My hand caught the door before it could close, blocking the sensor. “I’m going to burn the pants.”

He paused and turned to look at me, “Good choice.”

I stood there, wracking my brain for something else to say. I wasn’t ready to go down to my floor. I didn’t want to end the conversation yet. He stared at me with expectant eyes, “What are you doing, kid?”

“I’m not a kid, stop calling me that, “ I snapped, stung yet again by the horrible pet name, “I’m seventeen.”

“Still a kid,” he countered.

“We’re only seven years apart,” I shot back. Why did I say that? Why did it matter?

“Great, only a second grader apart,” he said with a hint of amusement in his voice. There was something in his eyes I couldn’t quite place. For a fleeting moment of desperate hope, I thought he might be intrigued, too.

“It’s not that far apart,” I pushed. For some reason I needed him to understand there wasn’t a huge gap between us.

“Whatever you say, kid,” he accentuated the last word and I tried to hide my flinch.

“I said stop calling me that,” I sighed, “My name’s Eren.”

“Well, Eren,” he leaned close and I felt the air leave my lungs. “Why don’t you hurry up and get out of my doorway before the alarms start to go off?”

“What’s your name?” I blurted out.

He paused, as if considering the question for more than it was. As if the answer could possibly be more than one word. Then a salacious smile spread across his lips and he fixed me with a provocative stare that made me forget his eyes had ever been cold, had ever been anything except for searing hot. I wasn’t even sure if my legs were still holding me up, and when his hand gripped my wrist I realized I didn’t care if I could walk again after this.

He leaned close, so close that I could feel his hot breath on my lips. It smelled like dark spices, and my mouth started to water. I could practically hear the smirk in his words as he purred, in a deep, husky voice, “Call me… Corporal.”

He pushed my hand free from its hold on the door and I stumbled back, breathless. I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out. The last thing I saw before the doors slid shut was that smirk. I could see it even after the elevator dinged its arrival at my floor. I’m not sure how I managed to get from the elevator to my bed, but I was glad to have the pillow to smother my frustrated moan.
Fuck.
I had never thought of myself as the stalking type.

Somewhere between the 62nd and ground floors of Trost Tower, I had convinced myself that I was going to the gym so that I could work out - for health reasons, of course. I was wearing dark blue jeans and a brown shirt, neither of which were suited for a heavy work out session, or so I assumed. I had never set foot into Trost's top-rated gym, and I had only a faint notion of how to find its location. Nevertheless, I was certain that I was going to the gym to get a rock hard body. And that wasn’t entirely a lie. The rock hard body I was after just didn’t happen to be mine.

The sadistic midget had taken up residence in my head and he was refusing to leave. I had tried everything to forget him after he had sent my teenage hormones spiraling down into a pool of primal need. I don’t think I ever fully understood the definition of the word ‘lust’ until his body had been pressed against mine. When I felt those words reverberate in his chest and exhale in a throaty purr at my ear, I knew I had no way of turning back.

“Call me Corporal.”

I groaned and pressed my face into my hands. I could still hear the request as if he were standing right at my side. The voice had been in my dreams, taunting me. While I had been grateful for a break from the heart-wrenching nightmares that had occupied my dreams for the past three months, I was not as thrilled to have another set of sheets to clean. I thought about sending him a dry cleaning bill, considering it was his fault. Of course, I would never have the courage to do something like that. I was lucky I was able to form words around him at all. If things kept up the way they were, I would be left babbling in the corner of the elevator.

I had been through about a dozen porn sites by the time I realized no amount of boobs would ever be able to erase his face from my mind. Every time I allowed myself to drift into a sexual fantasy, there he was with that long black hair and those smoldering blue eyes. At first I had thought that it was the
hair that was messing with my mind. He had a slender shape and a short stature, and combined with the long hair I could have almost mistaken him for a girl. But it was that detailed chest and husky voice that made my knees want to resign from their job of holding me up. No girl stood a chance, and by the end of every fantasy I was crying out, muffled into my pillow, the only name I had to call him by.

Corporal. What kind of name was that, anyway? Obviously it wasn’t his real name, and I didn’t think for a moment that it was. As far as fake names went, it was the worst and he had to realize that. But the way he had whispered the name into my ear told me that there was so much more to it. His voice had sent shivers down my spine for reasons other than the fact that he sounded like melted chocolate when he spoke.

There was a command in his voice; one that made me want to get on my knees because somehow I knew that was what he wanted. It was the command that had me walking towards the gym, hoping beyond hope that he would be there.

He wasn’t.

I stood in the doorway of the gym, feeling the heavy weight of disappointment settle into my gut. There were three girls lifting little pink weights, all of them standing in front of the window that offered a view of the pool. I had come down here for nothing, and I had no idea when I would be able to catch another glimpse of him. Maybe this was for the best, though. The more I avoided him, the easier it would be to get him out of my system. This obsession couldn’t be healthy, and it was important that I kick the habit before it started.

I turned away from the door to head back toward the elevator.

“He looks so good! Do you think he’ll come in here next?”

I stumbled and grabbed the door before it could close on my hand, and looked back towards the girls who were still fixated on the pool. Following their eyes, I could understand why they were standing where they were. It offered the perfect view of the Corporal, who was currently poised on the edge of the diving board. I noted that his hair was hidden beneath a black swimming cap, but it didn’t detract from his appeal. I felt my breath catch in my throat, and it must have died there because I couldn’t drag in another ounce of air. My poor lungs.

The Corporal’s body was bare; save for the black spandex swim trunks that did little to cover more than was absolutely necessary. I wasn’t complaining, and I was sure I would kill anyone who did. The sight left little to the imagination, but I preferred to have things spelled out for me. I could see every line of his abdominal muscles as he stretched his arms up, preparing for the dive. With one perfect arch of his body, he sliced through the surface of the water and vanished from my prying eyes.

I was out of the gym and standing beside the pool before I realized I had moved. I pulled in a gasp of air to satisfy the burning in my lungs, trying to remind myself that breathing was a necessary part of life. I watched his body move through the liquid as if it belonged there, each stroke perfect in its precision. As I watched him, I started to feel envious that everything seemed to come so naturally to him. I was bumbling through life and here he was, some kind of god. He was too much with a perfect body, the penthouse suite, and probably thousands of women lining up at his feet.

“You’re not dressed for swimming,” the deep voice snapped me out of my reverie. I stared at the Corporal, who must have exited the pool while I was busy daydreaming.

Don’t stare at the water on his chest. Don’t stare at the water on his chest. Don’t stare-
“What are you staring at?”

Fuck.

“Don’t you need a towel?” I said this, hoping that it could somehow explain away the fact that my eyes were lingering on the water droplets making their way down his body. Stupid, lucky water.

“Don’t you need to mind your own business?”

“I… uhm…” I tore my eyes away from the titillating sight, screaming at myself internally. How was this man able to unravel me like it was nothing? I had never been so entranced by anything in my life. I hated him for making me feel like I had no control over my own thoughts, let alone my own movements. Why was I following him like this? Why was I staring at him? Why couldn’t I stop, and why didn’t I want to?

“Grab me one,” he gave a small jerk of his chin in the direction of the towels to my right. Like it was second nature, my hand shot out and closed around the first fluffy towel it found. I held it out to him, obedient.

Somehow I think he noticed.

He took it from me and his lips twitched with the smallest of smirks. “Thanks, kid.”

I tried not to flinch, and failed. “It’s Eren.”

“Yea, I know what your name is, kid,” he put emphasis on the last word, and this time his smirk was all too obvious. He pushed the towel along his skin, collecting the droplets of water that were left behind. “You’re assuming that I actually care what your name is. For the record, I don’t.”

“Whatever you say, Corporal,” I tried to use the name as an insult, but approval lit up his eyes instead.

“You listened,” he said as he draped the towel around his shoulders. “That’s good.”

I felt satisfaction flare up inside me like a white-hot flame, and cursed it for doing so. I shouldn’t have cared that he approved of anything I did, and yet I felt myself wanting to find other ways to please him. However, being the little shit that I was, I did everything I could to fight back the desire to please. There were other things I wanted to get out of him, questions that I had to ask that I was more than certain he wouldn’t want to answer.

“Why do you want me to call you that, anyway?” I decided to start with the easiest question, the one that had been plaguing my mind since last night. “It sounds like some kind of…”

I trailed off, because I wasn’t exactly sure how to put it into words.

“Some kind of what?”

“I don’t know. Something that you… that a… you know,” I stared at him, hoping that he would understand. If he did, he gave me no indication of it, “Like a sex club thing. Or some S&M shit. Something like that.”

The smile that crossed his lips would have made me fallen on my ass if my hand weren’t still holding onto the cart of towels. In that moment he looked both dangerous and sexual, and I felt myself wanting to run to and from him instantaneously. I’m not sure how I was able to form the next words that came out of my mouth, “So, is it?”
“Something like that,” he said in a deep voice that rumbled over the words. He watched me through hooded eyes, causing a yearning heat to flare up in my belly. Was he trying to make me crazy?

Muddling my mind seemed to be his area of expertise, and I wondered if it was something he did to everyone for a living. I had no doubt that he knew exactly what he was doing to me, and how he was making me feel. Seduction seemed to be something he was too good at it for it not to be well-practiced art. Perhaps this was the line of work he had mentioned last night.

“What’s The Wall?” I blurted out before the thought could escape me.

“You’re too young, so don’t worry about it. It’s nothing you need to know.”

“Is it a club?” I pushed, not willing to let the subject die there.

“Yea, you could say that,” he replied with a small shrug. The white towel slipped slightly and I could see the muscle of his shoulder. I tried not to stare and, with a herculean effort, focused my eyes on his, silently urging him to continue. He gave me an admonishing smile, “It’s a club not suitable for brats your age, and that’s not because you’re not old enough to drink yet, got it?”

“So it’s a sex club?”

“Drop it, kid,” he snapped, and my teeth came together so fast there was an audible click.

“Fine. Don’t tell me about it,” I tried my best to sound indifferent, but I’m sure I sounded like I was sulking. Internally, I was. “Can you at least tell me your name? Your real name.”

“I told you the only name you need to know,” he practically cut me off with the words. “As far as you’re concerned, that is my real name.”

“Nobody would have a name like that.”

“Well, I do,” he said with a roll of his eyes. I could tell I was annoying him now, “You can call me Corporal, or you can no name the fuck out of me. Either way, you’re not getting my real name.”

“If I call you Corporal, does that make you my master?”

Somehow I must have managed to keep the challenging smirk on my face, because he stared at me with incredulous eyes. Internally I was digging a hole into the deepest part of my soul, where I fully intended to lie down and die. My master? Did I really just ask something like that?

“You don’t know what the fuck you’re saying when you use a term like that, do you, brat?” The words were practically a growl, and I tried my best not to shy away from them. His posture had changed, and somehow he looked taller than his small stature could ever allow. Suddenly I felt like the one who was barely clearing five feet. Every muscle in his body was pronounced; his entire demeanor was one of unquestionable power. He looked… intimidating.

It took all I had not to stammer like an idiot and stumble out of the room. “Maybe I do. Maybe I read about it.”

“You don’t strike me as the book smart type, brat,” he emphasized the last word and I suddenly found myself missing my hated pet name. “Have you ever even seen a book? They live in this magical land called a library.”

“I’ve seen books!” At Armin’s house. And at school, where they were pretty much unavoidable.
“Porn mags you steal from your pops don’t count,” he sneered.

“I use the internet for that!”

“Good to know where you go to get your jollies,” he quipped.

I could feel my face reddening, and realized I had to get the hell out of this room before I made a bigger fool of myself. In that moment, as if answering my prayers, my phone started to ring.

I was on that shit faster than Sasha on a potato. I hadn’t even taken the time to see who was calling.

“Hello?”

“Eren? Are you okay?” Armin’s voice was flooded with concern, “You sound like you’re out of breath or something.”

“Yea,” I cleared my throat, trying to compose myself, “Yea, I’m good. What’s up?”

“Did you still want to go shopping today?” There was a hopefulness in his voice that made me worry there was another reason he wanted to go out aside from finding me some non-plaid clothes for Monday. I glanced at the Corporal and decided I didn’t want to get into it over the phone.

“Yea, definitely. I’m already dressed and ready to go. How soon can you be here?”

“Five minutes, depending on traffic,” he said and lingered for a moment. There was definitely something going on. “I… I’ll see you in a bit.”

The line went dead and I stared at my phone, watching the cheerful face of Armin fade from the screen. If I had to guess, Jean had done something to upset him yet again. I tried not to crush my phone in my grip as I shoved it back into my pocket. As if I needed any other reason to hate that horse faced bastard.

“Horse faced bastard? Well, that’s rude. I don’t think I have a horse face,” The Corporal mused over the thought in such a way that I knew he didn’t think I was talking about him. Clearly I had spoken out loud.

“Not you,” I remarked, even though he already knew that, “He’s just some asshole at my school.”

He pointed at the pocket that held my phone, “The one who called you?”

“What?” My brow furrowed and I glanced down at my pants before I realized what he was asking, “Oh, no. That was Armin.”

“Your boyfriend?” he said with a teasing lilt in his voice.

“No! No, he’s not my boyfriend. I don’t have a boyfriend.”

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

A surge of curiosity made every nerve in my body tingle. He didn’t let the subject drop at the teasing remark, and I couldn’t help but wonder why he had pushed further. Why would he ask something like that?

“No, I’m not interested in any girls,” I chose my wording carefully, and searched his face for anything that would key me into what he was thinking. Unfortunately his passive expression gave away nothing. All he did was nod; it was as if that was the only reaction the information was due,
and nothing more.

After two beats of awkward silence, I decided to give up on forcing more out of this conversation and turned on my heel. Armin would be outside soon, and then I could try to lose myself in someone else’s problems. I needed that.

I was almost out the door when I felt a steel-like grip on my arm, pulling and turning me back to him. I stared down into his eyes and tried, unsuccessfully, to keep the surprise from my face and the arousal out of my pants. His body was so close that I could feel the heat from his skin; the scent of him filled my nose and clouded my mind.

He paused to look down between us before speaking, “So you’re not interested in any girls, at all.”

The meaning of the pointed remark was too clear for even me to miss. If I thought my cheeks were red before, I was a fucking stop sign now. Every word in the English language left my mind, and I could practically feel my mind throwing up its hands as if to proclaim, “I’ve got nothin’!”

“I might have someone for you,” he continued, either unaware or uncaring of my current state, “He’s a little older, but you seem to be into that.”

He said the last comment with another look down at my pants, and I died internally. However, a small part of me wondered if I had a reason to celebrate. Was he referring to himself, in some awkward third-person way? He called himself the Corporal, so it wasn’t necessarily a hopeless dream.

“He’s good looking and…” he paused and then leaned closer; as if he were worried that someone else might hear the next part of our one-sided conversation. His lips pressed against my ear and he whispered, “It would really help me out. Think of it as a favor, that I could make worth your while.”

He pulled back and I felt the air push from my lungs. I hadn’t realized I was holding my breath, but the burning sensation told me I needed more oxygen pronto. As I took in a deep gulp of air, I caught the amused glint in his eyes. I felt like I was a toy, and he was a cat happily batting me around the room whenever he felt like it. This was dangerous.

“Think about it,” he said as he set a hand on my shoulder. He met my eyes and held my stare for what felt like an eternity. Then he was gone.

The buzzing in my pocket reminded me that Armin was waiting outside, and I went running out the door as soon as my legs had returned to a solid state. He was standing outside of his car when I walked up to greet him, his arms wrapped around his middle as if he were holding himself together. He looked up at me with an expression that tried too hard to be happy.

“Armin…”

“Hi,” he tried to squeak out the word, but his voice cracked. His lower lip trembled as his composure broke, and he hung his head when his shoulders started to shake. I didn’t need to hear the soft whine to know that he was crying.

“Armin,” I pulled him close and held him against my chest, my arms banding around him like a protective cage. “What happened? What did he do? Do I need to kill him? Because you know I’m fine with that.”

Armin choked out a small laugh at what he assumed was a joke. “No, don’t. You’ll only end up getting hurt.”
“I could take him,” I said with complete certainty.

Armin lifted his gaze to me; there were tears still in the corners of his eyes and little rivers were drying on his cheeks. “It’s not his fault, Eren. He didn’t do anything wrong. It’s my fault. I’m thinking too much.”

I tried not to notice the stares turning in our direction from each passerby. I wanted to punch them all for looking at Armin when he was like this. His pain was his own, and they had no right to see it. “Come on. Let’s get in your car and talk about this.”

I took the keys from Armin when he tried to put them in the ignition, and held them out of his reach when he tried to grab them back. “You’re in no condition to drive.”

“I’ll be fine, Eren,” he said in a watery voice, reaching for the keys again, “I’m just u-upset.”

“Try to say that without hiccupping.” I shoved the keys in my pocket, and he shot me a look that was almost a challenge. But we both knew he wasn’t going to go there.

“I asked him if he liked Marco,” he sighed as he sunk down into his seat, lifting his legs up with him. He wound his arms around his legs and rested his chin on his knees. He was my friend, but damn was he cute. “I asked him if he liked him that way. As in more than a friend.”

“No, wait, that way?” I put emphasis on the word ‘that.’ I was teasing when I shouldn’t have been, but I wanted to make him smile, “Like, that way? Like he like likes him?”

“Eren!”

“O-M-G! What did he say?” I clasped my hands together, doing my best imitation of an excited schoolgirl and probably failing miserably. But Armin started laughing, and that was really all that mattered.

“He said that I was being ridiculous,” Armin muttered when his laughter had finally died down.

“And you are being ridiculous. So what’s the problem here?” I asked as I leaned back in my seat. I could live inside Armin’s car for the rest of my life and be more than content. These seats were damn cushy.

“It was just the way he said it. He sounded defensive, more than I expected him to be,” Armin let go of a sigh that shuddered on the way out before continuing, “I see the way he looks at Marco. I know that look, Eren. It’s the same look he has when he looks at me.”

“So what if Marco gets the look, if you’ve got Jean?” I rested my head back against the seat as I watched him, “Are you that insecure in your relationship that you’re going to read into every little thing Jean does?”

“I didn’t think so, but I might be,” he admitted, picking at the steering wheel with his nail. He closed his eyes and sighed again, “I’m scared.”

“Listen, if you’re that worried, I’ll talk to Marco. I can at least figure out how he feels, and if there’s nothing on his end then there’s nothing to worry about,” I paused, deciding to add it in before he could ask, “I’m not about to talk to Jean because… well, you know how I feel about My Ugly Pony.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call him that,” Armin said, but I noticed the smile that was now on his lips, “And I wouldn’t ask you to talk to him, anyway. But if you could talk to Marco, that might actually
“Consider it done. Now,” I dug the keys out of my pocket and tossed them to him, “Let’s go get me something that isn’t plaid.”

We went to a handful of stores that Armin suggested, and I willingly became his Ken doll for the day. With casual wear, I was usually able to dress myself with only a few exceptions, all of which revolved around a pair of plaid pants there were now charred remains in my waste bin at home. However, I was absolutely hopeless when I was trying to do anything that involved a button-up. Armin, on the other hand, had a natural gift for dressing himself in ways that I had always admired and envied.

“Not bad,” I said, turning in the mirror to admire the latest creation. I was wearing a long sleeved beige button up with a pair of dark brown slacks and a matching vest. It was simple, but sharp. “I like it.”

“You look amazing,” Armin breathed and I glanced at him, raising one eyebrow. He flushed and looked away from me, holding up his hand to hide the fact that his cheeks were glowing red, “Shut up! I like a man in a vest! Don’t judge me!”

“Hey, no judging,” I said with a grin and turned back to the mirror, straightening the vest to give it extra attention. “If you like it that much, then he’ll definitely like—”

My words caught in my throat and my eyes peeled wide as I realized what had just come out of my mouth. I turned slowly to face Armin, who was staring at me with an excited curiosity that perfectly portrayed the schoolgirls I had tried to mimic earlier. As if knowing this, he said, “O. M. G.”

“Don’t.”

“You like a boy?” he practically squealed, and I felt the blood rush into my cheeks. “I thought that you might, but I wasn’t sure! You do, don’t you?”

I opened my mouth to speak, but he cut me off just as quickly, “You do!”

“No, I don’t!” I snapped back, but it didn’t sound believable even to me. Inwardly kicking myself, I turned away from him and acted as if I were suddenly very interested in the buttons on my shirt. Ooo, shiny.

“All right,” Armin said around a small laugh, and I met his gaze through the mirror. There was an understanding look in his eyes that made me want to tell him everything right now. But there was nothing to tell, was there? “You don’t have to tell me anything. Not until you’re ready, at least. Until then, this never happened.”

He paused for a moment, “So, definitely that shirt and those pants.”

“And the vest,” I smiled, turning back to face him, “Because it looks good enough to make you blush.”

“Don’t start,” he warned, holding up a finger. But there was still a smile on his lips, and I knew I was already forgiven.

I picked up a few more shirts and slacks in varying colors, and snagged a few more vests along the way. After I had paid for them, we walked outside, trying to think of what we would do with the remainder of the day. We weren’t halfway to Armin’s car when his phone started to ring. It was Jean.
“Hello?” his voice was timid, yet hopeful. I stepped to the side and walked to the car to let him have his conversation in private.

“He wants me to come over,” Armin said when he had finished. He returned the phone to his pocket and chewed his lower lip, waiting for me to catch on to what he was asking.

“Well, then you better get going,” I smiled. I wasn’t about to make him drag my ass back home and miss out on time with his boyfriend, even if his boyfriend was my least favorite person. “It’s a nice night. I’ll walk home.”

“I’ll see you on Monday?” he asked, his expression relieved.

“Bright and early,” I said, and turned to start walking in the direction of Trost Towers. The majority of our excursion had taken us far away, but the last store was within walking distance to my apartment. I’m sure that Armin realized that before he even considered asking me to walk home.

I heard the loud thrumming beat of the club long before I had reached the doors. It wasn’t far from Trost Towers, within walking distance in fact, and I had to wonder why I had never noticed it before. I had never been on this part of the street so late at night, which was probably the only time the club was actually thriving. The black tinted windows that kept the insides shrouded in secret were the reason I had never noticed it during the day. In the bright sun, this place wasn’t memorable in the least, but at night the red letters of “The Wall” glowed with an intensity that bathed the street in a crimson light.

I started walking towards the steps, entranced and unaware, but a black velvet cord that was attached to the railings on either side stopped me in my place. A loud laugh drew my attention to the woman that stood on the other side with a clipboard in her hand. She had darker hair that was pulled up into a ponytail, large clumps left out of the tie in order to frame her face. Brown eyes shined with amusement from behind a pair of black pointed eyeglasses that must have come out of the 1950s. She wore a long black trench coat that was open enough at the top to reveal the hint of a corset. She was stunning, in the quirkiest of way.

“Where you do think you’re going, honey?” She said this with a wide smile, as if she actually wanted to know where I was headed. “You’re too young to get in here. Even I can see that.” She tapped her glasses.

“I know. I just,” I paused. What was I trying to do? “I’m looking for someone?”

“Oh?” her voice rose in a pitch of pure excitement and intrigue, “Who?”

“The Corporal,” I could only hope that my voice didn’t tremble on the name. I was sure it did, but I continued regardless, “Is he here?”

“Oh, honey, he’s here every night,” she said with a knowing smile and threw in a wink to go with it. “But I still can’t let you in. Sorry about your luck.”

She tapped her clipboard, looked over her shoulder and then back at me, “Don’t think he’s in there right now, though. Might be able to catch him at Trost, if you’re lucky enough.”

“Oh, uhm… thanks. I’ll check,” I stammered out and then turned. As soon as my back was to her, I felt a sharp smack on my ass. I spun around to face her, finally noticing the crop she hand in her other hand.

She let out a raucous laugh, waving the end of the crop in front of my face, “Shoo, honey. You’re
I stumbled backwards and then turned without another word, mostly because I honestly had no idea what to say. There was a blush in my cheeks as I walked back to my apartment at a hurried pace. Were those the kinds of people that he hung out with on a daily basis? I couldn’t decide if I was intrigued or disturbed, but I had settled on a mix of the two when I finally entered Trost Tower.

I scanned the atrium for any sign of the Corporal, but he was nowhere in sight. There was one man hunched over a drink at the bar, his short black hair a mess. Probably someone who had a rough night. I walked towards the elevator, and tried to convince myself that I was not disappointed. Not at all.

“Hey, kid!”

I turned towards the all too familiar voice and my eyes widened. The Corporal approached me from the bar, carrying a drink in one hand and what appeared to be a black scarf in the other. His face had the same deadly beauty from this morning, but his blue eyes were now accented by black eyeliner, as they always were when I saw him at night. His hair, though, was what took away any of the words I had left when I was in his presence. It was short - much shorter than I had seen it the night before. It was still the same inky black color, but it didn't come down far past his eyes and I noted, with a hint of appreciation, that it was undercut. If I had thought he was attractive before, he was downright addictive now.

I stared for a long moment before finally pointing and blurting out, “You cut your hair!”

“What?” He touched his head and his brow furrowed in confusion, “Oh, right. You’ve only seen me with my wig on.”

“Wig?” I questioned, and he held up what I had presumed was a scarf. I stared at the black strands that I had seen on his head only yesterday. “Why do you wear a wig?”

“Ever wanted to be someone you’re not?” he asked, and I had to wonder what he was hiding from. But whether or not he was hiding from anything, I was pretty sure I could relate.

“Every day,” I said with a small shrug, still eyeing the scarf. “Do you always wear that to The Wall?”

“Every day,” he mimicked me, and a smirk twitched the corner of his mouth. I was getting used to the small signs of emotion; I was able to detect them now.

“Listen, about the things I said to you earlier. About the guy,” he looked around us, and seemed to decide that this wasn’t the place to have a conversation. He grabbed my shoulder and I felt a jolt of electricity run through me. I didn’t have time to curse at the way my body reacted to him. He steered me towards the elevator, and I willingly followed. “Come up to my room. We need to talk.”
This one is definitely heavy on Eren and Levi, but I'm more than happy with that. Of course, that's to be expected with an Ereri fic. Finally, this chapter reached the point I had expected to get to at the end of the first chapter! Gaaaah... I'm so excited for what's to come next!

Thank you again to everyone that left comments, kudos, or Tumblr messages! Honestly, you all make my day whenever you send a message! If you'd like to follow me, you can find me at lootibles or lusty-levi (Levi RP blog) via Tumblr.

Hope you enjoy the chapter!

“Knock it off. You looking like a fucking puppy dog.”

I tried to stay consciously aware of the fact that I was bouncing in place, but my brain had long since gone home for the night and my nerves were set on vibrate. I fidgeted with my fingers and reminded myself that Corporal was taking me up to his apartment to talk about another man. Nothing else would be happening, no matter how many sexual fantasies my virgin mind dreamt up. I had never realized how actively horny my mind could be until this night, and it was the perfect explanation as to why I was jiggling like a bowl of jell-o. My sudden bout of stationary hopscotch was a vain attempt to alleviate any boner that might pop up to say hello.

“I had a lot of coffee,” I muttered in a pitiful attempt to disguise the fact that I was as giddy as a schoolgirl about being invited to his room. I wanted to kick myself for reacting this way to a man I barely knew, and filed the thought away for later. A personal ass kicking—it was necessary at this point.

“Aren’t you a little young to drink coffee?” He said, raising one eyebrow as he watched me bounce. I could hear the teasing lilt in his voice and it stung almost as much as the dig at my age. “Sure it wasn’t candy? Get lost in Willy Wonka’s ass for a day? Taste his everlasting gobstoppers?”

“That’s gross.”

“Since when do I ever say anything tasteful?” he shot back and then leaned into the familiar corner of the elevator.

“Not once since I met you.” I shrugged. I didn’t add in the fact that it was his crudeness that drew me to him.

“And never once before,” he said with a passing glance at the floor number that was slowly ticking by. “I hate this thing. What a crappy elevator. I take faster shits than this thing moves.”

I wasn’t sure what sort of look must have crossed my face then, but whatever it was had amused him to the point of a small chuckle. Which was saying something for him, considering his face rarely changed at all. “You look surprised, kid. What, have you never heard anyone talk about taking a shit before? Are you one of those prudes who claims not to fart?”
“No,” I muttered and shifted a little. I had never heard anyone older than me talk in such a crude way. Of course, I was used to those adults being teachers or holding other positions that demanded a certain level of class. Obviously Corporal didn’t come from the same walk of life, and I hadn’t exactly expected him to talk in a way that was well-mannered. However, I had hoped that my first trip into his apartment would have been a conversation that didn’t involve bowel movements. What a romantic. Shits and farts.

“Good. I can’t deal with people who walk around with a stick up their ass.”

“You don’t seem like you can deal with people in general.”

“That’s true,” he agreed and the corner of his mouth twitched. “There are only a select few that I tolerate.”

“Like the girl at The Wall?” I asked and then promptly clamped a hand over my mouth. I didn’t mention that I had gone past his club and I wasn’t planning to do so, but the word vomit had decided to come up and ruin that secret.

“Didn’t I say you were too young to go there?” he chastised and the icy tone coloring his voice was unmistakable. I lowered my hand back to my side and opened my mouth to speak, ready to defend myself, but he cut me off, “Seriously, if I get shut down because your kindergarten ass just had to see what I do for a living, I will give you the beating of your life.”

“I didn’t even go inside!” I exclaimed defensively and then quickly lowered my voice when his eyes narrowed, “I mean, I wasn’t even planning to go there. It just sort of happened.”

“How did you ‘just sort of’ go to The Wall? Nobody ‘just sort of’ goes there.”

“Well, it’s right by Trost. I actually had no idea that it was so close, and I never come from that direction. Not at night, anyway.” I added the last bit because it was true. There were certain parts of the city that you just didn’t walk through after sundown, and that street was one of the few that made me uncomfortable when it was dark and I was alone.

This response seemed to be enough to satisfy him, and he gave a half roll of his shoulders to indicate that he was now indifferent to the matter. After a moment of silence had passed, he looked back at me and fixed me with a stare that was nothing short of playful, another small smirk turning up the corner of mouth, “So, did you see anything… interesting?”

I wasn’t even sure I wanted to linger on that word. The way he had said it had dragged it out into the full three syllables that it deserved, each sound articulated so perfectly and in such a mischievous way that I was absolutely certain I hadn’t seen anything that would be considered the type of interesting he was talking about. Of course, the woman I had met at the door had been remarkable in a peculiar sort of way, but I had the sudden feeling that there was a very good reason the windows of the club had been tinted black. The prying eyes of the streets wouldn’t be able to see what went on behind the closed doors. That probably wasn’t a bad thing.

“Nothing too interesting,” I started, and could have sworn I saw a look of disappointment flash across his features, “There was some strange chick at the front door, though.”

“What did she look like?”

I described her to the best of my abilities; pointing out the details I had remembered such as the bizarre 1950s curved glasses and the long trench coat. Corporal was already nodding when I had started with the color of her hair, but he let me finish with the rest of the description before he spoke, “That’s Hanji. She technically works under me, although at this point she may as well co-own the
business. She handles a lot of the shit that I don’t have the energy to put up with. I’m not surprised that she didn’t let you in. For all her insanity, she’s actually decent with the publicity shit. She knows better than to let some brat fuck up the energy of the place.”

The comment stung, but I decided to ignore it. At least for the time being. I wasn’t about to mouth off and have him take away the invitation. I was getting into that apartment; even if I had to bite my own tongue clean off in order to avoid saying anything stupid. I decided to settle for something that would make him laugh instead.

“She can’t be that great for the club. She’s not the best with invitations.”

“What the hell do you mean by that, brat?”

“She hit me with a whip.”

He tilted back his head and barked out a laugh, genuine amusement lighting up in his features. “Oh, kid. That is exactly why I need her at The Wall’s entrance.”

The elevator arrived at the penthouse and the doors slid open to reveal the ever-stunning view of his apartment. I restrained myself enough to let Corporal walk into the apartment first, despite the fact that my body was ready to leap into the foyer the second the doors were open. He wagged one thin finger in a come-hither motion over his shoulder and continued to walk into the expanse of the room, “Come on in, kid.”

I had come to both love and hate the nickname he had given to me the day we met. While I mostly hated it with a fierce passion, it was still better than being called a brat, which seemed to be the term he reserved for when I had done or said something to piss him off. Kid was something he used over my name on a constant basis, and part of me wondered, or hoped, that there was some level of endearment in the epithet.

I was good at fooling myself.

He walked over to the kitchen island that had a grey marble top that reminded me of his eyes. Stormy and cold, expressionless unless you looked at it in the right light. He set the black wig on its surface and turned to snatch two short glasses from the cupboard. I stared at the wig and tried to recall what it had looked like on his head. I had only seen it twice, I realized after thinking back on my memories. He had a towel draped over his head on his way in from the gym, and a swimming cap on at the pool. Tonight was the first night that I had seen him in his true form.

I had grown so accustomed to seeing him with long hair that the image of him now was still a little jarring. The wig had softened his features to the point that he had appeared almost feminine. Without the wig he had a severe attractiveness that I had never appreciated before. It was like staring at a wolf in its natural habitat; beautiful and deadly all in the same moment.

“That right there,” he pointed at my face with his index finger; his other fingers were curled around one of the glasses he had taken out. “That’s why I’m going to choose you for him.”

“Huh?” I touched my nose, as if that had to be what he was talking about. Was there something on my face?

“Oh, come on,” he exhaled; annoyed with the fact that I was clearly missing something that was so obvious to him. He set the glasses down and grabbed a bottle filled with a smooth amber liquid. “Let’s not pretend like you haven’t been eyeing me like I’m some tasty treat in a candy store.”

I could practically feel the blush flood my cheeks and creep its way up into my ears. Once again I
found myself fidgeting, and my words were caught in my throat. Which was probably the best place for them, considering I had no idea what they would be when they finally came out of my mouth. He knew exactly what to say to send my heart into a panicked flutter and he was more than happy to use his knowledge against me.

He chuckled when I said nothing, “Drink?”

I eyed the liquid and decided that it would be better if I remained in control of my motor functions, “No, thanks.”

“We’re about to negotiate prostituting your body for the greater good,” he remarked as he poured the drink into both glasses. He lifted one and held it out to me, “Trust me, you’ll need this.”

I walked over to the island and took the glass in my hand, surprised by the weight of it. It wasn’t at all like the cheap pieces that we had in my cupboard at home. It was thick, elegantly cut crystal that made the amber liquid shimmer enticingly. I took a small, timid sip and felt the fire hit my tongue and slide down my throat. I suppressed a gag and covered my revulsion with two raised eyebrows, giving a little nod and setting the glass down. I could only hope he didn’t notice how I nudged it away from me.

He glanced at my glass and I noticed the corner of his mouth lift just slightly in his classically emotion-free smirk. He sipped his own drink and set it down on the counter, tracing the rim with his index finger. He was bent over the counter, his other arm resting lazily across the marble so that his hand dangled over the edge. His eyes were hooded and I saw nothing but thick lashes as he stared down at the liquid in his glass. He was, in every sense of the word, exquisite.

“I feel like I should be charging for a peep show.”

The comment snapped me back into focus and I realized that I had been caught staring once again. I could still detect the faint curve of his lips, but his eyes held enough annoyance in them to make me question whether or not I had pissed him off. “This is why I hate being around kids. Brats like you were never taught that it’s rude to stare.”

“My parents failed a lot with me.”

“Stop right there, kid,” he interrupted what was going to be a joke, and I knew I had said something wrong. He held up his hand and nailed me with a ‘I don’t have time for this shit’ glare. “I am not your fucking therapist. I don’t care if your parents tie you to a wall and sacrifice you to Satan on a daily basis; you leave me out of it. We clear?”

“I wasn’t… I mean, I’m not…” I fumbled over the words, completely discombobulated. I hadn’t meant for him to take my comment in a serious light. I was the last person to open up about what was going on in my life, especially when it came to my parents. “Damn it, do you always have to be so blunt?”

“It’s part of my charm,” he replied with a small shrug. He was holding his glass again and waved his hand to the side, causing the liquid to slosh around. “But enough about me. We’re not here to talk about me. Let’s focus on getting you some ass.”

“I don’t want ass!”

“Oh, honey, you’ve wanted ass since the day you were born. It just took seeing mine to get you to realize it,” he crooned. “I’m your real-ass-ation.”

“Are you even aware of what you’re saying?”
“I’m very aware of everything that goes out of and comes into my mouth,” he replied with a salacious smile. I didn’t have to think hard to figure out the double entendre.

“Whatever. I’m not gay,” I said the lie like I meant it.

“And I’m not antisocial. Now we’re both liars.”

I stared at him and set my hands on the marble countertop. I was surprised by how cold the surface was beneath my fingers, and I fanned them out to explore it. The chill stung my palm, but I liked it. I had always found myself drawn to pain, at least in small amounts, and I wondered if that was why I couldn’t admit something so simple to myself. I was shying away from something I knew my body wanted and I couldn’t deny that there was some form of agony in that.

“I’m not lying.”

The sharp clink of glass striking the marble counter was still ringing in my ears when I realized he had pressed me against the kitchen island. My mind didn’t even register that he had moved, so when his hips pressed into mine and called attention to the steady beat throbbing in my pants, I cried out. Embarrassment flooded my body as quickly as it did my face, and I stared at him with an incredulous and betrayed expression, “What are you doing?”

“Proving something.”

His hips pushed into mine once more and the sensation forced my lips to part in a gasp, allowing him to take full advantage. His mouth was on mine before it had closed and his tongue moved without hesitation, gliding across mine in a slick heat that sent arousal coursing through my body. He was invading every inch of my mouth in probing licks, and I couldn’t find enough sense or desire to protest. I could taste an array of intoxicating flavors that were undeniably him, and I felt myself greedily leaning into the kiss. A moan stirred somewhere between us, but I wasn’t sure if it had come from him or me. I didn’t care.

A fire lit in my belly, the desire spreading through me like wildfire. I was losing control of myself in his taste and yet I couldn’t get enough. I needed more. With a newfound confidence, my tongue caressed his, softly at first and then with more insistence. I wanted to taste his mouth. I needed to explore him as thoroughly as he had explored me. My demanding tongue pushed into his mouth and he appeased me just long enough for a good taste. Then he bit the tip of my tongue and I felt a jolt of pleasurable pain shoot all the way into the head of my cock. With a groan, I pushed my hips into his and grabbed a hold of his ass.

He broke away with a laugh and I was left standing there with my arms held out and my face plastered with confusion. “What the hell was that for?”

“To prove something.” He pointed at my pants, which had apparently turned into a circus tent boasting the newest spectacle of the great one-eyed monster. “Hip Hip Hooray! Honey, you’re gay.”

I groaned and leaned over the kitchen island, hiding my face in my hands. I had no way of arguing with him or myself at this point. It was hard enough to ignore the fact that I had ruined more than a few sheets while fantasizing about him on several occasions. Not to mention the fact that I had been trying to find any reason at all to see him since meeting him for the first time. Of course, that didn’t mean that I would feel the same way for just any man. But this whole set-up meant that I could stay around him, even if just for a little longer.

“Fine,” I relented, “Who is it?”
“I’m not about to give you his name right off the bat,” he said, and lifted his glass by the rim to take a sip. What a weird way to hold a drink, I thought, amazed that he didn’t spill it all over himself. “He’s an important man, so I can’t throw his name around like it’s nothing. I’m going to feel you out first, and if I think it’ll work, then you’ll meet him.”

He could spend the rest of eternity feeling me out and leave it at that, for all I cared.

“Why me?” I paused, trying to decide if I really wanted the answer to that. I quickly interrupted him before he could answer, “Why are you trying to set him up with someone?”

“Let’s just say I owe him one…”

I felt the chill shoot down my spine before I realized how eerie his statement was. I had heard it before, but the way he said it was not in the casual way of owing someone a favor in a good sense. There was something menacing in his tone, and his eyes had entered a glacial state I had not yet seen them in before. The way he tilted his head cast a shadow over half of his face, and I knew that I would have seen emotion then if I could have seen his eyes at all.

“Who is he to you?” The question came out before I could stop it, but curiosity kept me from regretting it.

“He’s my not so former, mostly current lover,” he spat.

The chill that spread through me now was for another reason entirely, and I felt my stomach turn uncomfortably. There was a sour taste in my mouth, and I quickly reached for my glass to burn it away with fire. I wasn’t looking at him when I finally spoke, “What’s in it for me?”

“Well, do you like comic books?”

I turned to stare at him, wondering if he had purposely said the last thing I had ever expected to come out of his mouth. “Huh?”

“What am I saying, of course you do. You’re practically twelve,” he teased, and I burned away my comment with another sip of the liquid fire. “And what sexually confused fanboy wouldn’t want to say that he had his first fantastically gay fuck with Captain America?”

I choked on the next sip and slapped the glass down on the counter, bending over as I coughed to clear my airways. When I finally had control over my voice, I spluttered, “What?”

“I’m telling you, the man is some kind of perfect sex god,” he said this so casually, working his glass in a slow circle to swirl the liquid, “Looks just like that guy in the Captain America movie.”

“I’m not interested in fucking Captain America.”

“Thor, then,” he suggested, glancing up at me, “We’ll have him grow his hair out. You seem to like long hair.”

“It has nothing to do with the hair.”

It had everything to do with him. I wasn’t looking for some superhero fuck, unless that superhero in some way resembled the man in front of me. But what kind of superhero would that be? The Amazingly Spunky Shrimp? The Daringly Dangerous Dwarf? I was sure he would bash my head in if I mentioned either, so instead I focused on nursing my drink. It wasn’t so bad once I had time to adjust to it.
“So you’re not going to do it, then?” he prompted.

“I don’t even know if I’d be interested.”

“You could at least give him a try,” he pushed, eyeing me over the rim of his glass. He was drinking in that strange way again, and I found it almost comical.

I could have given it a try, and I was almost willing to let myself consider doing so. However, his earlier words and the frigid anger they contained kept me from pursuing the idea. I felt like a pawn being set up for a very intense game of chess between two men I barely knew. Corporal wanted me to enter into a relationship, but I had the distinct feeling that it wasn’t meant to be long-term or enjoyable.

“Listen, I feel weird about this whole thing,” I started to decline of his offer, but he cut me off before I could finish.

“Fine, forget it,” he snapped. He grabbed his glass and mine, carrying them to the sink and depositing them there. “I thought you might be halfway useful, but clearly I was wrong.”

“I just feel like there’s a lot you’re not telling me.”

“Yea, there’s plenty I’m not telling you,” he admitted and turned to face me. He leaned against the counter by the sink, staring at me with narrowed eyes. The color of them was suddenly much darker, housing a series of emotions I couldn’t hope to decipher. “But it’s not like I’m going to get you hurt. You can trust me.”

Somehow I knew those words were true, and I realized I trusted him more than I had trusted anyone since Mikasa had up and vanished. He had a brutal honesty and a blunt way of saying things that reassured me he wasn’t living under a disguise. He was the person he claimed to be, and nothing more.

“Fine,” I said and then nodded to solidify the agreement. “Fine, I’ll trust you. I’ll do it, if that’s really what you want. Whatever it is. But I want something out of it in return.”

“Like what?”

“Let me in your club.”

He scoffed and turned back to the sink. I heard the water turn on and he started to clean. “I could get shut down for having some under aged brat in my club. I’m not risking my livelihood for you.”

“No one’s going to know,” I grumbled, rolling my eyes. Sure, I wasn’t old enough, but that didn’t mean I couldn’t look the part. “Beside, I’m pretty damn sure the guy you’re trying to hook me up with is older. So we’re not exactly in the legal territory anymore, are we?”

“That’s kind of the point,” he sighed and then shut off the water. He lifted one of the glasses and started to dry it, turning to face me. “Fine, one night in my club. It pays on delivery, though. No free pass until you get some ass.”

“You’re the dirtiest poet I know.”

“I wasn’t aware you had such a wide range of poetic friends,” he murmured, and I watched in satisfaction as the corner of his mouth twitched.

“So, I get to hang around you until you decide if I’ll work for him, right?” I suggested as casually as
possible. I didn’t want to make it obvious that I was pretty much agreeing to the entire thing because of this little stipulation.

“Stop falling for me kid,” he warned, “I’ll break more than your heart.”

Either I had done a horrible job of disguising myself, or he was just able to read me like an open book. I frowned, watching him dry the cup. “Is that supposed to be some kind of threat?”

“Let’s call it friendly advice,” he replied. He set the glasses back into the rightful place in the cupboard and then turned to me, giving a little wave towards the door, “Now get out, kid. We’ll talk more about this later.”

Despite my best efforts, I wasn’t able to catch a glimpse of him the following day. I had resigned myself to sulking in my bed for the remainder of the weekend, knowing that the dreaded internship was waiting for me tomorrow. Armin must have sensed that I had decided to become a recluse for the day, because he had already called me twice. There was another number that practically buzzed my phone off the table three times, but it was unknown. I had thought, in a brief moment of hope, that it was Corporal and then quickly reminded myself that I had never given him my number. I let it ring, and never bothered to pick up.

However, when Armin’s cheerful face lit up my screen for the third time that day, I decided to pick up, “No, I’m not going out.”

“Uh… hi?” he said on a small laugh. Then the laugh turned into a squeal and I could hear him shifting around, “Jean, stop!”

“Ugh, gross! Armin, I don’t want to listen to you have sex!”

“Eren!” Armin chided me, and I knew without being there that his face was one of pure chagrin. “We’re not having sex, he’s just tickling me!”

“That sounds like it’s going to lead into sex.”

“No! I mean, maybe,” he huffed on the other line, “Can we change the subject?”

“Please and thank you,” I sighed, and turned my head in towards my pillow. My voice was muffled in the fabric, “Sup?”

“You know we have the internship tomorrow, right?”

“I’ve been trying to forget, but thank you for the reminder.”

“Don’t forget to bring a clean copy of your resume with you,” he paused, clearly waiting for me to acknowledge what he said. I was too tired. “You still have the one I helped you make, right?”

“Yea, somewhere,” I mumbled and he groaned. I knew he was getting ready to reprimand me. “I’ll find it, don’t worry. Promise.”

“Just don’t forget it,” he insisted, and then I heard more shifting on the other line as the phone was wrestled out of his hands.

“And don’t forget to wear something that doesn’t make you look like you attacked the elderly on your way into work,” Jean guffawed.
“Jean, I told you I took him shopping!” I heard Armin in the background, struggling to get the phone between fits of laughter. I assumed Jean was still tickling him. At least I hoped that was all he was doing.

“Yea, you did,” Jean continued in a teasing voice, “Said he had a nice ass. And what was all this I heard about a vest? I think Armin’s straying from me. Should I feel threatened?”

“Jean!” Armin squealed and he laughed.

With a groan, I shoved my face further into the pillow. I didn’t feel like listening to any of this.

“E-Eren?” Armin spoke around a laugh, “I’m going to hang up now, okay?”

“Kay,” I mumbled out from under my pillow. I was pretty sure he heard me.

The line went dead and I tossed the phone back onto my nightstand. I pushed my head back into the pillow and shut my eyes, knowing that tomorrow would be here too soon.

I did my best to listen to supervisor Mike as he showed our group around the massive building that housed Survey Corporation. He was a larger man with sandy blonde hair that was parted down the middle, and on his face was what I assumed was supposed to be an attempt at a goatee or at the very least a mustache. I wasn’t sure he had succeeded on either, but it was a better attempt than any I could have made. Despite the fact that I was determined to hate everything about this place, I couldn’t bring myself to dislike him.

I couldn’t say the same for the job position he described.

We were going to be in the mailroom, to start. Apparently all interns started at the bottom and the lucky few were able to work their way up into higher positions as time went on. Which essentially meant that I would be getting comfortable in the mailroom and waving goodbye to Armin all too soon. He would be on his way into an office by the end of the day, once they had recognized his potential. It was better that way, though. I didn’t want to ruin his internship experience with my constant complaining, and I knew that I would at least have Connie to keep me company.

“When’s lunch?” Sasha whispered, rubbing her stomach as we walked down the hall.

We were being shown around on the upper floors first, which housed the very best of Survey Corp. I assumed Mike did this because he wanted to give us something to strive towards. Some gem at the end of the internship that I was sure most of the team was salivating for. Unfortunately for him, the only thing I was interested in striving towards was the door.

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“Next I have someone very special for you all to meet.” Oh, goodie.

Mike opened the door to a magnificent office that made me think twice about resigning myself to the mailroom. Behind the desk sat a man of intimidating size and strength. He had blonde hair that had been tamed into perfection, and he met our presence with a blue stare that sent a shiver through my body. Everything about this man screamed power. I could practically see the muscles through his black button down, and suddenly I wasn’t so sure that I was only attracted to one man.

I quickly shook the thought from my head and composed my expression back into one of bored indifference. He rose from the desk and stepped out into the hall to greet us. I couldn’t help but notice that his size was even more impressive when he was standing up. I heard a gasp to my right and glanced in the direction to see Armin tense up as the man shook his hand.
Jean noticed it, too.

“You’re President Erwin,” Armin said in a voice that wavered.

“You know who I am, that’s good. I’m the President of Survey Corp. It’s so wonderful to have the chance to meet you.” Erwin said with a smile that should have been illegal. It felt like he was taking advantage of the fact that Armin was currently experiencing absolute hero worship. I suddenly had the strong desire to protect him from this man, but I restrained myself. Good first impressions and all.

“I’m going to be joining Mike in showing you around the rest of Survey Corp,” Erwin informed us, finally releasing Armin’s hand. Jean grabbed it in his the moment it was back at Armin’s side. I think I actually approved of Jean in that moment.

“But we do have one more person we’re waiting for,” Erwin continued talking and I tuned back into the conversation, only mildly interested. “Ah! Here he is now. Vice President Levi, come, meet the new recruits.”

We turned as one group to face the man Erwin addressed. When my eyes met his I felt everything inside of me spin out in all directions, leaving me empty and confused. Two nights ago I had been so sure that I knew who this man was, and yet here he was in front of me, transformed. His hair was as short as it had been on Saturday night, but the dark eyeliner and black nail polish were gone from his body. He wore a black suit with a white button up and something that I assumed must have been a tie, but it was unlike any I had ever seen before. It was white and somehow reminded me of a folded dinner napkin, which should have been comical, but I felt my knees go weak at the sight of it.

I wanted to grab it and pull him to me, and I might have considered doing so if I hadn’t felt so betrayed in that moment. He had been wearing a disguise this entire time and that disguise was all I had known, up until now. Suddenly the wig and the clothes made sense. The words he had said two nights ago rang in my head.

“Ever wanted to be someone you’re not?”

I stepped forward and blurted out the first thing that came to mind. And regretted it the moment I met his eyes.

“Corporal?”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Well, Levi had different opinions about where this chapter was going to go and naturally he got his way. I had to cut this chapter off in a place I hadn't expected because he would have gone and turned this into a mammoth of a chapter otherwise. Hopefully there will be some Armin and Jean time in the next chapter. I'm also hoping to get the chance to write more about The Wall soon! <3 I have a few more SnK favorites to introduce there in addition to Hanji, and I'm really looking forward to them.

Oh! I got my first piece of fanart for The Intern on Tumblr the other day! I just... wow... I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH! You have no idea how happy that made me! I love any kind of art, and seeing Intern!Levi drawn with his long hair... gaaaaaaaaah. Happiness. <3

Thank you all so much for the comments here and on Tumblr - it really does make me so incredibly happy to hear from all of you! I'm tracking the tag "fic: the intern" on Tumblr, and if any of you would like to message me with questions/comments, feel free to at either lootibles or lusty-levi (which is my Levi RP blog).

Hope you all enjoy the chapter!

I knew it was a mistake the moment the word left my lips. The name he had given me was only acceptable in the private, cramped spaces of slow moving elevators, and I didn’t need the death glare he was shooting me now to make me aware of that fact. Yet there it was, the menacing look in his eyes that had me certain that he could perform the most nefarious tortures on baby kittens and still keep a bored look on his face. I could feel myself melting under the heat of his stare and contemplated making a quick exit out the nearest window of the high rise.

“What was that?”

Levi’s expression altered so quickly that I had to wonder if his face ever looked anything other than indifferent. The irritation was gone from his eyes, replaced with skeptical look that was so condescending it was tangible. My urge to find the nearest escape was no more subdued by his current expression than his previous one. In fact, as I saw a smirk twitch on the corner of his lips, I was sure this look was worse. He was going to toy with me now, in front of everyone, and we both knew there wasn’t a damn thing I could do about it.

“I asked you a question, kid,” he prompted me once more, and this time he walked towards our little group of interns. I fought the urge to take a step back, determined to stand my ground. “What was that you said? Just now, what did you call me?”

“I…” I dragged the letter out for so long that it sounded like I was readying my pipes to sing a song. My mind raced with all the words that could possibly rhyme with corporal that would get me out of this mess. Nothing was coming to mind. What a horrible word. It had to be a poet’s worst nightmare.

“Out with it, kid, we don’t have all day to wait for the fucking punch line.”
I heard Armin’s gasp beside me, and knew he was reacting to the expletive. He had never met Levi before and was completely unaware of the lack of class that the raven-haired midget was capable of exhibiting. I wasn’t even entirely certain who Levi was, especially not at this point, but I knew that he had no qualms with cursing up a storm regardless of the people surrounding him. It was almost reassuring to realize I still knew one thing about him. He was himself in spite of the fact that he was in front of his boss and wearing a suit that probably cost more than a month’s rent.

I could tell his patience was wearing thin, and I knew without looking that everyone had stopped to stare at us. They were all waiting and I had run out of ways to explain away the name. Why had I opened my mouth and said that word? I knew the answer, of course, as much as I tried to avoid it. I wanted to call him out in front of everyone and make him realize that he had been caught in the lie he’d spun up for the past three days. Whether it mattered to him or not was another thing entirely, but it mattered to me. As stupid as it sounded, I was proud to have dug up any information concerning the man that had occupied my dreams for the past few nights. Now I was back to square one.

“Shit or get off the pot, kid.” He said, snapping his fingers in front of my face. I recoiled from the sound like an offended cat and blurted out the word everyone had heard me say the first time around.

“Corporal.”

“That’s what I thought.”

Then why the hell did you make me repeat it, asshole?

I kept the comment to myself through sheer force of will, biting my cheek to give my teeth something to do other than flap me into another problem. He was relishing my torment, and I knew that there was more torture to come. The mischievous glint in his eyes had appeared the instant I said the word for the second time, and I had to wonder once more what the name really meant to him. I had visions of whips and chains, the scent of leather heavy in my nose and his breath hot on my neck as he ripped the word from my lips again and again.

I wasn’t entirely sure why I had to suppress a shiver, but I wasn’t about to ask my body about it now.

“What do you think this is?” Levi continued in a mocking voice, “The military?”

“No, I just-“

He cut me off so quickly that I was sure he thought I was about to accuse him of telling me the name prior to today.

“I’m not Corporal here.”

I couldn’t ignore the directness of his words, and I felt a small thrill that I was the only one here that understood the meaning behind them. He may not have been Corporal in this building, but that would change the moment we were back in Trost. He would be Corporal again, and he would expect me to call him by nothing other than that name. I wasn’t even sure why I was relieved by that fact, considering I had felt a small victory upon finally learning his name. Levi. There was something strong and ancient about his name, something powerful. I wanted to feel it on my tongue.

“I know. I’m sorry, Levi,” I muttered. Armin gasped again, although this time it was directed at me. I hadn’t used the title with the name, but I couldn’t get myself to care. I wasn’t about to say Vice President before his name every single time I wanted to address him. I would have rather embarrassed myself some more by continuing to refer to him as Corporal. Levi’s eyes had narrowed and the dangerous look was back on his face. The stare he was giving me told me that I should lower
my eyes, but I held his gaze defiantly. “I didn’t mean to call you Corporal. My father’s in the military. It’s habit.”

The lie came out easily enough, and the look Armin shot me tipped Levi in all too quickly. Levi’s expression darkened and I could feel an apprehensive knot twist uncomfortably in my stomach. I couldn’t blame Armin for that, though. Even without Armin there, I was sure Levi would have been able to unravel any falsity I tried to slip past him.

“Is that so?” Levi murmured, eyeing me with a skeptical stare. “Well, kid, even if your pops is making you call him corporal day in and day out, you still need to know the difference between that and Vice President.”

Levi turned to Erwin and waved one dismissive hand in my direction, “This is what we have to work with? I was hoping for better, but I guess I shouldn’t have expected much.”

“He’s one of many, Levi. Some of them are actually quite promising,” Erwin assured him, and I tried to ignore the fact that Erwin’s eyes lingered for a second too long on Armin.

“Yea, we can’t all be winners,” Jean spoke up and any appreciation I had left for him went flying out the window, “Don’t lump us in with Eren here. I’m not even sure how he made it in.”

Ass. Hole.

Armin nudged his elbow into Jean’s stomach and gave him a look that silenced Jean from commenting further. Not that silence was going to help him. Levi had already turned his full attention on Jean and I felt my blood run cold despite the fact that the menacing glare was not directed at me. I wasn’t sure how it was possible for a man who barely cleared five feet to look so intimidating.

“I’m sorry,” Levi started and then paused, “No, I’m not sorry. Did anyone here ask for your opinion?”

I heard Jean swallow and suppressed a smirk.

“No, I just-“

“No,” Levi cut him off and gave a small nod, seemingly satisfied, “That was all I needed to hear. You can keep the rest of your comments to yourself.”

For not being in the military, he certainly talked to us like we were new recruits in need of a good tongue-lashing. Of course, I wasn’t about to argue when Jean was on the receiving end. However, that all changed when Levi’s attention turned back to me and his eyes narrowed, “Wipe that smirk off your face, Jaeger.”

I froze when I heard my surname leave his lips and my eyes widened. I had never told him my last name, and he had barely even acknowledged my first name when I gave it to him. The fact that he had that kind of information keyed me into the realization that he had known I was coming to Survey Corporation today. He had spoken with me Saturday night, all the while knowing that I would have this kind of surprise waiting for me on Monday morning. I wanted to punch him in the face, but I wasn’t sure my hand would survive the impact.

“Levi,” Erwin spoke up. I turned as Levi did to stare at the impressive man who had chosen to remain silent while Levi managed the new interns. “Would you join me in my office for a moment?”

Levi’s posture changed immediately from relaxed to rigid, and I had to wonder why such a simple request would have such a profound effect on him. I tried not to linger on the thought, but the look in
Levi’s eyes made every hair on the back of my neck stand at attention. I had the sudden urge to grab him by the arm and drag him out of the room, as far away from that man as we could get.

“Of course,” Levi replied.

“Mike, please continue the tour,” Erwin said, addressing our supervisor, “Levi and I will be joining you shortly.”

Mike gave a curt nod and directed the group towards the elevator that would be bringing us down to the mailroom. I lingered for a moment and watched as Erwin walked towards his office. I had planned to wait for Levi to follow him, but jumped when I felt a hand on my shoulder. Levi’s lips brushed against the shell of my ear, and I suddenly found myself cursing Armin for helping me pick a pair of pants that were not nearly as accommodating as I would have liked. “There’s your Captain America, comic book boy.”

“What?” I stammered, not at all in control of my mental faculties when his lips were on my ear.

“That’s him,” Levi put it in simpler terms, but my mind was still having trouble registering what he was saying. I lost all hope of figuring it out when I felt his low, breathy chuckle against my neck. His hand moved off of my shoulder and I stood there in a catatonic state as I watched him walk into Erwin’s office. He left the door cracked.

“Eren?” Armin came to my side at a short jog, “The elevator already went down to the mailroom. Come on, we can catch up.”

“You go ahead,” I waved him off, still staring in the direction of the office, “I have to go to the bathroom.”

“They probably have a bathroom down there,” he insisted, “Come on.”

“Yea, but those are gonna be shitty bathrooms. I may as well see what the execs get while I’m up here, right?”

Armin studied my expression and I knew he was searching for the lie. After a second of no success, he glanced in the direction I had been staring a moment before and then looked back at me. “Do you know him, Eren?”

“Who?”

“You know who,” Armin said with a frown. I had never been good at lying to him.

“Can we talk about this later?” I groaned, looking back towards the door. I was eager to hear whatever it was they were talking about. With my luck it would be boring office work, but something about Levi’s expression had made me think otherwise.

I could see the hesitation in Armin’s eyes, so I insisted, “You know you’re not going to be able to drag me down there, so just go. I’ll be there in a second.”

“Just be careful, alright? Don’t get yourself kicked out on the first day just because you had to poke your head inside the President’s office.”

“I’m going to the bathroom.”

“Please don’t shit on his desk.”
My eyebrows shot up in surprise, “Armin, you said shit.”

He flushed with chagrin, “I’ve cursed before! I curse!”

“Armin, any five year old with an iPod curses more than you do,” I rolled my eyes and didn’t bother to hide my grin, “You’re gonna be late. Stop worrying about me and go, otherwise we’re both going to get in trouble.”

Armin opened his mouth to form a retort and then thought better of it. He huffed and gave a small shake of his head, “Be careful.”

“Yea, yea,” I said as I waved him off. I waited until he was nearing the elevators before walking over to Erwin’s office. The hallway had been blessedly clear this entire time, and I had to wonder if anyone ever came near Erwin’s door. The fact that Levi hadn’t bothered to close it made me assume that there would be no one passing by anytime soon.

I leaned against the wall beside the door; careful not to poke my head anywhere near the open crack. Listening in on one of the president’s conversations was certainly not the brightest idea for the first day of my internship, but at least I wasn’t stupid enough to put my head in clear view of the door. Somewhere in the back of my mind I wondered if I could be removed from the program for this little escapade, but then quickly decided that I didn’t actually care. This was Armin’s kind of dream job, not mine. I was just along for the ride.

“I don’t care if you were just messing around with him,” I heard Erwin’s deep voice through the door and my thoughts scattered, “Do you know how irresponsible that was? You can’t just give out that name to anyone, especially not some child. What if he tells the other interns who you are?”

“He’s not going to. And he’s barely a child, Erwin. He’s almost eighteen… that’s practically legal.”

“You’re going to get yourself into trouble, Levi,” Erwin warned, “You don’t need to waste your time with a teenager. Do you realize what you’re getting yourself into?”

I heard a loud drumming sound and could have sworn that someone was running down the hall. I turned to look, but there wasn’t a person in sight. It was only then that I realized the drumming was the sound of my heart, so strong and fast that its beat reverberated in my skull. They were talking about me. Not just that; they were talking about a potential relationship between Levi and myself. Even if Erwin was shooting the idea down, the fact that it was there at all made my insides light up in a way I didn’t know they could.

“First off, you’re one to talk about chasing a teenager,” Levi shot back, “And second, who says that’s where this is going? I just didn’t want the brat to know my real name. I have no interest in breaking in a virgin. That’s your territory.”

“Only where your ass is concerned,” Erwin countered and Levi let out a short, humorless laugh.

“Let’s not talk about my ass right now.”

I rubbed at my chest and tried to ignore the pain that had begun to nest there. I wasn’t sure if I was angry or embarrassed, but above all I felt a fierce jealousy that didn’t even truly make sense. The fact that they had a relationship beyond saying a passing greeting in the hall at work stirred something inside me that made me question my own sanity.

“You really aren’t planning on doing anything with the kid?” Erwin continued. I heard the sound of fabric shifting and fought the urge to look through the crack in the door. They were touching each other now.
“Not a damn thing,” Levi said in a dismissive voice. Then his tone twisted into one of amused curiosity, “Why, are you interested in him?”

“ Didn’t we just discuss how that would be dangerous territory? He’s one of our interns, Levi. That couldn’t possibly end well.”

“He’s not the type to squeal,” Levi paused and then added, “Not that way, anyway.”

“You know him so well already,” Erwin asked in a voice that was both cold and critical. It didn’t sound like it was a question, or even a statement. It was an accusation.

“Put your claws away, Erwin. I told you, I’m not interested.”

“It doesn’t seem that way to me.”

“Oh yea?” Levi’s voice had a challenge in it, “Would I offer his ass up to you if I were interested in him? I’m not the type to give away the things I want, so that should prove something to you. Go on, take him. Hang him from your ceiling for all I care.”

“That would be a sight.”

“Be sure to take pictures.”

“I’m not interested in taking on another project, Levi,” Erwin sighed, and I was certain I was the project he was referring to. “Especially not some kid working here. It’s a disaster waiting to happen.”

“There’s not going to be a disaster,” Levi pressed, “I have the brat wrapped around my finger. I can handle him.”

“I would prefer you handle me.”

I walked away from the door and uncurled my hands, a burning sensation lighting up in the center of my palms. I had dug my nails into them as I listened to the conversation, and now there were red half moon shapes pressed into the soft skin. I watched the marks rise slowly from the offended flesh as I walked down the hall. I had no interest in hearing the rest of the conversation, and even less in seeing Levi anytime soon. Wrapped around his finger? I would crush his damn hand the next time I saw him.

A hand grabbed my shoulder and I spun with one arm up, the back of my hand slapping Levi’s away from me. He stared at me with wide eyes and it had to be the most expressive face I’d ever seen him make. I watched in sick satisfaction when it took him a moment to compose his features back into impassive boredom. His eyes continued to hold a look of surprise even after the shock had gone from the rest of his features.

“What the hell was that for, brat?”

So I was a brat right now, huh? That seemed to be the case every time I pissed him off in one way or another, but this time I was more than happy to earn the title. I stared at him with an incredulous expression, wondering how he could even ask that question. I rolled my eyes and shook my head, deciding to turn away without wasting my time on an explanation. He caught me by the arm before I could put more than two steps between us.

I expected him to ask me what was wrong again, but Levi wasn’t the type to repeat himself. He started walking down the hall and kept a firm grip on my arm, leaving me with the option of following willingly or being dragged across the floor like a sack of potatoes. I was caught between
the choices and stumbled along behind him, in awe at the amount of strength this small man was capable of. I was weak in comparison, and I had always considered myself to be fit for my age. I was proud of my strength until this moment. I tried to wrench free of the hold he had on me, but he pulled me along like I was nothing more than a pebble in his hand. It was effortless for him, and humiliating for me. So much for crushing his hand.

He turned before we could come near Erwin’s office and started walking down a hallway that Mike hadn’t shown us during the tour. There was a door waiting for us at the end, and I barely had time to read the nameplate before he yanked the door open and pulled me inside. I heard the wood slam back into place and opened my mouth to protest against the injustice of being locked in here alone with what I assumed was a lunatic. The air was knocked out of me an instant later, taking any comment I had along with it, when I was thrown down onto what would have been a comfortable couch if I hadn’t just been body slammed into it.

I wheezed as my lungs recovered and opened my mouth to speak once more, but I quickly found myself incapable of words when he joined me on the couch by straddling my hips. He set one hand flat against my sternum and leaned over me until our faces were inches apart. I could feel his hot breath on my lips, steady and smooth as if the kidnapping session hadn’t exerted him at all. The closeness of his body muddled my mind, and I found myself forgetting why I was angry with him in the first place. Hell, I couldn’t even remember my name.

“You think you can raise a hand to your superior and then walk away without any consequences?”

The deep rumble of his voice drove my mind deeper into a haze of sexual confusion, and I tried to think of a response, any response. However, the majority of my mental efforts were focused on keeping my arousal at bay. A distant thought reminded me that I was mad at him, and sporting a full erection while he straddled my hips would not allow me to leave this situation with my dignity intact.

“I asked you a question, brat.”

The name snapped my mind back into motion and I blurted out the first non-sexual thing that entered my head, “I’m not wrapped around your finger!”

He raised one perfect eyebrow, amused defiance taking over his expression. He rolled his hips forward in one fluid motion and I felt a rush of blood flood my face and other areas of my body as it started to betray me. I watched as his eyes turned down to direct his gaze between us, and a smirk twitched on the corner of his lips. When he spoke, it was in a voice that was so lascivious it was unfair.

“That’s not what your dick says.”

“That’s not fair,” I groaned, and promptly agonized over the sound. “I would react this way if anyone did that.”

“Oh?” Levi mused as he rolled his hips once more, eliciting a hiss through my teeth this time around. “I doubt that.”

I threw an arm across my face to cover my eyes from the sight, hoping that depriving myself of the image would help in some way. I would at least be able to hide the blush on my cheeks, if nothing else. It wasn’t fair that he could make my body respond to him so easily. I felt like a puppet that he could pick up and put down when he pleased, and the thought was just enough to remind me of my anger.

“I heard what you said,” I muttered.
“You think I don’t know that?” I had expected him to say something that would dismiss what I’d heard, but he didn’t even sound defensive. “Why do you think I left the door open, brat? You really don’t think at all, do you?”

I moved my arm to my forehead and stared at him with an expression caught between anger and curiosity, “You knew?”

“That you were snooping around the door?” Levi replied, “First off, you’re not exactly discreet. I could hear you stomping down the hall. Really, brat, what the fuck is in your shoes? Rocks?”

“I was quiet!”

“Shut up and let me finish,” he snapped with an edge of annoyance. “I left the door open so that you could listen. I expected you to follow me there, and you didn’t disappoint. Good for you.”

“So you wanted me to hear you being an asshole?”

“I’m always an asshole, kid. That’s my constant state of being.”

I couldn’t really argue with that. “Why did you want me to hear any of that?”

“Because that’s the guy you’re going to fuck, and I knew we’d be talking about you,” he said with a casual roll of his shoulders. “Figured I’d give you a chance to hear him outside the professional setting.”

He leaned back and his ass pressed into my erection. His mouth twitched and I knew he was intentionally fogging up my mind. However, after that little gem of information, I could actually get my brain to focus on something other than the way his body felt against mine. Apparently I had been correct in assuming that Erwin was the man Levi had talked about on Saturday, and while he was admittedly attractive in every sense of the word I couldn’t bring myself to care about anything other than the man that was currently positioned on my hips.

“So, are you interested?” he prompted me; his voice was tinged with annoyance that told me I had made him wait more than a few seconds in silence.

“After what you said to him? After you lied about pretty much everything I thought I knew about you? Fuck no.”

“Watch your tongue,” he warned and I had to roll my eyes. He retorted with another push of his hips and a full-blown smirk took over his mouth when I let out a throaty moan. “Oi, you’re a live wire, aren’t you, brat?”

I opened my mouth to respond with some comment that I could only hope would be witty, but the words choked around another moan when he swiveled his hips on mine. The deep chuckle that reverberated in his chest did nothing to calm the aching need that was now straining against the unjust tightness of my pants, “Keep it up, kid, and I’ll have a hard time handing you over.”

“I thought you didn’t like virgins,” I managed to speak through a gasp. I didn’t like embarrassing myself with the word, but I couldn’t resist throwing the comment back in his face.

“Maybe I’m willing to make an exception.”

His hips were pumping a steady rhythm against mine now, and I had to struggle to form the question I desperately wanted to ask, “Will you?”
Another deep, throaty chuckle was the only response I got as he leaned over me once more and pressed his hand against my chest just below my throat. I could feel his long, slender fingers against the raging pulse in my neck and fought back a wave of humiliation. I had no hope of hiding the fact that he was able to stimulate every inch of my body so easily. With his hand still on my chest, he lowered his head to mine and I waited for the low rumble of his voice to either piss me off or push me further into this lustful oblivion.

His warm, slick tongue licked the shell of my ear and the edges of my vision faded as I felt my body respond for me, my hips kicking up into his with a driving force that demanded he recognize the fact that he was responsible for my throbbing erection. I heard his sharp intake of breath next to my ear and relished a moment of triumph that I was able to pull any reaction out of him. My victory was quickly forgotten when his hips responded in kind, the once playful push turning into a demanding grind that left me panting beneath him. I would have never expected to feel such overwhelming pleasure from rubbing against anything, but the tension building in my lower half was too much to be ignored. My cheeks flushed as I started to give into the sensations growing within me, and I tilted my head back with a lustful moan.

“Not so fast, you greedy brat,” he growled, but his voice did nothing to ease my arousal. “I never said you could come. Especially not in my office, on my couch.”

“In my pants,” I gasped, hoping the comment would be enough to assure him that I wasn’t going to get anything on his couch. His hips suddenly stopped moving against mine, and I was unable to stop the indignant cry that sprang forth from my lips.

He clamped a hand over my mouth and held up one finger, glancing over his shoulder at his door. I could only assume that he had heard something I hadn’t, but I couldn’t bring myself to care whether or not there was anyone standing outside listening to us. I was ready to give them a fucking show if I could continue to buck against the man on top of me. I thrust my hips up as if to prove my firm indifference on the issue and was pleased when he let out a small moan. He tightened his grip on my mouth and fixed me with a dangerous glare before turning his attention back to the door.

He sat there in silence for what was probably only a moment, but felt like an eternity to me. After a while I started to wonder if he was doing this on purpose as some sick form of torture. Finally, he turned back and pressed his hips into mine as he leaned over me once again. He rested his forearms on my chest and stared down at me with an expression that I wouldn’t have been able to read even if I had all the time in the world. It seemed like there were a million emotions fighting for position on his face, each of them conflicting with the other.

“Fine,” he snapped and his eyes narrowed, “If that’s what will get you to do this for me, fine.”

“What do you mean?” My mind was still too lost in the haze of sexual desire to follow his train of thought.

“This is what you want, isn’t it?” He questioned and then smirked. I wondered if he knew he wasn’t answering my question at all as I waited for him to continue. He stared down at me for a long moment before leaning so close that his lips barely an inch from mine. I could feel the heat of his breath as he murmured in a voice that made me ache for him once more, “We’re going to make a deal, brat.”
Chapter 6

Well, Levi and Eren both took turns bringing this chapter into a few different places I wasn't expecting. The Jean and Armin bit I had planned didn't make it in this chapter, so if you want you can blame the main two boys in this one. >__> They apparently had a lot to say.

Oh, and again thank you so much for your comments! ^__^ I love reading them so, so much and they're very appreciated. Thank you for taking the time to write them! They really do make my day. As always, if you'd like to follow me on Tumblr you can find me at lootibles or lusty-levi (RP blog, and I am open to RPing Intern!Levi), and I'm tracking the fic: the intern tag.

Oh, as an aside... I'm having a trouble narrowing down mood music for each chapter. I have a couple ideas, but I was wondering if any of you might have any suggestions? Thanks!

Enjoy!

“What kind of deal?”

Levi had done the impossible feat of getting me to focus on something other than the increasingly demanding throb in my pants. The mix of emotions that had battled for position on his face had finally settled into one expression of annoyed defeat. He was giving in to something, although I had no idea what it was. I had my hopes, of course; all of which had to do with him continuing to move his hips in the same blissful rhythm they had been in only moments ago. Hell, if it would get him moving, I was willing to bargain just about anything despite the fact that I had very little to offer.

“I shouldn’t have to give you shit, you know,” Levi started, an annoyed snap in his voice, “You agreed to do this for me and now you’re backing out. I should have expected as much.”

“That doesn’t sound like a deal,” I muttered, trying to ignore the way his hips felt against mine as he adjusted his position. “Those are usually a you give, I give kind of thing.”

“Would you shut your mouth for one damn second?” Levi interrupted. He let a sigh rush through his clenched teeth and I wondered for a moment if he was trying to get control of his body as well. Maybe his mind was as muddled as mine. “You never think before speaking, do you? You just say whatever the fuck pops into your head. There’s no filter.”

I opened my mouth and he clamped his hand over it. I thought, in an instant of pure insanity, that it would be a good idea to lick his hand. It was a childish idea, of course, something I would have done if I were messing around with Armin. Luckily whatever sense I had left was just enough to keep my tongue in my mouth. It was, unfortunately, not enough to keep the mischievous glint from flashing through my eyes. He stared down at me, reading my expression as if I had actually said my thoughts out loud, and leaned down. His fingers curled to grip my jaw as he spoke close to my face, his hand the only barrier between our lips.
“Don’t even think about it, brat. Sending you back to Mike without a jaw wouldn’t look good.”

I swallowed.

I knew he didn’t mean it as a joke. Levi’s apartment had been immaculate in every sense of the word, without a spot of dust to be seen. Something about his appearance told me that the cleanliness was not a maid’s doing, but his. Even now, after he had taken his time tormenting me on the couch, his clothes were still in pristine condition and his hair didn’t have a strand out of place. I thought back to the times when I had seen him in the elevator, black eyeliner and wig in place, and realized that he had been perfect then, too. I had a feeling that Levi didn’t do anything half-assed. He valued being as sanitary as the things around him, and my tongue on his hand would be a violation of that.

“Now, as I was saying,” he continued, “I shouldn’t have to give you a damn thing, but since you’re determined to be a little shit… why don’t you tell me what you want. One thing and one thing only.”

He moved his hand and sat back on my hips. I fought my reaction to the satisfying weight pressing into the dull throb that still lingered there and spoke, “You.”

I had expected, and even hoped for, some kind of shock in response to my confession, but the most I got was boredom and annoyance. His expression didn’t falter in the slightest, not even a small twitch of his mouth. He was stoic. He had anticipated this. “Why?”

I felt my brow furrow as confusion sunk into me. Was that a legitimate question? Had he ever seen himself in the mirror? “What do you mean why? Isn’t it obvious?”

“You think I’d waste my breath on something that’s obvious?”

“You just did.”

“Look at me, kid,” he said despite the fact that I already was. It had become impossible to look away from him. “I’m not exactly a prize to be won. I’m offering you a fucking sex god. Don’t turn down a buffet for dinner scraps.”

I stared at him with incredulous eyes and propped myself up on my elbows. He leaned back to accommodate my new position and amusement touched his features, “Your eyes look like they’re going to pop out of your head, kid. It’s creepy.”

“Are you insane?”

“It’s one of my best qualities.”

“No, I’m serious. Have you seen yourself?” I adjusted my weight to one arm to point at his face, as if he wasn’t already aware of what I was talking about. I was pretty sure at this moment that he had no clue.

“Have you seen him?” Levi put emphasis on the last word and I felt jealousy twist like a knife in my gut. I didn’t want to think about the fact that Levi considered Erwin attractive.

“Yea, I saw him,” my voice was low and tinged with frustration, “You practically shoved him in my face. But I don’t want him.”

“You don’t know what the fuck you want.”

“I want you, Corporal.”
He groaned and put a hand over his eyes, pressing it tight against his head. I could see the definition in his jaw as he clenched his teeth and he sat there for a long moment, his breathing audible as he tried to collect himself. Finally he dragged the hand off his forehead and through his short hair, the strands sticking between his fingers as he stared down at me with an expression caught between lust and anger. When he spoke his voice was low and raspy, strained as if he were barely managing to contain himself.

“You’re a manipulative little shit for making me want what I can’t have.”

I didn’t wait for him to say more. I lunged forward, throwing him off my hips in the process. His back hit the couch and I joined him with an urgency I had never felt before, swallowing his angry protest as I covered his mouth with my own. I felt his hands push against my shoulders and steeled my hand against the side of the couch, determined to keep my position. I was brave in that moment, confident to the point of insanity and driven by the single desire that had consumed my every thought for the past week.

His hands surged forward as I continued to assault his lips, my tongue boldly probing for further access. He would no doubt take advantage and bite my tongue to get me off of him, but I was too possessed by my need to taste him that I couldn’t bring myself to care. I would have welcomed the pain and struggle if it would grant me a moment more of this. I was willing to take what he would give me at this point, and the fact that I was so desperate for him so shortly after meeting him both thrilled and terrified me.

I felt his lips tense into a thin line as his jaw tightened and his hands stilled on my shoulders. In a moment of clarity, I realized I had gone too far and finally gave up, withdrawing from the kiss. He stared up at me with an expression that was carnal desire in the most primal sense, his blue eyes brighter than I had ever seen them. A low growl stirred in his throat and I hissed when his nails dug into my shoulders before clenching around fistfuls of fabric. He wrenched me down to him and surged up in the same instant, his mouth open as he reclaimed mine.

His tongue invaded my mouth before I could protest, the warm, slick heat exploring every inch that I had to offer. My tongue met his and the taste that flooded me pulled a delirious moan from my chest, taking my mind with it. I could hear nothing but the panting breaths that escaped our lips in the brief instances that they parted. A soft, pleading whine was stirring in my throat as I scrambled to get back on top of him, desperate to feel the throb that I knew would be waiting for me there. Our hips pushed together and a guttural moan parted my lips, his head tilting back as he hissed through his teeth.

“Damn it, Jaeger!”

He grabbed my hips and shoved me off of him with such ease that it was almost insulting. I fell against the opposite side of the couch and stayed there, my trembling limbs refusing to do much other than a stationary position. I struggled to collect myself, panting hard as I stared at him. My cheeks were flushed red, but I noted with a triumphant satisfaction that his were as well. His lips were parted, his breaths labored as he stared at me with the same bright eyes that told me he was barely restraining himself.

“What the fuck.” He paused between breaths and pressed both hands against his forehead. He let a heavy sigh rush through his teeth and followed it with a frustrated groan before repeating himself, “What the fuck are you doing to me?”

“I could ask you the same thing.” My voice was breathless and I tilted my head back, trying to focus on my recovering lungs rather than his face. He made breathing impossible on a regular basis, and I would suffocate happily if I looked at him now.
I heard a rustle of fabric as he moved off of the couch and envied him for his ability to walk. I followed him with my eyes as he crossed the room to the door, grabbing the handle before turning to me. “Get out.”

“What?” I spoke through a laugh. I wasn’t sure if I was flabbergasted or just plain amused that he thought I had any control of my legs at the moment.

“You heard me, brat,” he growled, gripping the handle so tight that I could see the white of his knuckles. “I want you to get out of here. Now.”

“I can’t move my legs.”

“Then I’ll drag you out by your hair.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Try me.”

I sat there, staring at him as I debated my options. There was a reason he was standing at the door and ordering me to leave, and it wasn’t because I had no effect on him. His chest was still rising and falling quickly as he struggled to maintain some semblance of his signature indifference, and I noticed his pants evidently offered as little accommodation as mine did. Walking out of that door meant abandoning any of the progress I had just made, and I was certain I had made a lot. Like hell I was moving off of this couch.

I leaned back against the arm of the couch and stared at him with defiant eyes. I could have sworn I heard metal crunch as his hand tightened on the doorknob. Then he released it, striding over to me with a determination that told me I should start running now if I wanted to live. He caught me before I could make it off the couch, grabbing a fistful of my hair and giving it a hard tug to show that he had been serious, “Have it your way, then.”

“Don’t you want me to help you?” I blurted out the only thing I had left.

His hand stilled and his grip loosened just enough to tell me that I managed to save myself a painful trip out the door. “You already made it clear you have no intention of helping me.”

“No, I said I wasn’t interested in him. I never said I wouldn’t help you.”

He stared at me like I had just told him two plus two was five. “An interest in him is kind of the one and only requirement, kid. How the hell are you supposed to make him want to fuck you if you can’t get it up?”

“I can get it up,” I scoffed with a roll of my eyes, “I might not be interested, but it’s not like he’s not attractive. He’s hot. Trust me, I’ll be hard for him.”

I caught sight of his eyebrow twitching once in what looked like anger and decided to try my luck. “I’m hard thinking about him now, actually. Is he still in his office? We could get started right away.”

“Fuck,” Levi muttered and released his grip on my hair, shoving me back against the couch. He strode away from me and towards his desk, pacing the room. He ran both hands through his hair, knotting the strands in his frustration. “You damn shitty little brat. Fuck! You’re good. You really are, you know that?”

“What do you mean?”
“Come off it, Jaeger,” he snapped, turning to glare at me, “You’re almost as manipulative as I am.”

I shut my mouth and suppressed a satisfied smile. I had managed to make him jealous. But who was he jealous over? A nagging voice gnawed at me, reminding me that he was in a relationship with Erwin, or at least had been recently. The jealousy might not have been over me at all, and the thought made my stomach twist uncomfortably.

Then I realized, “You want to hurt him, don’t you?”

“What?”

“That’s why you’re asking me to do this, right? I mean, you wouldn’t be this gung ho on it if I were just a piece of ass for him. He seemed more interested in Armin, if that were the case. I’m probably not even his type, am I?”

“You’re young enough,” he spoke slowly, eyeing me with a guarded expression. I was getting into things he wasn’t prepared to discuss.

“He barely looked in my direction today,” I countered, standing up from the couch. “This isn’t about a relationship. You’re trying to get me to fuck him. Why?”

“That’s not your business.”

“It’s my ass! I’m pretty damn sure what goes in my ass is very much my business!”

Levi’s mouth curved on a small smirk. “Maybe so, but you’re going to have to trust me on this one.”

“Trust you?” I spit the words out as they filled my mouth with a bad taste, “Are you kidding me? I don’t even know who the hell you are! I’ve known you for a week and everything up until now has been a lie!”

“None of that was a lie,” he snapped back, “What you see in front of you right now? That’s the lie. It’s the lie I live until I can have the life that I want.”

“What life? The Wall?”

“Mock it all you want, kid, it’s a hell of a lot better than what I have here.”

I looked around the expansive office with the glass windows that offered the best view I had ever seen of the city. It was hard to believe that anything would be better than this comfortable job in a position of authority in one of the most respectable businesses in the country. I turned my attention back to him and raised one eyebrow, questioning his sanity.

“Life isn’t all about money and things, kid.” He leaned one hip against his desk and folded his arms, cocking his head to the side and fixing me with a smirk. The pose was one I would expect from some sassy girl, but somehow it worked for him.

“Is that why you want me to help you, then?” I decided I had to return to the subject and at least attempt to understand why he wanted me to do any of this. “So that you can have that life?”

“You could say that.”

“Is he forcing you to be here?”

“Not exactly,” he said with a small shrug and then shook his head. “We’re not going to talk about this. That’s the most you’re going to get out of me.”
“You’re going to have to give me more if you expect me to do this for you.”

He narrowed his eyes and moved away from the desk to walk towards me. I tried to ignore the sway of his hips and wondered how he had taken a motion I had always associated with women and turned it into something that was both alluringly feminine and seductively masculine in the same moment. He could take down armies with those hips.

“Does it have to be more information?”

“No.” I blurted out the word before I even had time to consider the question.

He paused and gave a little nod, eyeing me speculatively. “So let’s say I were to offer you my company on a weekly basis…”

“Daily.”

“I have a life, brat,” he retorted and then sighed when I said nothing, “We’ll see.”

“What kind of company are we talking about?” I amazed myself when I managed to say the words without stammering.

“Oh?” He purred the word in a way that made my pants uncomfortably tight yet again. His eyelashes flicked down as he noticed my sudden problem, and a smirk had teased its way onto his lips by the time he returned his gaze to me. “We’ve already established that I’m not a hooker. I’m offering you my company, which is more than I’ve ever offered anyone. Be grateful.”

“So no touching.” I clarified.

“We’ll see, brat. Don’t get your hopes up.”

“Can I have time to think about it then?”

The look crossed his features so quickly that I barely had time to process it. His eyebrows had knit together and his eyes almost closed, his lips parting to reveal a set of white clenched teeth. It looked like pain, but that didn’t make sense.

“Yea. Sure.” His face was impassive and his voice was cold. He walked past me and his shoulder struck me along the way. I stumbled slightly and righted myself by placing one hand against the wall. “Think about it.”

He opened the door and tilted his chin towards the exit to indicate that it was time for me to leave. I faltered for a moment, wanting to stay and figure out what had gone so wrong so quickly. I said something that had set him off, but I had no idea what it was. Deciding that I might only make things worse, I opted to take the offer to leave. I was almost through the doorway when he caught my upper arm and yanked me hard enough that I fell against his chest.

He leaned up, growling at my ear, “If my body is all you’re interested in, this could work out nicely.”

The biting edge of his voice said otherwise. “Who said that was all I wanted?”

“Why do you have to think about it?” His fingers curled and pressed his nails against me through the fabric of my shirt. “If we get this over with, will you get started now?”

Ah. Suddenly I knew exactly what had gone wrong. I had chosen to say I would think about it right after I had been denied the promise that things would be physical in those daily visits. He was right. I
really had no control over the words that came out of my mouth. I didn’t stop to think about them for a moment, and it had turned everything to shit now because of it.

“That’s not all I want,” I said, jerking my arm free of his hold.

His eyes narrowed infinitesimally and he lowered his hand to his side. “Fine. It would make things a hell of a lot easier, but fine. If that’s the case, then you’re going to prove it.”

“How?”

He dug in his pocket and held out a key, “For the penthouse. You can’t get the elevator up there without it. This is my spare, but that doesn’t mean you can be a dumbass and lose it, got it?”

I took the key, staring at it as my brow knit in confusion, “What do you want me to do with it?”

“Sit on it and spin,” he said with a roll of his eyes, “Really, you don’t think, do you? I want you to come up to my place tonight.”

I felt my heart skip. “Okay.”

“By seven,” he continued, “Not a second later. Don’t make me wait for your ass, Jaeger. You’ll be up there by then and you’ll have an answer on whether or not you’re going to do this for me. You’re going to do that or you can forget the whole fucking deal. I’ll find someone else to do it and you can kiss this internship goodbye.”

“I’m actually not interested in the internship anyway,” I said with a dismissive shrug. I wasn’t trying to downplay his threat, but it was true. I had been dragged into this thing kicking and screaming by a cute, manipulative blonde.

“What do you mean you’re not interested?” His voice was almost as incredulous as Armin’s had been when I first tried to turn down the internship. “If that’s the case, then why are you even here?”

“I was dragged into it by Armin.”

“Armin…” Levi looked towards his desk and I followed his gaze, noticing a stack of labeled folders sitting at its center. “Arlert, right? He’s Erwin’s favorite.”

“I could tell,” I uttered the words in a voice that elicited a knowing smile from Levi’s lips. It was one of the few instances in which I had seen expression on his face, but I was too angry and protective over Armin to appreciate it.

“That kid’s going to have to watch his ass around him,” he noted and then added, “I mean that in the most literal sense. Erwin has a thing for smart petite men.”

I couldn’t stop my gaze from roaming over his body, and he gave a small laugh when he noticed my stare. “Myself included, yea.”

I didn’t want to know anything about their relationship. In fact, it was imperative that Levi keep those details to himself if I had any hope of pursuing Erwin in the way that he wanted me to. Not that I was sure I would be able to anyway. I was as inexperienced as the word virgin went and I had only just recently accepted the fact that I was interested in men.

“You know I’m not petite. And I’m no where near as smart as Armin.” I paused and then muttered the last bit so quick and low that I hoped he might miss it, “I’m not even as experienced as Armin.”
“Experience isn’t a necessity,” Levi waved his hand dismissively, unfazed by my confession. “In fact it’s kind of a bonus where Erwin is concerned. He likes fresh meat. Breaking in someone new just happens to be one of his favorite pastimes, right next to pottery and crocheting.”

Both my eyebrows shot up and he smirked. “I’m kidding.”

I jumped when my phone started to vibrate in my pocket and pulled it out to see Armin’s cheerful face on the screen. “Hello?”

“Eren?” He sounded panicked. “I just checked the bathrooms. Where are you? The tour’s almost over.”

“Why did you break away from the group?” I decided to avoid his question with one of my own. “We’re having lunch because we just finished the tour of the cafeteria. Where are you?”

“I’m-“

My eyes widened with surprise when the phone left my hand. Levi waved me off as I tried to reach for it, and he leaned back against the doorframe as he held the phone to his ear.

“He’s with me, kid.”

I had the sudden urge to punch Armin for stealing my pet name, but then reminded myself that he wasn’t the one who said it. I glared at Levi and he raised one eyebrow in response, clearly not aware that the name was mine. I still hated it, of course, but it was mine.

“Vice President Levi,” he said the title in such a bored voice I was actually waiting for him to tack on a yawn at the end. Armin must have asked who he was.

“Uh huh. Yea.” He let out a rough sigh of impatience, “Yea, yea, kid, I get it. I’m fucking amazing. Can we move on? Great. Where are you?”

I watched his brow furrow and felt my fingers aching to trace the lines. I mentally kicked myself for the thought immediately after and realized that I was now becoming dangerously obsessed. This was going to be bad.

“Which cafeteria, Arlert? There are two.” His nose wrinkled in disapproval, “That one? Ugh. All right, tell Mike I’m on my way down to rip him a new one. We don’t need the interns eating swill on their first day. Tch. What kind of impression is that?”

I could hear Armin’s nervous stammering on the other line and felt a stab of pity for him. He clearly didn’t want to tell Mike anything Levi had just said.

“What?” Levi rolled his eyes and continued, “I didn’t ask whether or not you wanted to do anything. Tell Mike I’m on my way, and I’m bringing his straggler with me.”

Levi hit the end button on my phone and held it out to me in one fluid motion. I took it from him slowly, completely dumbfounded over what had just occurred. I was pretty damn sure Armin had the same expression on his face a few floors below. “You didn’t have to yell at him.”

“Yell?” Levi scoffed, “When I’m yelling, you’ll know it. What I did just then is called being authoritative. You’re going to have to learn to get used to that really fast if you plan on spending any more time around me.”
He grabbed my wrist before I could even ponder a response and pulled me out the door. He shut it behind us and took off at a quick stride down the hall, rapping his knuckles hard against Erwin’s door as he passed by it. He called over his shoulder when he heard the door click open, “Mike brought the interns to the fucking dive the warehouse workers eat in. Who the hell put him in charge again?”

“That would be me,” Erwin started, already closing his office door behind himself to follow us, “What are you doing here, Eren?”

“I… uh…”

“He got lost in the shitter,” Levi said with a roll of his eyes, waving his hand dismissively over his shoulder. He glanced back at Erwin, “These kids are hopeless. They’re just going to mess up everything. I don’t know what you were thinking with this internship.”

Erwin was eyeing me suspiciously and I managed a sheepish grin. He wasn’t buying Levi’s excuse; that much was obvious. I tried to ignore his stare and focused on catching up to the raven-haired man in front of us. Trying to keep up with Levi’s surprisingly fast gait should have been a category in the Olympics. It should have been easy for us considering our legs were much longer, but he stayed at least two strides ahead of us the entire length of the hall. Levi jabbed his thumb against the button for the elevator and turned to face us as we finally caught up.

“So, Eren,” Erwin’s voice was invitingly smooth and yet commanded my attention. I turned my gaze to him and tried to ignore the fact that he was actually attractive. I wondered, briefly, if maybe I could do this for Levi after all. “Are you enjoying your first day here?”

“Tch,” Levi interrupted, “He said he’s not even interested in being here. He’s been moaning all day.”

The last comment sent a thrill straight down into my groin and by the look on Levi’s face I could tell it was fully intentional. I tried to fold my hands as casually as I could and held them near the fly of my pants. Stupid, manipulative midget.

“That’s a shame. It’s a great opportunity.” Erwin said as he eyed me with a speculative stare. “Why did you sign up if you’re not interested?”

“Because Armin wanted me to.”

“Oh, Arlert,” he murmured in a voice that was a little too low not to be sexual. I didn’t like the way he said his name. “I remember him from earlier. He seems like a very bright young man. I’d like to have the chance to get to know him.”

I bet you would, you dirty fucking-

“I’m sure he’d love that,” Levi interrupted my thoughts as we stepped onto the elevator. “Maybe you can talk to him at lunch. After we get them out of that shitty ass excuse for a cafeteria, that is.”

“The food isn’t that bad, Levi.”

“Have you seen the kitchen? Filthy.” He shook his head with an expression of pure disgust. “I don’t even want to think about the last time they cleaned it.”

Erwin gave him an accommodating smile, “Fine, we’ll move them to our cafeteria. Is that better?”

“Much,” Levi muttered, looking over his nails with a bored expression, “It’ll be the perfect place to tell them.”
“Tell them?” I was glad Erwin sounded as confused as I was. “Tell them what?”

“I’ve decided to add an extra piece of incentive for the end of this internship,” Levi said, lifting his gaze to Erwin and lowering his hand back to his side.

“Oh, you have? And what are we going to be giving them?” Erwin sounded more amused than the annoyed that I had expected. I realized then that Levi had far more power in this company than I had originally thought.

“We’re not giving shit to all of them,” Levi corrected, turning his attention to the elevator dial as it countered down the numbers. “Just two of them. The best of the interns.”

“And what are we giving them?” Erwin prompted, his interest piqued. I had to admit, so were mine.

“Jobs,” Levi stated simply and then the corner of his mouth twitched in a small smirk. “I’ve been wanting a personal secretary, and you don’t have one either. That gives us two openings for the interns. Preferably male.”

“I don’t think you’d do well with a male secretary,” Erwin murmured, shooting a wary glance in my direction. He seemed to be analyzing whether or not he could say anything too personal in front of me, and must have decided that he could because he said, “If you had a little bitch doing what you demanded day in and day out, I doubt you’d be able to keep your hands off of him.”

“Oh, I can guarantee I wouldn’t keep my hands off of him. That’s the point.” Levi said with a low chuckle and then paused, glancing at Erwin once more. “I’m sorry, did I call them secretaries? That was stupid. I meant toys.”

The edges of my vision were blurring with a new level of jealousy I would have never thought possible. The idea of anyone working under Levi in both a figurative and literal sense made my skin crawl. The fact that there was a chance that person could be Jean made me want to slaughter everyone in the building to prevent that from ever happening. I felt my nails biting into my palms and tried to relax my grip only to find that was currently impossible. I was trembling with a rage that I needed to get under control before we left the elevator.

I could practically feel Levi’s gaze on me and didn’t have to look to know it was there. He had planned this and I was giving him exactly the reaction he wanted. He was the most dangerously manipulative person I had ever met and I realized what he had said earlier was true. I was wrapped around his finger and he was toying with me whenever he felt the inclination to do so. What was worse was that I couldn’t stop him. I didn’t even want to. He wanted me to give a damn about this shitty internship and suddenly it was the most important thing in my world.

Erwin stepped off the elevator first and I went to follow him, eager to get out of the enclosed space that was filled with one too many thoughts. Levi’s hand on my shoulder stopped me in my place, and I shuddered as his lips brushed against my ear and he purred in a voice that was so seductive I felt my sanity slipping.

“Interested yet?”
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Well, Levi and Eren dragged this one out a little more than I expected, but if it was for one of those scenes (read on), then I'm... TOTALLY fine with that.

Oh, and you have all made me so FRIGGIN happy! All of the comments both here and on Tumblr just had me absolutely giddy! ^__^ I love to hear what the chapter made you think, how it made you feel, etc. Really, the fact that you all took the time to write to me just makes me so happy to know you're enjoying the story so far! Although, it's really going to start to build up after this chapter, so... Yea! ^__^

I'm currently trying to put together a playlist for The Intern, so if you have any suggestions then please let me know! As always, please feel free to comment and let me know what you think either on here or on Tumblr at lootibles or lusty-levi (RP Levi blog).

Thank you all so much and enjoy!

“Mike, you craptacular shit bag.”

The aforementioned male looked up at the sound of his name, seemingly unfazed by the insults that had been tacked on along with it. Levi’s lack of eloquence seemed to be an accepted and expected occurrence in the office, which made it exceedingly easy to gauge who the new interns were based solely on their shocked expressions. I was the only one who might have actually looked like I belonged at Survey Corp. because I had already grown accustomed to Levi’s colorful choice of vernacular. That was, of course, the extent of my comfort level in this place. I felt nothing but awkward as I walked between Erwin and Levi as they strode over to Mike; I must have looked like a mouse caught between two lions.

Armin was seated beside Mike, wearing an expression of unparalleled discomfort. He had clearly done as Levi had asked, and by the look on his face I had to wonder if he had even used the same expressive language that Levi had demanded. I had to admit, I admired him for that. Armin was often mistaken as being meek, but he was incredibly strong when it came to getting the job done. He was never one to disappoint his superiors, which meant he had already won one of Levi’s internship offers before the competition even started.

I tried not to linger on the fact that he would have won the position regardless, where Erwin was concerned. The president’s interest in my best friend was going to make it considerably harder for me to attempt doing this favor for Levi. I couldn’t exactly seduce a man when I was constantly fighting back the urge to punch him in the head. It would be like trying to seduce Jean.

I shuddered in disgust, earning a questioning look for Levi.

“The food, right?”

“Uh, yeah.” I wasn’t about to draw any further attention to where my mind had wandered.
“See, Mike,” he called the other man’s attention. Levi had his arms folded, but lifted one arm and gave a waving flick of his wrist to point in my direction. “You’ve already made one of our interns sick and he hasn’t even touched the food. What were you thinking with bringing them here? It’s filthy.”

“Well, it’s closer to the mailroom, and it’s where most of them will probably be eating on a regular basis,” Mike gave a small shrug, “I figured they may as well get used to it now.”

“When they’ve spent a day in the mail room, this food will be fucking bliss,” Levi retorted and grabbed the sandwich in front of Armin, which had remained untouched this entire time. He tossed it in the garbage and looked back at Mike, “But for their first day, let’s at least show them what they’re working towards.”

Levi snatched up a napkin, wiping his already clean hand as if the sandwich had dirtied it in some way. Mike let out a sigh before standing. “Come on, group. We’re heading back upstairs.

“Can I bring my sandwich?” Sasha was muffled between bites as she tried to scarf down what remained on her plate.

“You’ve ate enough at this point that you’ll be enjoying that sandwich all night,” Levi commented, eyeing the food on her plate with a look of complete distaste.

“I don’t know about that,” I muttered, “Sasha has a steel stomach. She could probably lick this whole floor and be—”

“Oh god, that’s disgusting!” Levi waved his hands in front of himself as if he couldn’t bear to hear more. I had to fight to keep the smile off my face, pleased to have elicited such a strong reaction from him. Filth and filthy language seemed to be the only things I could use to get under his skin.

“Well, now that Levi won’t be eating for the remainder of the day,” Erwin spoke up with a charming smile and gestured towards the elevator, “Shall we head upstairs?”

Levi was staring at me with a look of pure contempt, his arms folded back into their previous position. He held my gaze as the other interns stood up and followed after Erwin, and I didn’t dare move to follow them. Something about his expression told me that I would have to stay put or run the risk of having my legs broken. Either way, I wouldn’t be going anywhere until he decided that he was through with me. I was perfectly content with that fact.

“You’re going to owe me dinner after that,” he snapped, “I’m not going to be able to eat until then after your little comment. Do you know how dirty this floor is, kid? I should make you lick it.”

“I would be happy to lick it.”

My voice was low enough that we both knew I wasn’t talking about the floor. He let out a rush of air through clenched teeth, steely blue eyes turning their heated stare on me and sending a jolt of desire straight into the head of my cock. He took a step towards me and I boldly stood my ground, not ready or willing to play off my comment as an innocent mistake. I had learned today that I had the ability to get a rise out of him, and every time I managed to do so filled me with a rush of exhilaration that was downright addicting.

“Oh, would you?” His eyes flashed with challenge and I knew the next words were a risk. He was the type to actually force me get down on my knees and lick the floor simply to make me pay for my comment.

“Yes, Corporal.”
I was rewarded with a hiss as he took in air through his teeth, his pupils dilating as lust surged through him, the brilliant blue of his eyes becoming little more than a ring around a black gaze that filled me with equal amounts of desire and need. I didn’t know why he was able to pull forth such an intense craving, and I didn’t care to understand. All I knew was that I wanted him every second of every day, and there was very little I wasn’t willing to do to have him.

“You better hope that your fucking friends are already upstairs,” Levi growled as his hand steeled around my wrist. I followed along behind him as he walked us towards the elevator. “Because I’m not about to stop just because we have an audience.”

He hit the button of the elevator once in annoyance and then twice as if it had offended him. He lifted his eyes to the little arrow and I did the same, willing it to light up. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I realized I would care if there were other people in the elevator. However, that voice was nothing compared to the need thrumming through my body, and the majority of me didn’t care if there were an entire stadium cheering us along.

The elevator doors opened to reveal two people I had never seen before; a man and a woman both dressed in elegant business attire. They had stacks of documents in their arms and looked like they were destined for the top floors, which meant we would have no privacy on the way up. I felt an overwhelming disappointment flood me as I tried to will the twitching in my pants to cease with its demand.

“Out!” Levi shouted before either of the two occupants had the chance to greet him, and I jumped at the sound. I watched in stunned silence as they both stumbled to get out of the elevator, either aware of his status or too intimidated not to obey. He didn’t waste any more words on them and yanked me into the elevator, turning to push the floor button and then the ‘close doors’ button. I watched as they slid shut.

Then my entire view of the elevator was lost and his lips were on mine with a greedy demand, his hands tangling in my hair to take purchase of the strands in order to pull me down to his height. In my lust-filled haze I decided that wouldn’t be necessary and grabbed hold of his hips, lifting and pushing him into the corner of the elevator. He gave a sharp gasp against my lips and I was almost certain he was about to follow it with protest, but then his legs steeled around my hips and hooked at the ankles, holding his position with a strength that made me feel weak.

His arms were wrapped around my neck as he grabbed two fistfuls of hair and pulled my head back, his open mouth claiming mine from above. I marveled at the way he commanded me, even when he was the one being held in the compromising position. I groaned into the kiss and my hips surged forward into his, eliciting a whine from his throat that sent a wild thrill through my body. His hips rutted against mine with an urgency that had me pressing him to the wall of the elevator until his hips were held captive. I could feel the steady pulse of his member as it strained against the confines of his pants, and I found myself wanting to free it right here in the elevator.

My fingers had curled up to their tips to press my nails against his hips, where they stayed until he made a desperate sound that urged me to explore further. I was swallowing every noise he made just as he took in mine; each moan, gasp, and whine muffled in the constant clash of our mouths. My hands slid down to his ass and, in a moment of reckless abandon that had me too bold to care, I squeezed his cheeks, jerked forward and drove his hips into mine. A broken cry sounded from his throat as I felt my arousal press against his, and his head kicked back against the wall behind him. If it hurt, he didn’t show it.

I drank in the sight of him in the brief moment that our lips were not connected, watching as his brows creased in the middle and his lips parted on another moan. I could have admired that look
forever, knowing that I was the one who put it there. He didn’t have time for me to stare, however, which he made clear when he tugged on my hair and pulled my lips back to his. I had no desire to protest, happy to be caught up in the sensation once more. I was addicted at this point, delirious every time I managed to get a taste of him.

The next set moans caught in our throats as the elevator chimed its arrival.

“Shit! Put me down, Jaeger!” Levi gasped, winded from lingering arousal. He scrambled to get down as quickly as I did to put him on the ground, and he busied himself with fixing his jacket and cravat as the doors rolled open.

I was still breathing heavily when I met the stares of my group and watched as Armin’s eyes widened. Jean didn’t bother to stop the laugh that barked from his mouth, “What the hell, Eren? You look like you just ran through a wind tunnel. Have you ever heard of a comb?”

I put a hand to my head and felt that my normally messy hair had entered new realms of dishevelment. “I… uh…”

Levi noticed Erwin’s suspicious expression before I did, and I took a moment to thank whoever would listen that he was far quicker on his feet than I was. “I had to make the brat pay for that disgusting comment.”

“And how did you do that?” Erwin’s voice was amused on the surface, but even I could detect the heavy undertones of distrust.

“Oh?” Levi reached up and grabbed a fistful of my hair, gripping it tighter than I would have liked. He walked out of the elevator and I was forced to stumble along behind him. “Like this.”

Jean snorted at the sight and then burst into laughter when I fixed him with my most vicious stare. I hated the fact that he didn’t seem to find me intimidating in the least, although I couldn’t exactly blame him given my current position. I was being dragged around at a partially bent over angle to adjust for Levi’s height. Even I had to admit that I looked comical. I suppose that my discomfort was worth it, because Erwin’s speculative expression had finally started to ebb.

Levi released my hair and walked towards Erwin, his expression composed and his breathing so normal that I felt envious. It was like he hadn’t exerted himself at all, yet here I was still panting like I had run a marathon. Clearly I was going to have to start working out if I had any hope of keeping up with him.

“Eren, what the fuck is that?”

Jean was pointing at my pants and I looked down to realize that my lungs were not the only things still recovering from the elevator tryst. My pants were tented around the arousal that was still proudly pulsing in my pants like a happy dog waiting to be petted. I could feel the heat rushing to my face and was grateful that the blood was now being directed elsewhere to show off my absolute mortification. I would have thought of an excuse if I knew there was any that existed, but there was no way of talking myself out of this embarrassment.

It was by some miracle that Armin grabbed my hand and pulled me down the hall away from the group. Jean called something after us, but I only heard Armin’s response, “Shut up, Jean! We’re going to the bathroom!”

Armin turned to me once the bathroom door was closed. He was kind enough not to give me a pitying expression and instead took a moment to walk past all the stalls to ensure that we were alone.
I stood there in awkward silence and waited for the blood to drain from my face and other parts of my body. The humiliation I had just gone through would probably make it so the blood didn’t return to that area for a long time. I could practically feel the walls being boarded up. No boners for me.

“Are you okay?”

I looked at Armin and felt a wave of gratitude wash over me. He could have asked me any number of questions that would have made this situation worse, but he opted for the least intrusive one.

“Yea, I’m okay. I don’t know why…” I trailed off and gave a shrug, not about to point out the fact that I knew exactly why my dick had popped up to say hello.

“We’re guys,” he said with a little shrug and offered me a small, reassuring smile. “It happens.”

“Yea, try telling that to Jean.”

“Don’t worry about Jean. I’ll talk to him. Just… you know, calm yourself down a little and then we can go to lunch. It’ll be fine.”

I rolled my eyes, “Oh, sure, because they’ll all have forgotten in five minutes.”

“They probably just think you like pain,” he muttered before his eyes widened and he clamped a hand over his mouth. He hadn’t meant to let that thought slip out.

“Why the hell would they think that?”

“Because you were hard after he… after Levi… well, you know. Dragged you by your hair,” Armin stumbled over the words and a blush started to fill his cheeks.

I didn’t think about that. Granted, I had been aroused before Levi dragged me out of the elevator, but the rest of the group hadn’t noticed that. I groaned and put my head in my hands, trying to argue with myself that the situation hadn’t just gotten worse and failing. Turned on by pain? I wanted to call it a ridiculous notion, but some nagging voice in the back of my head reminded me of the desire I felt every time Levi became dominant with me. Still, it wasn’t possible.

“Are you…?” Armin started slowly, cautiously as if he were waiting for me to snap at him. But how could I do that after he had just saved me from further humiliation?

“No,” I sighed, and then decided to confide in him something I had only just started to admit to myself, “It’s not the pain, it’s him. I was hard because I was alone with him and I think I…”

Armin’s grin was so wide I was sure his face might split in half with joy, “I knew you were! I knew it!”

I couldn’t stop the smile that found its way onto my face and shrugged, looking away, “Yea, I guess I am.”

I interrupted him before he could launch into a flurry of questions, “Can we head back now? I’d rather just get this day over with.”

“Yea, sure,” Armin said around the grin that was still taking over his face. I rolled my eyes and walked out the door. We walked down the hall in silence because we weren’t really able to discuss my confession in these public halls and Armin was probably too excited to talk about anything else.

“Hey, Woody!” Jean called from his table when we entered the room. Armin grumbled at my side.
“I’m sorry. I’ll talk to him.”

I watched Armin walk over to Jean and kept the slew of insults in my head. I was starving and willing to let Armin attempt to handle Jean before I was forced to rearrange his face. I stepped into the line and grabbed the first few things that looked good: a sandwich and a bag of chips. I followed up my choices with a bottle of some brand name soda I didn’t care about and walked over to the cashier to pay. I had just taken the amount out of my wallet when another hand came into my view and handed money to the cashier. I turned, dumbfounded, to stare at Erwin.

“I’m paying for all the interns today,” he explained with a smile and nodded towards my tray, “Come on, I’d like to sit with you.”

I lifted my tray and stood there for a moment, trying to argue if following him was a good idea and then decided that I didn’t really have a choice in the matter. Besides, it was just lunch, and I was fairly certain that the only reason he wanted to sit at my table was because Armin would be there. Despite the protective edge that I felt for my best friend, I was currently pissed off enough with Jean to throw Erwin in Armin’s way.

As we walked over to the table, I felt the hair stand up on the back of my neck and quickly searched the length of the room until my eyes met Levi. He was staring at me with an almost unreadable expression, but I noticed an edge of possessiveness in his eyes and it sent a chill through my body. I tried not to linger on the question of whether or not the look was meant for me, and took a seat at the table with my tray. I stared at Jean as I sat down, silently daring him to say another word about my boner mishap. He returned my stare with a knowing sneer, but said nothing.

“Oh, president Erwin!” Armin instantly perked up and sat a little straighter in his seat. I could feel Jean’s tension rising beside me in reaction to Armin’s palpable enthusiasm over a man that wasn’t him.

“Armin,” Erwin breathed the name as if it were his favorite word and casually sat back in his seat to regard my best friend. My fingers dug a little too deep into my sandwich as I suppressed any choice words I had to say. He should not be looking at him that way. “I was so pleased to hear you would be joining us. I read your file as one of the possible applicants and I was thoroughly impressed. You have a lot of talent for someone so young.”

Yea, you like them young, don’t you?

“I still can’t believe I was accepted,” Armin said, pushing the humble act a little far. It was obvious that he was going to be accepted. There wasn’t a student in the school that rivaled him academically.

“There isn’t anyone I could think of that I would have accepted over you,” Erwin replied in a voice that said far more than his words. Even I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks. When this guy decided he wanted something, he pursued it with all the elegance and danger of a predator.

Jean smacked his knife down on the table a little harder than was necessary and kept a firm grip handle, lifting his gaze to Erwin. He didn’t hide the venom in his voice, “There are a lot of good applicants. He’s not the only one. I’m sure you’ll find someone else that catches your eye.”

The remark was pointed enough that I had no trouble understanding what Jean meant by it. He may as well have drove the knife into Erwin’s hand and told him to back the fuck off. I glanced over at Armin who was staring at Jean with wide eyes; he had been oblivious to the fact that Jean was jealous up until now. Erwin, however, remained as calm as he had been before the comment and maintained his comfortable position as he analyzed Jean as if he were putting together an easy puzzle.
Then he paused and glanced off in a direction behind me, and his expression changed into one of amusement. His features returned to normal so quickly that I was almost convinced I had missed the look. He turned to me and then suddenly leaned in close, setting one hand down on my upper thigh underneath the table where no one close would see it.

He answered Jean as he stared into my eyes, his voice deep, “I’m sure I will.”

Erwin’s back hit his chair so hard I could have sworn I heard an audible crack. Levi’s hand was on Erwin’s shoulder, gripping it tight enough that I could see the white of his knuckles. His expression was one of carefully composed impassiveness, but I could still make out the twitch of his eyebrows that told me this unemotional façade was no easy feat.

Erwin tilted his head back to regard Levi, his expression calm and a welcoming smile on his lips. Whatever Erwin had just done was intentionally planned, and he had clearly expected this kind of reaction. He even seemed pleased that he had been right. “Did you need something, Levi?”

When Levi spoke his voice came out deep and dangerous through his teeth, “I’d like to see you in your office for a moment.”

“Can it wait?” Erwin raised one eyebrow as if he were actually surprised by Levi’s request. He gestured at the rest of the table, “We’re having lunch.”

“No. They’re having lunch. You’re having a meeting with me, right now.”

Erwin chuckled softly and stood from his seat, causing Levi to let go of his shoulder when he did so. Erwin adjusted his shirt and then returned his gaze to us. “We’ll have lunch tomorrow, without interruptions.”

His stare lingered on Armin for a moment longer and then he set a hand on my shoulder. I told myself that it was only because I was seated closest to him, but then the brush of his fingers across the back of my neck combined with his words sent an uncomfortable shiver down my spine, “I’d like to take the time to get to know you all personally.”

Levi grabbed Erwin’s hand and tore him away from my side, his voice snapping as he led him out of the room, “Don’t touch the interns. It’s creepy.”

I could hear Erwin’s soft laugh as he followed Levi out of the room, and then silence consumed our table. I shoved my food away from me, no longer feeling any desire to eat with all the thoughts racing through my head. The touch had felt more playful than sexual, and the words seemed too well thought out. I felt like I was being toyed with; I was being used by Erwin to make Levi jealous and it had clearly worked like a charm. Levi would no longer want me to pursue Erwin, and that much was fine. However, my stomach twisted uncomfortably when I reminded myself that Levi wouldn’t need me because he wanted Erwin back.

“Hey, you guys got to talk to President Handsome!” Connie laughed as he walked up to our table, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

“Handsome? You’re kidding right? That has to be the ugliest guy I’ve ever seen,” Jean snapped, glancing at Connie over his shoulder.

“You only say that because he stares at Armin like he wants to eat him,” I retorted, not bothering to keep the biting edge from my voice. I was pissed off now and it would feel good to focus my anger elsewhere.

“Eren!” Armin flushed with chagrin and I felt a small pang of regret that I had done so at Armin’s
“Do you really think he’s attractive?” Jean focused on Connie, trying to pretend my comment hadn’t existed. He was holding Armin’s hand now, their fingers threaded and held together on the table for everyone to see.

“What can I say, I like a man with distinguished eyebrows,” Connie joked. We all knew he was with Sasha.

“Those aren’t distinguished, they’re fucking landing strips for jumbo jets.”

Sasha snorted and covered the lower half of her face as she ran to get tissues, water dripping from beneath her hand.

I watched as Armin squeezed Jean’s hand in a moment of silent reassurance and felt anger rise inside of me when I realized I had wanted something like that. Even as Levi had talked about prostituting me off to some middle-aged man, I had imagined myself somehow ending up with him. Every time we were together it always led to something more, and I had hoped that would have been the case in the long term. It was obvious to me now that such a thing would never be happening. I was mourning over the loss of something I never knew I wanted.

I pushed up from the table and grabbed my tray, speaking when I caught Armin’s eye, “Can we go? I’m not feeling so well and we’re done for the day, right?”

“Yea, Supervisor Mike said that we could go when we’re done. Moving around took a little longer than expected so he’s going to show us the rest of the mailroom tomorrow.”

“Great, can’t wait,” I murmured with a roll of my eyes. I wasn’t even sure I would bother coming in tomorrow, but Armin didn’t need to know that right now. “I’m going to throw this out and hang out by the car.”

Armin nodded his agreement and I made my way to the trash, throwing away most of the unfinished contents and saving the bag of chips for later. I walked out of the cafeteria and headed down the hall towards the elevators at a fast pace. I didn’t want to take the chance of running into Erwin or Levi, although I was pretty damn sure they were both currently occupied in one of the offices upstairs. Good for fucking them.

I hit the down button and took a step back, waiting for the doors to open. I groaned softly and put my head in my hands, rubbing my temples to try to ward off the oncoming headache. Today had been more eventful than I would have ever wanted it to be. I had gone from miserable to thrilled and then back again in only a handful of hours, and I was positive my nerves couldn’t handle anymore of this day. I was going to crawl into my bed and, if I was really feeling inspired, I would actually consider going back to this hellhole tomorrow. Of course, that wasn’t likely to happen at this point. I wasn’t sure I could face him again.

Not that I had a choice.

I stared into Levi’s eyes when the elevator doors opened, and in a distant part of my mind I noted that Erwin was not with him. I hated how relieved that made me feel. I faltered as I stared into those steel blue eyes, trying to decide if I wanted to take the stairs and wondering if he would even let me. I wasn’t ready to get into a cramped space with a man who had probably just had a championship fuck upstairs. “I’ll just wait for the next-”

Levi grabbed the front of my shirt and pulled me into the elevator. The doors slid shut before I could
even play with the idea of getting out of there. “You’re not waiting for shit, brat. I came down here to get you.”

“Because you don’t need me to seduce him anymore?” I snapped, not bothering to keep the emotion from my voice, “Because you want him back now, is that it?”

Levi stared at me with an expression of shocked incredulity and shook his head. “What the hell are you talking about? God damn it, kid. You really don’t understand a damn thing, do you? You have all these thoughts in your head and not one of them is right.”

“Sure they’re not.” I said with a roll of my eyes, “That’s why you acted that way. Because you don’t want him. Right.”

“I… you…” Levi went silent for a moment and pinched the bridge of his nose, fighting to maintain his cool indifference. A growl stirred in his throat, “You unbelievable little shit. You don’t what the fuck you’re talking about.”

“Then explain it to me.”

He lowered his hand from his face and stared at me with annoyance glinting in his hard eyes, “I don’t have to explain shit to you.”

I watched as the numbers ticked down, urging them to go faster. “Fine. Whatever, don’t tell me anything. It’s not like you ever do anyway.”

“No, I don’t. And guess what, brat? I’m not about to start. So how about you save your fucking breath with trying to guilt trip me. It won’t work.”

I went silent as the elevator chimed its arrival at the ground floor and surged forward the second the doors were open. He caught me by my arm and pulled me back, hitting the button to close the elevator before jamming a gold key into the slot it was meant for, twisting it. The elevator stopped moving, but the doors didn’t open. Shit. Then he pushed me into the corner and used the position to lean up on my body. He was so short and yet I was the one who felt small.

“I’m not done talking.”

“What more is there to say?” I looked down at him and wondered if there was anyway out of this that didn’t involve me getting broken.

“I asked you to come to my place tonight. I know you’re not the sharpest knife in the box, so I wanted to make sure you actually remembered.”

“You still want me to seduce him?”

“Kid, you couldn’t seduce yourself if you tried, let alone him.” he said with a small smirk teasing the edge of his mouth, “But that’s not the point. He’ll do enough seducing for the both of you.”

“And that’s what you want?”

Levi opened his mouth to speak and then stopped, shutting it for a moment as he stared at me. The heat in his gaze caused desire to rise in my core and I was once again amazed and annoyed by how easily my body responded to him. When he finally spoke, his voice was deeper; “I want you to come to my place tonight. That’s what I want. We’ll discuss the rest of the shit when you get there.”

“At seven?” I knew I had so many reasons not to, but I couldn’t remember a single one when he was
“Not a second later,” he started and when I smirked his eyes narrowed, “I’m serious, kid. I won’t wait around for you. You’ll be up there, or you can forget all of this. If your ass isn’t in my bed by seven, I’ll assume you’re not interested at all.”

“How can I be in your bed at seven if I’m just getting there at seven?”

“Because I’m not wasting a fucking second once I get you up there.” He turned the key and the doors slid open as he took a step back from me. “Don’t be late.”

I tried to get my mind to focus on what he was saying, but I could hardly believe that things had taken this sudden turn. He was going to have me in his bed, tonight? I had a hard enough time getting him to agree to touching, let alone what he was insinuating now. Everything in my mind screamed at me to accept this for what it was and take what I could get, but my stupid mouth got the best of me once again.

“You want me to seduce him. Why do I need to get into your bed to do that?”

He leaned dangerously close until I was backed into the corner of the elevator once again, my elbow hitting the button for one of the random floors. The doors were closing, but that was the least important thing to me right now. The man in front of me was so sexually intimidating I found it nearly impossible to stand. His eyes were molten with a lust so strong that it had sucked all the air from the elevator and left me to suffocate under his stare.

His voice was rough, “Because if I don’t get you out of my system before we start this, I’m going to break both him and you.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Wowza this one is a long one - longer than the past few, anyway. Oh, and the next one will be in Levi's POV, so look forward to that!

AND OH! ^_^ Someone else drew me Intern art yesterday. I cannot even describe how giddy I was for the rest of the day! THANK YOU, YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE! <3 Honestly, the art and comments make me so happy, so thank you all so much!

As always, if you would like to follow me on tumblr, you can find me at lootibles or lusty-levi (RP blog). I'm also tracking the tag fic: the intern.

A lot of stuff happens in this chapter... hope you enjoy it! There is some angst, just as a heads up.

Oh, and the rating will be changed to explicit soon, so... yea.

ENJOY!

I couldn’t decide whether I was thrilled or pissed off that Levi actually wanted to get me into his bed. The idea that he wanted to get me out of his system made me feel as though I were some drug that had tainted his body and needed to be cleaned away. It made me feel dirty to the point that I wasn’t sure if I was willing to have him this way. Of course, that thought made the majority of my body scream in protest. I had been so intent on having him that I decided I would take him in any way he would have me, and that included a one time fling to scrub the urge away.

But still, was I willing to be used by him? I was almost certain it would break me if I allowed it to happen. I was in too deep at this point and I was more than well aware of that fact. His body wasn’t the only thing I craved and I knew that having a taste of him would only bury me deeper. This one-way obsession was going to end up snapping what little sanity I had left, and I had no choice but to let it happen. There was no escaping him and I didn’t even want to try. Levi had become my sanctuary in an otherwise chaotic world that was spinning out of control.

Despite all of that, I could not fight back the rage I felt inside. “So you’re just going to use me?”

“Use you?” Levi scoffed at my choice of words, even though his had been no better. “You make it sound like I’m expecting you to lay there like some fucking blow up doll. You do realize you’re going to enjoy it, too, right?”

“Isn’t that a little arrogant?”

“It would be incredibly arrogant if it were anyone but me,” he retorted, angling his head to glance once at the numbers that were ticking up. We were heading back to the cafe floor.

“You’re so short,” I mentally kicked myself for the comment, but my irresponsible mouth continued. “I don’t even think it would work.”

“I’ll remind you to rephrase that when I have you on all fours, brat.”
I felt the heat rush to my cheeks, as my eyelids grew heavy and lowered, my stare turning to one of carnal desire that he recognized too quickly. He took a step back and held up one finger, fixing me with a warning glare, “Keep your dick in your pants, kid. We don’t have the time or the privacy to do what I want right now.”

“Who cares if anyone sees?”

I could honestly say that I didn’t care at this point. I had embarrassed myself in front of the other interns with the circus tent in my pants, and I knew it couldn’t get much worse from there. Besides, if he wanted to get me out of his system then I was eager to do it now. I couldn’t bring myself to wait until tonight, knowing that once it was done I would be nothing more than pawn left in whatever game he was playing with Erwin. I wanted to get the pain over with now before I fell any deeper.

“This is why I hate teenagers. You’re all horny little shits, thinking only with your dicks.” He leaned against the wall opposite me and folded his arms, his guarded expression making it clear that nothing would be happening right now.

“I thought this was what you wanted.” It was part of what I wanted, but I knew I wouldn’t be able to get anything more out of him.

He pointed once at the number that was quickly approaching the selected floor, “We don’t have time, brat.”

“Then let’s go to your office. You have a couch.”

“Like hell I’m letting you get your damn cock stains all over my couch,” he said with a note of disgust, “You can wait, and you’re going to.”

“But,” I searched my brain for some other way to convince him and landed on the only tool that had worked before, “I need you, Corporal.”

A smirk spread across his lips and I felt a chill go through my body. He eyed me with an amused expression that called me a little shit without saying a word. Then, in a seductive purr, he murmured a threat that should have worried me, “Don’t make me break your dick off, Eren.”

A breath caught in my throat when his tongue formed the sound of my name for the first time, and I gripped the railing behind me to keep my body steady. I wanted to lunge at him and draw the word from his lips again, but I knew he would never allow it. He eyed my hand and the smirk remained a steady constant on his lips, keying me into the fact that he was more than aware that he was toying with me in the same way I had messed with him.

The elevator bell sang out a jaunty tune that made me want to rip it out of the ceiling, and the doors slid open.

“Eren!” Armin said with happy surprise. Jean was standing at his side with a sour expression on his face, probably still unhappy that Captain America wanted to steal his boyfriend.

“Hey Armin,” I said with a nod and then glanced at Jean, “Who shit on your cupcake?”

“Shut it, Woody.”

Armin fidgeted as he glanced up at Jean, and I decided to drop the subject immediately. It was clear that they had been fighting about something, and knowing my mouth I would only make things worse between them. Armin looked back at me and then tilted his head to stare past me, just now noticing the other presence in the elevator. “Oh! Vice President Le-”

“Oh, uhm… right. Levi.” The word sounded awkward on Armin’s tongue. He was obviously caught between trying to please Levi and his innate desire to address his superiors by their formal titles. “Were you going up to your office? We can wait for the next elevator.”

Armin gave a little motion of his fingers to indicate that I should join him in the hall. I walked out and Levi followed a step behind me, “I’m not going upstairs yet. I was just grabbing this brat on his way out the door. Erwin and I have something to tell the group before you all head out for the day.”

He didn’t wait for a response and made his way towards the cafeteria that still housed the remaining interns. Jean glanced down at Armin and held his hand out with an expression that said he wasn’t even sure he would take it. I rolled my eyes, realizing how little he actually knew my friend and started walking after Levi. I didn’t have to look back to know that Armin was now holding onto Jean as they followed behind me.

I was going to have to get Armin alone and talk to him soon. The possessiveness that horse-face had been displaying was putting an uncomfortable edge in their relationship, and I knew it had to be worrying Armin at this point. As much as I disliked Jean, I wasn’t willing to watch Armin cry over losing his first real boyfriend to some pathetic bout of jealousy. Not that I was one to talk when it came to being irrationally jealous.

As if to drive that point home, I walked into the room to find Levi leaning into Erwin as the taller male bent down to whisper something in his ear. I stopped walking and felt Jean smack into my back, and stumbled forward. I turned quickly, fixing him with an annoyed stare and completely disregarding the fact that it had been entirely my fault, “What the hell, Jean?”

“Me? Who the hell stopped walking all of a sudden? What, did you see a brightly colored piece of string and get distracted?”

“Oh, fuck off, Jean. Why don’t you just go back to glaring daggers at president handsome?”

I regretted the words before they had all left my tongue and shut my mouth immediately after, looking at Armin with an apologetic expression. Jean had been getting on my nerves all day and I had used the first and only ammunition I knew I had against him. I kept forgetting the fact that most of the things that would hurt Jean would end up hurting Armin, too.

“Like you’re not doing the same,” Jean retorted after a moment of stunned silence.

“Why the hell would I have any reason to glare at him?” I withheld the mention of why Jean had every right to hate Erwin. It was a conscious effort on my part to keep Armin out of it, but I was going to try my best.

“Do you think I’m stupid, Jaeger?”

“Do you really want me to answer that?”

“You’ve gone off with Levi at least three times now,” Jean pointed out and my eyes quickly scanned to see if anyone else was listening in on our little argument. “Don’t think I didn’t notice the way you’ve been staring at him. For sneaking around, neither of you are very subtle about what’s going on. I didn’t need to see your hard-on in the elevator to figure that one out.”

I held my hands out in front of me, waving them in an attempt to shut him up as I continued to scan the area. “Drop it, Jean. You don’t know what you’re talking about, so just shut up before someone else hears you!”
“Before someone else hears me? Eren, I’m pretty damn sure that everyone knows at this point. I heard they’re sending around an office memo right now. Actually, that’s probably what this meeting is about.”

“What?” I felt the color drain from my face.

“Jean,” Armin chided him, “He doesn’t have to talk about it if he’s not ready.”

Jean gave a small roll of his eyes, but relented for the most part, “Whatever. Just don’t sit here and bitch at me for hating that asshole when you don’t like him either.”

“Fine. Good. Done. Can we drop it now?”

I didn’t have time to get a response from Jean. Erwin called for our attention and we turned as a group to face him. Levi stood beside Erwin with his arms folded, and I noted how he seemed almost nonexistent beside the large male’s remarkable presence. That was, of course, exactly what Levi wanted. Earlier today I had been angry that he had withheld such an important part of his life, but now I realized he hadn’t been lying when he said that this was not the life he wanted. He loathed his title and removed himself from most situations that required him to be the face of the company. It was like he wasn’t even there. He willingly gave every measure of control to Erwin and hid in the background.

“Vice President Levi,” Erwin began and I watched as Levi rolled his eyes in response to the title. “Has made the suggestion of awarding jobs to the top two candidates.”

Armin gasped beside me, his excitement palpable. I could practically hear the possibilities running though his head and took a moment to appreciate Levi for the suggestion. Even if he had come up with the award to mess with me, I was pleased that Armin would at least benefit from it in the end. I had no doubt in my mind that he would be one of the two to earn a position, although I wasn’t sure I wanted to know how Erwin would use him as a secretary.

“Levi and myself are both looking to take on new secretaries,” Erwin continued, “So as this internship progresses, a number of you may be pulled from the mailroom to take on other duties. Depending on how you handle yourself in the office setting, you may be offered a position here after the internship has concluded.”

My gaze drifted back to Levi as I listened to Erwin proceed to touch on a few points of the internship, only managing to take in part of the information. Sensing the stare, his eyes met mine and held me in place with a force that reminded me that he was the one who had returned stability to my life. My mind had consistently wandered to dangerous places since the day Mikasa had walked out of my life, but when I stared at him I forgot everything that had made me feel empty inside. He filled me up in a way that no one else ever had.

“Eren?” Armin’s voice drew me out of my reverie and I turned to him just as the meeting concluded. “Do you want to get going? School’s already out and it’s almost the end of the day here as it is. We may as well leave a few minutes early and beat traffic.”

“Yea, sure,” I muttered, glancing over to see that Levi was walking towards the exit with Erwin. They would have to pass us on the way.

“Would you mind if we stopped somewhere on the way home?” Armin continued, working a strand of hair around his finger, “There’s something I want to do. We can get some food, too. You didn’t really eat your sandwich, so you’re still hungry, right?”
“Yea, I am,” I agreed and my stomach chimed in with its growling response. I eyed Levi as he walked past and added, “But I need to be home before seven. There’s something I have to do.”

His eyes met mine and lingered for a moment, a smirk turning up the corner of his mouth. Then he continued out the door with Erwin. Armin followed my stare and looked back at me with a knowing smile before speaking, “Sure. I can have you back before then.”

Armin turned to Jean to extend the invitation, but he cut him off before he had the chance, “Do you mind if I catch a ride home with Marco? I’m kind of exhausted and I don’t feel like going out.”

“Oh,” Armin deadpanned and then rushed to recover, “Of course, sure. That’s fine. It’s been a long day already.”

Jean looked at me as if he were both annoyed and confused by my presence, and I decided to take the hint without starting in on another argument. I walked towards the exit and glanced back at Armin and Jean, who now had their arms wrapped around each other. Jean’s brow was furrowed and Armin looked like he was doing his best to reassure him. I personally thought it spoke volumes that Jean would soon be getting into a car with another man, especially a man who Armin was convinced Jean had feelings for. But what did I know about relationships?

I decided to wait for Armin by his car, knowing that he would find me there when he realized I wasn’t waiting outside of the cafeteria. I hit the button for the elevator and felt my heart begin to skip in my chest as I hoped for one more chance to see Levi. The doors opened to reveal the empty shell and with a sigh I trudged inside, hitting the button for the ground floor. I had a feeling that he had tucked himself away in his office for what remained of the day, and I wasn’t nearly bold enough to go there looking for him.

I would see him soon enough, I reminded myself. I had to fight back the wave of butterflies that wanted to explode from my stomach at the thought of what could happen tonight. I wasn’t sure whether or not I wanted things to move so quickly, but with the way we had acted in the elevator and his office, I wasn’t sure we were capable of taking things slow. Keeping my hands off of him required a herculean effort that I wasn’t able to achieve. I was inexperienced and terrified that I would embarrass myself past the point of recovery, but nonetheless I was determined to let him do what he wanted with me.

I leaned against Armin’s car and tilted my head back against the window to stare up at the sky. It was unseasonably warm for this time of year, but there was a slight chill in the air that indicated colder days would soon be on their way. I was looking forward to the change in weather and hoped that this year would bring more snow than the previous few. I couldn’t imagine living in a place that didn’t have definitive seasons, where the majority of the year was caught somewhere between spring and summer.

“Thanks for waiting!” Armin drew my attention to him as he ran up to the car. He gave me an unnecessary apologetic smile. “I didn’t mean to take so long.”

“Are you two going to be okay?”

Armin looked down with a heavy sigh that trembled on the way out and then shrugged, giving the only answer he could, “I hope so.”

“He’s just jealous. He’ll get over it.”

Armin gave a slow nod, although he didn’t look like he actually agreed with the thought. “Yea, I know. He’ll probably just vent to Marco and be fine in the morning. It won’t matter by tomorrow.”
“You’re okay with letting him go with Marco?”

“To be honest?” Armin looked at me with a sheepish smile, “Not at all, no. But don’t tell him I said that. I don’t want him to think that I don’t trust him.”

“Don’t tell him?” I raised one eyebrow and grinned, “How often do you think we talk when you’re not around? It’s not like we have sleepovers and secret meetings.”

My comment earned a smile from Armin and I was happy to see his mood starting to improve. “You know what I mean.”

“Yea, yea,” I said as I walked over to the passenger side and hopped in. I hooked my seatbelt into place and then clapped my hands together, eager to get on with the day and push my way to seven. “So, where are we going?”

Armin gripped the steering wheel and took in a deep breath, steeling himself for some kind of confession before he blurted out, “I want to get my hair cut.”

“Oh yea?” I eyed his hair, trying to remember the last time he had a trim, “Okay, then, I’ll get the bowl and we’ll get to work. Just a little off the bottom, right?”

“No,” he said the word through a laugh and started up the car, “I mean a real haircut. As in something different from what I have now.”

“How different?”

“Really different,” he gave a side-glance in my direction and I tried to keep my expression as neutral as possible. I honestly couldn’t imagine Armin with any other hairstyle.

“What brought this on?” I asked. I figured it was the safest way to broach the subject without seeming like I was turning down his idea.

“Everyone else has a professional hairstyle, and I’m the only one with long hair. I stand out.”

“Standing out isn’t a bad thing,” I countered. He had obviously stuck out in a good way for Erwin. “It gets you noticed faster. Isn’t that what you want? It’ll set you apart from the competition.”

“I don’t think it’ll set me apart in a good way.” He sighed, one hand removed from the steering wheel to touch his hair. “I’ve had this same hair cut since I was a little kid. It might be good to have some change.”

I leaned back in my seat, analyzing Armin’s nervous expression. He was clearly looking for some support on the issue and I got the feeling he hadn’t received any from Jean. “It’ll always grow back if you hate it.”

“That’s true,” Armin smiled and glanced at me. He then directed his attention back to the road, seeming far more confident in his choice. A moment of silence passed before he continued in a hesitant voice, “So… Levi, huh?”

I let the air rush from my lungs before giving a slow nod, “Yea. Levi.”

“He’s not what I expected,” Armin commented, turning off down a new street. “I researched the company and found a ton of stuff on him before the internship. He’s nothing like the pictures I saw.”

“What do you mean?” I had the sudden urge to attack Google and find out everything I could on the
man that had remained a complete mystery up until today.

“He was smiling in all the photos,” Armin said with a small shrug. It was hard to imagine, considering the most I had even seen on his lips had been half a smirk at best. “He looked really… happy. He had long hair, too. Longer than he has now, anyway. It was a little longer than mine now.”

My mind flashed to the memory of the first time I had seen him in the elevator, wearing what I now knew to be a wig. “Sure it wasn’t a wig?”

“No, it wasn’t.” Armin shook his head. “He made valedictorian and there was a comment in the article about how he didn’t look like a student who would have earned that title. It was definitely his hair.”

“He made valedictorian?” I couldn’t say that surprised me.

“Yea, he was the top in his class in high school,” Armin slowed the car down as he looked for a space to park. “He was in some sports, too. Mostly karate and things like that. He went to a couple of tournaments.”

I tried to picture the well-rounded, smiling Levi that Armin was talking about, but it was nothing like the man I had met almost a week ago now. “That doesn’t really sound like him.”

“I know; that’s why I was so surprised. He seems so empty. Like he’s been hollowed out and there’s just a shell left.”

Armin pulled into the parking space and unhooked his belt. I sat there for a moment, trying to wrap my mind around the information. I would have to run a search on him when I got home, if for no other reason than to find the pictures of him with something other than an impassive expression.

I followed Armin into the shop and watched the hairdresser fawn over his soft blonde hair. I suppressed a laugh and took a seat where I would be able to see the one thing I never expected to happen. It was difficult to imagine Armin with anything other than the hair he had since I had met him. But I learned a long time ago that when Armin made up his mind, it was best to support his decision and watch it unfold.

Armin hopped into the chair and the hairdresser spun him in a direction that blocked my view, robbing me of the chance to see anything before it was finished. I had always wondered if hairdressers did that on purpose. Whenever I had my hair cut they always spun me away from the mirror as they worked. I figured it was because they wanted to have a grand reveal at the end, but I suspected that it was just plain torture.

I heard Armin giving directions for what he wanted cut, although the gist of their conversation told me that he was putting the artistic creativity into the hairdresser’s hands. I wasn’t sure I approved, but I continued to remind myself that his hair would eventually grow back. I could only hope that his hair wasn’t butchered into some hideous buzz cut. I couldn’t imagine Armin with barely any hair. The image was frightening.

I dug my phone out of my pocket, deciding to take the time to search for Levi’s face. It didn’t take me long to find his picture, and Armin had been right: it was nothing like the Levi I knew. He was leaning against a girl I didn’t recognize and they were both caught in a fit of laughter. His eyes were crinkled around the edges and his mouth was spread in a wide grin. His hair was longer and reminded me of the wig he had worn on that first night, but it was most definitely his natural hair in the photo. He looked so happy that I felt pain in my chest, and as I rubbed at it I murmured, “What
happened to you?"

“That’s not exactly the response I was hoping for.”

I looked up to see Armin and my phone fell out of my hand when my fingers became useless. My mouth dropped open and I leaned back in my chair, as if doing so would allow me more room to absorb the sight in front of me.

The front of Armin’s hair remained untouched for the most part in the sense that he still had his bangs, although the longest strands now only came down just above his chin. The hair that framed his face was cut in a backwards slant to give him a reverse bob-style cut. The rest of his hair from his ears back was cut to a length that was only a little shorter than my own.

An hour ago I wouldn’t have been able to imagine Armin with different hair, and now I couldn’t fathom why he hadn’t done this sooner. I repeated in a mantra that he was my best friend and taken. My taken best friend. Totally off limits. Too awkward to try. Really, it would be strange for the both of us. It would never, ever work.

Goddamn he was hot.

Armin fidgeted and blushed a crimson that reached the tips of his ears that I could now see, and I realized I had said the last bit out loud. I cleared my throat, bent to scoop up my phone and then stood up. “Sorry, that was awkward, right?”

“Does it really look…” Armin fidgeted with his cream sweater and muttered, “Hot?”

I had to bite my lip to keep from laughing. Despite a haircut that would earn him the title of a lady-killer, he was impossibly shy. To be honest, that probably made him even more attractive. “Yea, you really do. It’s… just, wow. Damn.”

He made a soft noise of embarrassment and I decided to have a little fun. I put my arm around his shoulder and leaned in, trying on my best seductive voice as I purred, “So, busy tonight?”

I wagged my eyebrows up and down to take off the awkward edge, making it obvious that I was joking. He squeaked and then hit my arm to push me away, beet red now, “No, but you are!”

I raised one eyebrow at the way he said it and then dug my phone out of my pocket to check the time. “Oh, shit! We have to go. We have to go now.”

Armin gave the hairdresser his card to pay and glanced back at me, “Don’t worry, we have twenty minutes. He’ll understand if you’re a little late, right?”

“No, I really don’t think he will,” I said, glancing at the street and trying to gauge how far and fast I would have to run. There was no way I would make it in time on foot, so I would just have to hope that traffic was lenient today.

Armin added the tip and we made our way to his car. I had never gotten into the seat and buckled up so fast in my life, and Armin seemed to sense my urgency because he pulled out as soon as he saw an opening that was at least one car length. I heard the blare of the horn behind us and looked at Armin with a grateful expression, “Thanks. He told me I couldn’t be late. I think he meant it.”

Armin gave me a side-glance and I was momentarily caught off-guard by the sight of him once again. I was actually jealous of Jean. Armin gave me a shy smile and looked back at the road ahead of us, “He’s strict, huh?”
“Very.” I agreed and then shrugged, “But I kind of like it.”

Armin gave a small nod, but didn’t comment any further on the subject. The traffic ahead of us was a field of red lights and I felt worry twist in my gut, urging the cars to move faster. I held my phone in my hands, turning it over and over out of nervous habit. I jumped when it started to vibrate in my hands and flipped it over to see the words, “Unknown Number” plastered across the screen.

“Again?” I groaned, “This number has been calling me for days.”

“Maybe it’s him?”

“I never gave him my number,” I said, but kept myself from ending the call as I considered the possibility.

“Your number was in your file, though. He has that,” Armin glanced at me and nodded to my phone, “Pick up. Maybe you’ll get lucky? You can tell him you might be late.”

That was all the convincing I needed. I hit the button to receive the call and eagerly pressed the phone to my ear, “Hello?”

“Eren!”

My eyes peeled wide, “Stop the car! Armin, stop the car now!”

Armin’s hands jerked on the wheel as he scrambled to comply, pushed to do so by the urgency in my voice. His tires squealed as he pulled into the nearest available space and pressed a hand to his chest, “Eren, you scared me half to death! Who is it?”

I pushed the speakerphone button and held it out, “Mikasa.”

“Oh my god,” Armin whispered before speaking up, “Mikasa, where are you? Are you okay? Tell me where you are, I’ll come get you!”

“I’m okay.” She didn’t sound like she was okay at all.

“Where are you?” I pressed, unwilling to drop the subject.

“I can’t tell you. I want to, Eren, but I can’t. I can’t run the risk of him finding me.”

“Who?”

“Listen, I’m going to come back for you, okay?” She said, ignoring my question. “I’m sorry I had to leave you there. I almost took you with me, but I knew that would be worse for you.”

“Mikasa, what happened?” Armin pressed, concern coloring his voice.

“I can’t—“
“Mikasa, tell us where you are! Dad can come get you and-“

“No! Eren, don’t tell him I called. Don’t tell him you heard from me. Do you understand me? You can’t tell him.”

“But he’s looking for you,” I argued, confusion and anger making my voice rise, “He wants you to come home.”

“Trust me, that’s not what he wants.”

Armin’s eyes narrowed and he grabbed the phone from my hands, “Did he hurt you?”

“Armin, shut up, dad would never-“

“Eren.” Mikasa’s voice made me stop midsentence and I stared blankly at the phone.

“No,” I shook my head, “No, he wouldn’t do anything. All he wants is for you to come home. You have to come back home, Mikasa. We’re not running away. We don’t need to run away. Just come home.”

“I have to go,” she sighed in a rush, frustration in her voice, “Don’t ignore my calls again, okay? It’s going to come up unknown, so just answer. We’ll talk about this when you’ve had time to think. I just wanted you to know that I’m okay. I haven’t abandoned you.”

I jabbed the ‘end’ button and threw the phone into the dash so quickly I didn’t even realize it had happened until my phone was laying in two pieces on the ground. Armin stared at me with wide eyes, trembling in his seat, “Eren…”

“She’s lying!” I snapped, turning angry eyes to Armin. I was shaking so hard I could barely think. “She left us and now she wants me to leave, too!”

“Eren, I…” Armin trailed off, knowing reason would not reach me right now.

I forced my hands into my hair, “Fuck, fuck! Why the fuck is this happening now?”

The emotions raging inside of me were too much to bear. I felt like hitting a wall until I had no hands left to punch with. I felt like screaming my voice raw. I felt like tearing apart everything I could find. But most of all I felt like seeing Levi. He had been the only thing that took my mind away from the hell she had left it in, and I needed him now more than ever.

“Take me home.”

Armin didn’t even attempt to argue and pulled back out onto the road. I sat in stony silence as I stared out the window, trying to will my mind anywhere but where it was right now. I needed to escape, and that overwhelming urge caused the minutes to tick by like they were hours. When we finally pulled up to my apartment, I pulled open the door and paused just long enough to collect the remains of my phone. I met Armin’s eyes, “Thanks.”

“You know how to get a hold of me.”

I nodded and shut the door, listening to his car pull back into traffic as I walked up to Trost Towers. I was an hour late at this point, but at least I had a good excuse and a broken phone to go along with it. He would have to understand that.

I barely noticed the man that was leaning against the glass wall beside the door. Smoke curled
around him as he released a breath and lowered his hand to his side, regarding me with a bored expression. He had dark blond hair that was cut into a style that looked like it was attempting to be Levi’s, but falling short. “Hey, are you Eren?”

I stopped at the sound of my name and turned to stare at him. “Yea, why?”

“Levi wants his key back,” he said and held out his hand.

I stared at his palm and then pushed the door open, continuing towards the elevator. If Levi wanted his key back, he could tell me that himself. I had just pushed the button when the man caught up to me, “Hey, brat! I’m talking to you.”

“If he wants it back, he can take it from me when I get up there.”

“He’s not up there, shitty brat.” The words sounded like a poor imitation of Levi and I found myself sickened by the attempt. “He already left, and he sent me here to get the key from you. He said to tell you it’s over. You lost your chance, understand? He doesn’t want to see you again.”

I trembled as I stood in place, willing the man to go away under the force of my glare. I gripped the key so tightly in my hand that I was sure it had cut into my skin.

“By the way, I think you might want to rethink that internship,” he sneered, “He doesn’t need to see you in the halls.”

I stared at him, eyes filled with uncontrollable rage and my entire body shaking as I tried to get control over my nerves. The room was bending around me as my vision started to blur, the agony building up inside of me. This night had been filled so much promise only two hours ago and now my entire world had gone to shit. How had this happened to me?

I heard the elevator chime behind me and made up my mind, flinging the key so it scattered across the floor and towards the front doors. I felt a brief moment of triumph when the man cursed and went after the key. I took his moment of distraction to walk into the elevator on trembling legs and hit the button for my floor. I watched as the doors slid shut.

And fell to my knees and screamed.
I rolled my eyes because that was honestly the only response the comment was worthy of. I knew Erwin was trying to get under my skin; it had become his favorite pastime over the last few years and I’d gotten to the point where I brushed it off as easily as everything else. I walked over to the mini bar situated on the left side of Erwin’s office, running my thumb over the bottom of a short glass before flipping it over and smacking it down on the counter. The noise didn’t even make him flinch, although I knew it wouldn’t. Sharp movements like that was a tactic I could use on everyone but him. He knew me too well; a fact I had grown to hate above all else.

I poured the amber liquid into the glass with the full intent of numbing anything and everything I had felt in the past hour. That was not to say, of course, that the brat was getting to me. No one was capable of unnerving me and he was certainly no exception to that. Back in the cafeteria my little
outburst, if you could call it that, was due to nothing more than an annoyance that things were proceeding before I had given them permission to. I wanted to have full control over the situation, and Erwin’s sudden flirtation had thrown a wrench in my plans. Of course, it was a well-crafted wrench that would ultimately fit right into place, but I didn’t want that happening just yet.

I choked down the lies with a swig of the drink and felt it all burn on the way down. I set the glass back on the table and fingered the rim, a carefully crafted expression of boredom playing on my face as I answered in a tone that reflected the dull emotion, “I don’t have anything bad, Erwin. You were making a spectacle out of yourself in front of the new interns and I was simply putting a stop to that. Don’t read into it.”

“I’m the one making a spectacle out of myself?” Erwin’s voice was pointed on a few choice words that implied I had made a show of myself as well. I couldn’t really argue with that. “Who was the one dry-humping one our teenage interns in the elevator?”

I opened my mouth to deny everything, but thought better of it. We had security cameras and Erwin was no fool. He would have reviewed his evidence before accusing me, and lying would only be a waste of my breath. Instead I gave an indifferent shrug and took another swig of the drink. “He’s got a nice ass, what can I say?”

“Most of them have nice asses, Levi, that’s not the point,” Erwin continued as he crossed the room to my side, leaning over me to grab a glass of his own. Midday cocktails had become a thing for us since I hit a legal drinking age. Not that we didn’t have just as frequent parties beforehand, but I had to regulate myself back then and that was never fun.

I nursed my drink and eyed him suspiciously, wondering if he was going to actually get to the point. He took his good time in pouring the drink, dragging out the inevitable and only managing to tick me off more. He knew that, of course. He wanted me to speak first and I was in just enough of a piss poor mood to give in. I didn’t do so without an irritable snap in my voice, though. I had to get something out of it, after all. “Then what is the point?”

“I don’t think I’ve had you set your hand on me like that in ages,” Erwin said, watching me from over the rim of his glass. He took a sip before continuing. “That wasn’t the way we play, Levi. There was a threat in the way you touched me. You were telling me to back off of him.”

“I was being jealous over you, you oversized assbag.”

“As eloquent as always, Levi.”

“Oh, bite me, old man,” I rolled my eyes and did my best not to down the rest of my drink. It would have burned like a bitch and I wasn’t ready for the inebriation that would follow. Somehow that always ended with me spread out on the desk under Erwin as he rutted me into a screaming orgasm that I would only faintly remember after I came out of my drunken stupor.

“You’re not jealous over me, you’re jealous over him,” Erwin pushed forward with a pointless conversation I was still hoping to avoid. “If it had anything to do with me, you would have pummeled him. Instead I’m pretty sure you bruised my shoulder.”

“Awe, poor baby. Should I rub some Bengay on it? Oh wait, that’s right, you’re still gay. Do we have any of that lying around?”

“Oh, you’re hilarious. Really, you should think about opening a comedy show instead of a fetish club, Corporal.”
“Maybe I’ll add it to the line up,” I muttered around the rim of my glass, nursing the drink far more often than I should have. At this point I really would be bucking underneath him in the next ten minutes. I couldn’t really find a reason not to. I was pissed off enough that it would lead into the rough throw down that I needed and it might even get my mind off of-

Shit.

I took another sip to urge away the face that had suddenly popped into my mind, trying not to recall the mess of brown hair that had felt so soft between my fingers right before I pulled it taut. He liked it rough, I was sure of that now. I had never been an exceedingly gentle lover and if he hadn’t been scared off yet, it was a good sign that he was down for some kinky shit. The little sounds that had stirred in his throat had only furthered my excitement, and I found myself wondering what else he would let me do to him. He was a brand new toy, and I hadn’t had one straight out of the package in far too long.

And I couldn’t have this one. I had to keep reminding myself of that pesky little detail. It was bad enough that Erwin was already tipped off to the fact that I was sporting a near constant boner for the little shit. I had a purpose for him from the start and despite the latest occurrences the plan was not getting into his pants. Not where I was concerned, anyway. Erwin was free to strip the kid bare and bend him over the desk.

My hand tightened around my glass and I let out a slow breath through my nose. I had no idea what this brat was doing to me, but I didn’t approve at all. I didn’t like feeling as though I had no control over my body, and he had made me respond to him against my will on more than once occasion. The way he could switch from innocent and naïve to boldly sexual was almost deadly. Short of my midday drinking session, I didn’t have a significant amount of vices and the little shit was quickly becoming the most addicting substance I had ever encountered.

“Despite what you may think,” Erwin started in a voice that was too teasing for me not to look up. I could tell he was about to say something that was going to make me want to deck him. “You’ve never been good at hiding your emotions.”

I gave a short, humorless laugh. “Only from you, Commander.”

His expression immediately grew heated with lustful promise. “Don’t use that name unless you intend to bend over right now.”

A smirk pulled on the corner of my mouth and I stopped any response I had ready with another sip. I set my glass down and leaned against the bar, “I’m not interested. In him, that is.”

“Then go ahead and prove it.” I tried not to care about the challenging tone of his voice. He didn’t believe me in the least. “Go downstairs and tell the kid you’re not interested in him. Because he’s certainly interested in you. Cut it off before he gets in too deep.”

I rolled my shoulders, casually giving him an indifferent shrug as I pushed away from the bar. “Fine, whatever. I was going to head back down and grab something to eat anyway.”

“Let me know when you’re done.” His voice dropped an octave and it was impossible to deny the sexual edge of his words, “I’ll pick up the pieces and put him back together.”

My fingers curled in towards my palms, making fists before I realized the motion had even occurred. I quickly shook out my hands and shot him an annoyed stare that said I couldn’t care less, “Pfft. I’m not your fucking secretary. Find him youself when I’m done. I’m sure you’ll hear him wailing through the stairwell.”
I walked out into the hall to the sound of him laughing, letting the heavy door slam shut behind me. I muttered a few choice expletives as I walked towards the elevator, pushing the button twice in case it didn’t register the first time. I folded my arms as I waited, staring at the number that indicated the machine’s current position. I could feel my impatience growing, but it wasn’t because I was dying to get this over with. I hated to admit it, I truly did, but I wanted to see that brat’s ugly mug one more time today. I wanted to watch him react to me once again; with the pink coloring his cheeks and the brightness entering those already vibrant eyes. The way he responded to my presence was damn near euphoric. I couldn’t get enough of it. No one had ever looked at me quite the way he had, and I wanted to soak up these few occasions while they lasted. I would be tossing him aside soon enough, after all.

I stepped onto the elevator and pushed the button for two floors down, grateful that it would be a short trip. I wasn’t sure I would carry it out as Erwin expected, but I planned to at least make the brat squirm a little bit. I wasn’t ready to push him away from me yet, not to mention I was pretty damn sure that my body was the only thing he was agreeing to this whole thing for. If I took that off the table, what chance did I have?

Of course, there was always the possibility that he would show an actual interest in Erwin. The idea wasn’t completely repulsive, considering Erwin was essentially born to be a blonde sex god. Eren could do worse, and he was making a constant attempt to do so. While I may have been amused by it, I had no explanation as to why he was even remotely attracted to me. Perhaps if it had been years ago, before everything had gone to shit, but now? Now I was broken. And once he came to realize that, he would be gone like the rest of them.

I was still battling internally on whether I would continue to pursue the kid or cut him off now, when the doors slid open to reveal the boy that had occupied a little too much of my time the past few days. He stared at me with a shocked expression and an edge of anger in his vibrant eyes. Even with the anger, though, they brightened at the sight of me and I felt such power in the fact that I could make them do that. A flush spread across his cheeks and his breathing accelerated just slightly, just enough to thrill me.

“I’ll just wait for the next-“

Oh, the hell you will, brat. You’re mine.

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It was fucking hard to walk past Eren when he told Armin he had somewhere to be tonight. The fact that he had remembered and bothered to make the pointed remark in my direction pleased me more than I wanted to admit. He would be there, as I had commanded, and there was no limit to the amount of kinky things that I had planned for us. The ideas had started multiplying the second he agreed, and I decided that I would take this one night to do everything I wanted with the insufferable brat in order to get him out of my system.

It was simply a case of knowing I couldn’t have him that made me want him this way, and I was planning on fixing that tonight. I could tell he hadn’t been exactly thrilled with my choice of words, but I knew getting him into my bed would be easy nonetheless. We had a chemistry that made it impossible to keep our hands off of each other for longer than five minutes, although I knew that obsession had an expiration date for me. Once I finally fucked the kid in my bed and everywhere else, I would be able to slap a ‘That Was Easy’ button on his ass, call it a day, and send him off to
Erwin.

I quickly finished up what little I had left to do in my office; save for the introduction of the interns it had been an uneventful and boring day. I decided not to linger near Erwin’s office. He had a talent for finding ways to wrangle me into his limo for an evening workout session that required no weights and no clothes. Despite my best efforts, I had trouble denying him and it wasn’t just because of his de-licious body.

I had fallen for him, hard, at a very young age. He had been my first male experience and the only female experience I had prior to that had been a dismal one at best. Two thrusts in and my dick had given up the lie of wanting anything that resided between a chick’s legs. The girl at the time, Petra, had been more than graceful about the fact that I had gone limp as a fucking noodle on her. That was probably one of the reasons she was still at my side every time I entered The Wall. Of course, I told myself it was that and not the fact that she was still hoping I would decided to give up on cocks.

That was never going to happen, especially not with a man like Erwin in the next office down. I had known him since before I could remember; being business partners with my father had earned him more than a few visits to my home. However, it wasn’t until I turned sixteen that I started to notice him and he started to eye me. Not long after that he had me pinned down on his desk, pounding so hard it shifted several feet as I screamed a few holy praises at the ceiling. I wasn’t able to walk for hours after he had finally released my ass; he had simply chuckled and left me trembling and panting on his couch. I felt like a toy and the prospect only intrigued me more.

He opened up a world to me that I could have never imagined wanting but couldn’t have dreamed of living without once I was in it. I lost control to him completely, and I was happy to do so. He owned me in every sense of the word, in ways that I never thought I could be had, and it felt so fucking good at the time to belong to someone so entirely. The pressures of family and school had been eating away at me internally and it was a relief to sacrifice myself over to another person. I let him guide the situations and tell me what to do, and I followed him blindly, answering every order with a, “Yes, Commander.”

I had been innocent before him, save for the attempted fling with one girl, and I didn’t mean just in body. I was the top in my class, athletic and involved in a number of sports, popular to the point that becoming student president had been a cinch. Essentially everything that would make people’s eyes pop out of their heads if they heard it now, knowing me as they did. I was always smiling; always surrounded by people I claimed to love. I had a mess of black hair that was a little too long to keep under control, but at the time I didn’t care. I would tie it back into a sloppy bun or ponytail whenever I needed it out of my face, and the thought of cutting it never crossed my mind until the incident.

The incident being my father’s death. Well, no, death was the wrong word because that could apply to anyone who had died. It did not count for a man that had taken his own life and abandoned me with a company to run and no knowledge of how to do so. I was eighteen at the time, freshly interning at the company when I became its sole proprietor. I had turned to Erwin because I was so firmly wrapped around his finger at that point that I would have never thought to do otherwise. He was all too willing to fix everything. He had taken the responsibilities and the title so quickly that the spell he had on me started to break and I began to suspect him for what he was.

It took me too long to unravel his lies and find the filthy mess waiting underneath. He had gone to my father, who was painfully strict and unforgiving in his most agreeable moments, and told him everything we had done. Every dirty detail of our passionate love affair over the past two years drove my father to kill himself out of shame. Shame for having a faggot son like me. A son who fucked older men and engaged in what would be considered unspeakable acts by most everyday people who considered handcuffs to be kinky.
I had decided then that I would ruin Erwin in the same way he had destroyed me. He had his own perfect little family of a wife and two kids who were seemingly unaware of the double life he led. While I wasn’t about to mix myself into the mess, I was more than happy to find a willing boy that would not only give me ammunition with which to dismantle his family, but grounds for a statutory rape charge to boot. I think I would have cared about the fact that I was ruining more than one innocent life, back before he made me what I was.

Somewhere along the way I had lost the boy that I’d once been, and the morals I had went with him. I rarely showed emotion because it was what Erwin had demanded of me at the time. I had grown used to keeping my face stagnant in order to please him, and the habit had ingrained itself over the years. He reassured me, when we were out of the bedroom, that I could remain myself. Had I not been so eager to be the perfect pet for him, I may have actually managed to hang onto a shred of the longhaired boy that I could now only recall in photos. The wig that I wore paid homage to him, at the very least, despite of what I did while wearing it.

Perhaps that was why Eren was able to get to me the way he did. He had seen both sides of me now, something that only Erwin was able to say, and he accepted me so easily that it set me off balance. I had forgotten what it was to be wanted regardless of who I was. In fact, I don’t think I ever had that. Erwin had rejected my previous life and forced upon me one that had been the complete opposite. The thought that I now had this kind of acceptance twisted an unfamiliar knot in my stomach.

I was looking forward to the brat, and I hated it.

My BMW rolled out of the parking lot a couple minutes past six. I took my time weaving through traffic. I was in no hurry to get home only to sit and wait around. I wasn’t the one with a time I had to hold to, and I liked the idea of Eren sitting in my apartment anxiously awaiting my arrival.

Only I was the one left waiting.

“Where the fuck is that little shit?” I growled, eyeing my clock for the umpteenth time. He was late and he had been so for the last ten minutes. I hated the idea of waiting for anyone, but this was far more than the annoyance of being forced to sit around expectantly. I had been eager for tonight and he had promised me that he would be here on time. He had even made remarks to show that he hadn’t forgotten.

So where the fuck was he?

After another ten minutes had passed, I realized something I didn’t want to admit earlier. He wasn’t interested. The idea actually left me reeling with shock, because for once I had been so sure of myself. I had felt no doubt that he would be here, and yet here I was standing alone. He had decided against my offer, and it wasn’t the fact that he was refusing to seduce Erwin that got to me. He had rejected me.

So I decided to do the same to him.

If the brat showed up at this point, I wouldn’t want to see him anyway and so I opted to dress up and go to The Wall. It was the place I always found myself whenever my nerves had set me on edge. Although the entire theme of the club was a world Erwin had pulled me into, it was a world I wanted to stay in nonetheless. I was comfortable there. I knew myself there. Even though I wanted to destroy Erwin in so many ways, I was still grateful for the self-discovery he had put me through.

He had awoken a passion in me that had become the driving force behind my entire future. I wanted to invest everything into my little fetish club of fun and leave the hellhole of a company I had hated since the day it was handed to me. I understood The Wall; I thrived there. I felt alive with every night
I spent there, disguised in a wig reminiscent of my old self and decked out in clothing I actually felt comfortable in. I felt a glimmer of the life that I used to have before it all went to shit.

I walked towards the club wearing a pair of black leather pants that clung to me like paint, showing off the shape of my ass and the length and curve of my legs. My calves were wrapped up in the additional leather of my high-heel, belted boots. Occasionally I did grace my feet with some pumps when I was in a particular mood, but more often than not I preferred the sight of leather on top of leather.

I had paired the pants with a gothic coat that sported three belts on either wrist cuff. The collar of the jacket fanned out around my neck, and I had left it open to reveal the shape of my muscles underneath. Although I usually wore this as a short coat, it had the extra addition of two zippered sides that brought the length down towards my ankles. I had opted for the additions tonight, thinking momentarily of a spectacled woman when I did so. Hanji had a penchant for trench coats.

True to form… “Corporal! You wore a coat!”

The Wall was the only place I showed more than just a hint of emotion. I flashed her a smirk and gave a small tilt of my head to indicate I had heard her. “And you did, too. How surprising.”

She either ignored or didn’t notice the sarcasm, “I did! Do you like it?”

I gave a snap of my fingers and then waved my index finger up in a quick circle, “Turn. Let me see it.”

She grinned wider and did as she was told. She was a good little pet when she knew she had to be. My mood varied and she was perfect at keeping up with it, a talent that had earned her the title of co-manager.

“It looks just like all the others. Is it new?”

She scoffed and clutched it to her body by winding her arms around herself, “No! This is Monique!”

“Is that a brand, or did you actually name your trench?” I didn’t need to ask to know the answer.

“I like naming things.” She grinned and shrugged before eyeing her clipboard. Her 1950s cat-like glasses glinted in the light. “Hrm… I don’t see your name on here.”

I rolled my eyes and flicked the bottom of her clipboard so it bounced up and then off her chest. “Check again, four eyes.”

“We’re in a dominant mood tonight, huh?”

I shot her a look, raising one eyebrow, “What do you think?”

“What got under your skin?”

It was obvious to her that something was bothering me, and I knew she would notice the second I had chosen my outfit. She could tell by my choice in attire when I felt like taking control. That wasn’t to say I didn’t always take control in my club, of course. On most nights I just tended to be the sassy bitch that ordered people around, as opposed to the Corporal that was both ready and willing to whip them into place.

“Some shitty little brat… apparently you met him,” I was capable of honesty with Hanji.
“Oh! The cutie patootie with the messy hair, right?” Her smile would have been infectious if I weren’t immune, “I whipped him!”

“So I heard…” I eyed the club entrance, “Is Auruo around? I have a job for him.”

“Yes! He’s inside. He’ll be happy to see you in this… mood.”

I waved off her response, not wanting to discuss it anymore than I had to. I had been submissive for Erwin because he was incapable of being anything other than dominant. I had become comfortable in that role, although he was the only one I was every truly subservient for. I played the game with everyone else, but I was always topping from the bottom. My personality, more often than not, was dominant. However, in the company of certain males I found myself craving to be the one being tossed around and worked in like a well oiled glove for their waiting hand.

I walked into the club and straight through the thrumming dance floor that was always hard to navigate, but thankfully less so on a Monday night. The drag show would be starting in a moment, and our resident queens, Maria, Sina, and Rose would soon be taking the stage. I made my way down into the dungeon, where I knew I would find Auruo in some compromising position under Gunter’s thumb. Sure enough, he was strapped up to a St. Andrew’s Cross, although Gunter’s body was blocking my view of exactly what was going on.

“Oi, Auruo!”

His attention, along with rest of the room’s, turned to me. This was the kind of power that I enjoyed on the nights when I needed it most. Not even in my throne yet, and all of my subjects were ready and willing to bend to my every desire. No wonder Erwin never submitted to anyone.

“You’re going to go to my apartment and wait there,” I continued. Gunter was already undoing the latches, following a command I didn’t have to give. “There’s a brat I need you to look out for. His name’s Eren.”

“You want me to rearrange his face for you?”

I raised one eyebrow, my expression annoyed. He said the stupidest things. “No, I just want you to get a key from him. It’s for my apartment, so don’t come back without it.”

“Yes, Corporal.”

“And while you’re at it, see if you can get a little bit of emotional pain out of the kid,” I wanted to give him some of his own back. “Tell him he missed his chance, and that the deal’s off. I’m not interested anymore.”

Auruo nodded and left, and I marveled that I didn’t have to waste breath on telling people to hurry up and carry out an order. My little sexual squad was efficient, if nothing else.

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I was sitting in my throne when Auruo finally returned. I had one booted foot dangling over the armrest as I leaned into the opposite one, one hand lazily hanging down and drifting through Petra’s hair. She was collared and chained to my throne, where she tended to be on most nights that I was here. I wasn’t quite sure what she did when I didn’t come around, although she seemed to enjoy this
lifestyle for more than just me. She had joined it just as willingly, although with a little hesitation, when I had first started to learn the details.

“I have the key, Corporal.” Auruo said and plopped it into my waiting hand when I turned it palm up. I eyed the key, enjoying the silver contrasted against my black nails.

“Did he cry?” Something about the idea of him crying made my stomach twist uncomfortably. What was that about?

“I heard him scream in the elevator… I would assume it wasn’t with joy,” Auruo scowled then, “He threw the key and made me scrambled for it, but he looked pretty fucking miserable before he did.”

I rubbed my chest and disguised the motion by dropping the key into the pocket inside my coat. Good. The brat deserved as much for making me wait around for his sorry ass after I had been direct and consistent with him the entire time. He should be crying himself to sleep, dreading tomorrow when he would have to face me. If he even bothered to show up.

He was such a fucking coward.

“Levi!” Hanji called as she walked in, stumbling when she remembered herself, “Ah… sorry, Corporal…”

I waved my hand dismissively, suddenly not in the mood to care about her slip. “What is it?”

“That kid you mentioned earlier… well, he’s outside.”

I raised one eyebrow and lowered my leg from the armrest to sit up in my throne. “What?”

“He came running over just after Auruo went back in. I told him he’s too young, but he’s refusing to leave. He said he won’t go until you come out.” She eyed me, and I noticed that her expression was a touched amused, “He said if you don’t go out, he’s coming in here to get you.”

“Is that so?” I murmured, leaning back in my seat. So much for the little shit being a coward. And here I was thinking he would have been sobbing himself to sleep all night. As it was, he never did fail to surprise me. Maybe that was why I couldn’t stay away, and why I would have to give him a reason to be the one to run instead. He had no idea what he had just gotten himself into.

“Send him in.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Ooooh, I have been looking forward to this chapter. The rating has been changed to explicit BECAUSE of this chapter. Hopefully this makes up for the past two cliff hangers and angsty-ness.

Oh, and thank you so, so much for all your comments! Seriously, you are all so frickin' awesome. Those comments literally make my day every time I get them! Oh, and I still have to draw Intern!Armin. >_< I wrote instead, but that's a good thing, because... well, that's why there's an update!

As always, if you'd like to follow me on tumblr you can find me at lusty-levi (RP blog) or lootibles. I'm also following the tag 'fic: the intern'.

Please let me know what you think of this chapter! I've been excited for this one! ^_^

Enjoy!

Anger rushed through me the moment my knees had hit the floor of the elevator. Who the hell did that short little asshole think he was? What gave him the right to send some middle-aged dick with an obvious leather-fetish to ruin my night further? Sure, I’d been an hour late and even I could admit that didn’t look good, but I had hoped he would have given me at least five seconds of his time to explain myself. I was agonized moments before, but I was furious now and I refused to curl up and scream my lungs empty in some desperate form of self-pity. That wasn’t who I was. I would not cry over him, but I wouldn’t avoid him either. I would kick his fucking door down if I had to. I needed him and the night he had promised me. I needed him in my system as badly as he needed to get me out of his.

And like hell was I going to back down now.

The elevator may have been slow, but it had barely made it to the second floor by the time I had made up my mind. I punched the button and was shoving my way out the doors before they even had the chance to open all the way. I didn’t have time for something that would take me up to my floor and back down at a snail’s pace. I wasn’t giving him the opportunity to sit there for more than five minutes, smug with the false knowledge that he had won. I would show him that he couldn’t jerk me around this way and play with my emotions as he just had. I may have been willing to submit to him in his office, but I was nobody’s bitch to be toyed with.

I ran down the steps like they were some smooth steep incline, taking them two and three at a time as I braced myself on railing for leverage. I had made it out into the lobby with just enough time to see the retreating form of the leather-clad asshole Levi had sent to harass me. I wanted to punch him in the back of the head, but I decided to save my anger for the one who actually deserved it. I ran after the wannabe Levi, pushing my way out of Trost’s doors and into the street. I watched as he walked up the steps leading to The Wall and then he ducked inside of the building, disappearing from my view.

I was there a moment after, struggling against the burn in my lungs to speak to the woman that had
whipped me before, “Where is he?”

“Who?” She drew out the ‘o’ in a playful way that made me think of a sassy owl. She knew exactly who I meant, but it was obvious she was going to make me work for the information.

“Levi,” I spoke the word on an exhale, still recovering from my marathon run. Once again, I realized that I would have to start working out if I was going to have any hope of keeping up with this man.

“Sorry!” Her voice rang in a playful singsong tune that conflicted horribly with my current mood. “There’s no Levi here tonight.”

The emphasis she put on his name was all the information I needed. “The Corporal. Is he here?”

“Why yes indeed-y. But!” She held up her crop and then playfully bopped me on the nose with it. I tried to keep the murderous intent from my eyes as I stared at her, and she grinned wider at the attempt. “Unless you suddenly aged oh, I don’t know, four years in the past three days, I can’t let you in.”

I was not in the mood to play around and responded in a snapping tone, “Yea, I did. It’s a new experiment they’re working on. Insta-grow. Now let me in.”

“Experiments!” She squealed as she clapped her hands together and practically bounced in place. It looked like she were some teenage girl swooning over a piece of man candy, and the reaction wouldn’t have fit properly on anyone but her. Somehow she seemed like the mad scientist type. “Oh, I know you’re kidding, you little tease. But oh! If you weren’t we could talk about it all night!”

I had no doubt she could talk until sunrise, but I didn’t have the time to find out. “Come on, Hanji, just let me see him.”

“That’s Mistress Hanji to you!” She corrected with another tap of the crop to my nose and I wrinkled it instinctively. Then she paused, blinking, “Wait, how do you know my name?”

I gave a small shrug, rubbing my offended nose. “L… Corporal mentioned it.”

“He talked to you? About me?” I expected the same girlish excitement she had when talking about experiments, but she was more aghast than anything. “He talked to you about The Wall?”

“A little bit,” I shrugged again, “Not much. Can I please just get in? I’m not going to drink or anything. I just want to see him.”

“Sorry, my little honey bunches of oats, I can’t let you in. Too risky. Besides, it’s not the drinks I’m worried about.” She wagged her eyebrows at me and grinned a mischievous smile that was almost enough to convince me to go back the way I came.

Almost.

“Then tell him to come out here and talk to me.”

She barked out a laugh and then turned to some newcomers, checking their names off the list before unhooking the black leather cord to let them past. “And get my ass whipped? Maybe later, if things get dull.”

“If he doesn’t come out to talk to me, then I’m going in there after him.”

“I told you, you can’t get in.” She hooked the leather cord back into place as if to make a point of
I clenched my fists at my sides, trying to decide just how desperate I was to see Levi before the night was through. The day had been too eventful for its own good, and I had experienced so many ups and downs that it made me nauseous to think about it. And now, ever since heading home, I had been in a downward slide and I knew I would only sink further from there. I would be left alone with my thoughts if I went back home, and the last thing I wanted to do was recall the worst phone conversation of my life over and over again until it ate away at me. I knew that Levi had the ability to make my mind go blank with fits of lust. He made everything haze around the edges and shook me free of painful thoughts that had no way of existing when his hands were on me.

There was no question of whether or not I would turn back now. I had no choice but to stay and see him, and I didn’t care what it took to get inside. I needed to go to him before this night was through, even if he rejected me when I got there. I would explain myself whether he liked it or not, and no one was going to stop me. I steeled myself against whatever the repercussions might be and pushed past Hanji to jump over the leather cord.

I should have expected the bouncers, but the air still rushed out of me in a surprised gasp when they hit me like a brick wall. They held my arms and it wasn’t until I felt the burn in my joints that I realized I was trying to fight back. It was stupid, really, considering that I was struggling against the human equivalent of steel, but right now I didn’t care. They were just another obstacle between me and that door and I was determined to find a way through.

I had heard once that dropping all of your weight was a useful defense when trying to escape from an attacker. I would not recommend this approach when being handled by two men the size of Mount Rushmore. I hung there with my knees bent, dangling pathetically as they held me up by my outstretched arms as if I weighed no more than ten pounds. Hanji walked towards me with a huge grin spread across her face, and wacked the crop under my chin to tilt my head up and force my gaze to her.

“You’ve got some guts to go running after him like that,” she started, her voice carrying a hint of admiration that made me hopeful that this might actually go my way. “He came here with his panties in a twist over you, so I can’t exactly say you’ll be welcomed in by him.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but she pushed the crop against my lips before I could and continued, “I’ll go ask him if that’s what you really want. Just don’t go blaming me if he whips your ass into oblivion for showing your face when you’re not wanted.”

“He wouldn’t do that.”

“Oh, honey.” Her patronizing tone made my eyebrow twitch in annoyance and I wondered if I had picked that up from Levi. “Listen, if he won’t come out then you’re going to have to go. No ifs, ands, or buts about it.”

“If he won’t come out, then I’m going in there after him.”

She barked out another laughed and patted the top of my head with the crop, “You are so cute, I could just eat you up! I’ll tell him you said that. That might actually be enough to get him interested.”

“I won’t be long. You just… hang tight.” She cackled as she walked into the club, quite literally leaving me to hang there between the two men that hadn’t moved since locking me into position.

“So, gonna put me down?” I looked between them, but they stood there, silent and stoic like members of the Queen’s Guard. If those guards had tight leather pants and nipple rings.
What the hell kind of place was this, anyway? I had assumed that Levi owned a regular nightclub, but then I had to remind myself that nothing about Levi was even remotely normal.

I let a sigh rush out of me and tried to focus on ignoring the ache in my shoulders. I would have placed my feet on the ground, but somewhere in my attempt to throw my pathetic body weight, they had lifted me to a position high enough to keep me dangling no matter what I did with my feet. I stared down at my work shoes, which had become hopelessly smudged somewhere in my race to get here. I could almost hear Armin’s mournful whine when he saw the shit I had put these things through after only a day.

“Oh, good, you hung around!” Hanji said as she bounced out of the doorway and laughed at her own joke. Somehow I just couldn’t see the humor in it. “Good news, honey graham, he said you can come in.”

The Kinky Queen Guard released me instantly and I fell to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Groaning, I stood up and rubbed the aches in my shoulders that I could reach before moving my arms in big, slow circles. “Now?”

“Now, yes. As in right now.” The warning in her voice was clear despite the grin on her face. She waved me inside and followed in behind me, continuing, “He said to remind you that he doesn’t like to wait, and you had better make it fast.”

It was hard to hear her over the thrum of music that was making the walls throb like they had a pulse. Bodies collided in the center of the dance floor in a colossal mess of grinding flesh that filled the air with the salty, tangy scent of sweat and arousal. So many of the occupants were clad in some form of leather or latex in varying shades of black and red that it looked like a swarm of ants. There were cages lining the sides of the dance floor and a few interspersed throughout, each containing at least one writhing body lost to the beat of a song I didn’t recognize.

“So this is what he’s into.” I murmured, although I wasn’t quite sure I knew exactly what this was. The clothing wasn’t anything I would expect at a normal club, and the sight I was seeing now was giving me inklings as to why he wanted me to call him corporal.

Hanji only laughed as she led me through another section that contained a long black bar that was lit up with red lights from underneath. The top of the black counter shimmered with an unearthly crimson glow that was only visible through purposely-created cracks in the marble. There were dozens of black tables that boasted the same alluring effect, all of them gathered around a large stage that currently held three of the biggest women I had ever seen in my life. The middle was belting out the endnote of a song, sending a vibration straight down through my chest.

“That’s Maria, Sina, and Rose.” Hanji indicated them from left to right. Maria, who had bushy black hair and smooth dark skin, was by far the largest of the three and perhaps the least convincing. Sina was the smallest, with poker straight blonde hair and a nose that was a touch too big for her face. Her skin was so pale she practically glowed beneath the lights. Rose, true to her name, had brilliant red hair that fell to her shoulders in soft waves and a face that took my breath away. She was perfectly polished; far more glamorous a woman than I had ever seen before.

“Those are some big women,” I commented just low enough for Hanji to catch it, and her responding cackle reminded me of a hyena.

“Eren, stop!” She held her middle as she walked and laughed, “You’re going to make me piss all over Monique!”

I quickly looked around the floor for some person I had missed. Who the hell was Monique?
“All right, kid, brace yourself,” Hanji said as she came to a thick black door that was outlined in large silver bolts. The word ‘dungeon’ was carved into it in thick red letters. Unless he was expecting me to play a round of Dungeons and Dragons, I was pretty sure I knew where this was going. And it was too late to turn around and run now.

She pushed the door open and gestured to the black and red staircase that led down into the room below. The black slanted ceiling blocked any view that I would have had before entering the space, so I had to go in blind. I could hear the squeak of leather on leather followed by a sharp whine that was strangled between lustful moans. I tried to ignore the fact that the images my mind was creating stirred something in me other than the fear I had anticipated. I had pictured leather and chains whenever Levi’s lips were on mine, and those thoughts were inescapable now. I had been right about his lifestyle.

I stopped at the foot of the stairs because I had no other choice. My knees had locked up and my legs had turned to steel, rooting me in place as I tried to take in everything that I was seeing as something other than some nightmarish dream. My insides were rioting with the conflicting desires to go deeper or run screaming, and my body had decided on a solid neither. My sickening curiosity kept me from bolting out the door, but a very real fear wouldn’t allow me to take another step.

There was a man strapped to a large wooden ‘X’ and he was held in place by leather cuffs on his wrist and ankles. By the sound of the moans pulling from him now, I identified him as the man I had heard on my way down. Oddly enough, that wasn’t the most bizarre thing I saw in the room and I was having trouble deciding which was the worst out of what I could only assume were numerous torture devices. The walls were lined with an array of masks, whips, riding crops, chains, and other miscellaneous tools that I wasn’t sure I wanted anywhere near my body. I felt like I had stepped into the Spanish Inquisition, and I was suddenly terrified that I might be forced to pick one of these as my punishment.

With that thought, I turned around to leave and slammed right into Hanji. She laughed and grabbed me by the shoulders, turning me back towards the room. She leaned close and spoke in a surprisingly reassuring voice, breaking from her usual humor. “I know it looks scary, but no one is going to hurt you. We’re all very willing participants and we’re not about to force you into something that you’re not okay with. Especially not Levi. Surprisingly enough, he’s very against inflicting any pain that isn’t expressly asked for. He knows you’re new, and he’s not going to hurt you. You can tell him to stop at any time and he will.”

My eyes searched for Levi and found him at the center of the room on a slightly raised platform. He was lazily draped across the armrests of a large gothic style throne, and his eyes had been on me the entire time. His stare was molten with desire, but shifted to one of playful amusement when he met my gaze. I felt shock rush through me as I realized that he had been more expressive in the past five seconds than he had in the past week. It was like someone had breathed life into his body and lit him up from the inside. There was a fire in his eyes that burnt away any desire I had to leave.

“About time you got here,” he drawled in a cold voice that was tainted with the playfulness I had seen in his eyes. “Do you have any idea how long you kept me waiting, you little shit?”

The last word snapped like a whip, but I had never been happier to be called a shit. I had no idea how much I had been craving the sound of his low voice until it was vibrating through me once more. I saw movement and stared down to the bottom of his throne in surprise. His fingers were brushing languidly through the hair of a girl that was chained to one of the armrests by a collar around her small neck. I felt a lick of jealousy and tried to suppress it before it became too obvious, lowering my gaze and regretting it instantly.
“Uhm… why is there a man on the floor?”

“To clean your feet,” Levi spoke through a soft laugh. I lifted my eyes to fix him with an incredulous stare. He couldn’t really be serious about me using some random person as a doormat.

“But my shoes aren’t even dirty.”

“Pretend they are.” His voice slipped down an octave and became a low, commanding purr that shot straight to my groin. “Pretend that they’re dirty. Very, very dirty.”

I stared at him, giving a slow shake of my head before looking down at the waiting back. I shook my head a little faster, my eyes wide. I couldn’t do that. There was no way in hell I could do that.

“Or you can turn around and go home,” Levi waved his hand dismissively before developing a sudden interest in his nails.

I took a very slow, deep breath and stepped onto the back of the man lying at the foot of the stairs. I gave a quick wiggle of my feet, thankful that I had worn business shoes with little to no traction. The man beneath me responded with a grunting moan that I could feel through the soles of my shoes, “Thank you, master.”

All the blood rushed from my face and I knew by Levi’s responding laugh that I had squeaked in pure mortification. I moved off of the man so quickly that I stumbled forward and nearly fell to the ground, barely managing to keep myself upright. My shoes may not have been dirty, but I certainly felt filthy now. What the fuck had just happened?

“You’re a crapbag of innocence, kid.” He was still laughing, and the carefree expression he wore now made the entire ordeal worth the mental scarring that would require years of therapy to forget. “I’ve never seen anyone go so white. You look like a fucking ghost.”

I gave a small roll of my eyes, “Very funny, Levi.”

Everyone in the room went so still that I had to look around to understand why everything was suddenly quiet. The room, which had been filled with moaning groups of people, was now silent and focused on me. Their eyes were peeled wide open and some of them stared with gaping mouths as if I had just committed a horrible sin. The dread on their faces started to build in my gut as I realized I must have made some kind of mistake. When I turned my gaze back to Levi, I was sure I most definitely had.

“What the fuck did you just call me?”

He was leaning forward in his seat now, both heeled boots flat on the floor. His elbows were resting on his knees and his fingers were threaded between them. He would have looked contemplative if his expression wasn’t downright terrifying. I felt myself squirming beneath his stare and opened my mouth to speak only to find my brain had absolutely nothing to offer me. I managed a shrug and a quick shake of my head, and decided that would have to serve as my answer.

“What was that?” His eyes narrowed and I suddenly felt like we were back in his office. His entire demeanor was colder, and it was hard to deny the dominant air that was flowing off of him in thick waves. I could have suffocated in it. “How the fuck does that qualify as an answer? You don’t know?”

“I-I’m sorry, C-Corporal,” I managed to stutter the words through chattering teeth and it occurred to me that I was scared. Scared of what he planned to do and the pain he could inflict with any number of tools around the room.
His eyes narrowed infinitesimally and then, for a split second, his gaze softened. His impassive mask was back up an instant later, and he was leaning back in his chair and wagging a beckoning finger at me. His features shifted into an expression that was both languid and carnal, and made my knees weak. As he watched me, he slowly lifted and lowered one perfect eyebrow. Then his lips curved in an amused smirk and he purred, “Come here, brat. Your corporal wants you.”

I was walking towards him before I realized I had moved at all, as if my body had been made to obey his command. Hadn’t I come here to kick his ass for pissing me off? I filed the thought away for later, because it was clear that I had no control over myself at this point. When I arrived at his throne, he reached up and grabbed the collar of my shirt, yanking me down and ignoring my surprised yelp. His lips pressed to my ear and he spoke in a low voice that was meant only for me. “I’m not going to hurt you, do you understand?” He didn’t continue until I had nodded my assent. “Good, because I don’t want you to be scared here. This isn’t about fear, Eren. I won’t use anything on you or do anything to you that you don’t want. And what we do here does not determine how I’ll act towards you outside of this room, so there is no pressure. You can walk out the door. There will be no repercussions.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but realized I had no idea what to say. What was he asking of me? I had to wonder what would happen if I trusted his words and gave into my sick curiosity. “And if I want to stay?”

“Then you can stay, but you’ll be expected to abide by my rules. You’ll refer to me only as Corporal and you will do whatever I say,” he paused, “Within reason, of course. If you decide you can’t or you don’t want to do, then you’ll give me the safe word and we’ll stop. Immediately.”

I had searched around on the seedy underbelly of the web enough to at least know what a safe word was. “What’s the safe word?”

“Wings.”

I gave a slow nod, considering the word and wondering who had come up with it. Knowing Levi, he was the one who had made it and it had been chosen for a very specific reason.

“You don’t have to decide now. If you want to leave, you can go. Or if you’d like to stay for a preview of what might happen, then we can do that. Because trust me brat, after waiting on your ass for over an hour I am dying to give you a proper punishment.” The way he said the words excited me more than anything, and I was surprised that the fear was temporarily gone. He seemed to sense this and, in an attempt to both disarm and tempt me, he slowly licked the shell of my ear and elicited a hiss from my throat. He chuckled and then spoke in a husky whisper, “Play with me.”

The most I could manage was a shaky nod. I was panting, I realized, trying to breathe through the lust that was pressing down on my chest. “Y-Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, Corporal.”

“No, brat,” he shot back and then chuckled, “Well, very good, but no. Not what I was asking. Yes to what? What do you want me to do?”

I could feel my cheeks heat under the embarrassment of the words, but somehow I managed to say them, “Punish me.”

He grabbed my wrist tight and then swiped his boot across my ankles, effectively pushing them out
from under me and turning me into a dead weight. He stood in the same moment that I started to go
down, keeping the grip on my arm so that I hit the ground with minimal impact. I felt the wind push
out of my lungs but marveled at how he had handled me so deftly that he had managed to inflict no
pain at all. He released my arm and stood over me, his legs spread with a heeled boot on either side
of my hips. He snapped his fingers and Hanji rushed over to remove his coat, passing him her crop
and a small tube that he pocketed instantly.

I drank in the sight of his chiseled abs and felt my pants grow uncomfortably tight. I was panting
heavily now, my eyes wide with anticipation as I stared into his heavy-lidded, molten blue gaze. His
stare alone made my hips squirm, and when they did my pants snagged on the ground beneath me
and pulled the fabric taut over my erection, ripping a broken cry from my throat. I realized then that I
would let him do absolutely anything to me as long as he stared at me like that.

He chuckled, the sound low and deep, hopelessly sexual. “You greedy little shit, who said you could
move?”

He pressed the toe of his boot into the pulsing heat of my pants and my head kicked back to hit the
floor as a strangled moan broke free of my throat. He leaned forward, applying more pressure to a
point that had me questioning whether I was feeling pain or pleasure. I decided on both as ripples of
the confused sensation coursed through my body, and my hips began to twitch as I struggled to keep
them still. A cracking sound had me looking up and I watched as he struck the thin leather against his
palm a second time. He met my eyes and held the crop by either end between his hands, and then his
entire body moved forward in one sensual roll driven by his hips as he moved the toe of his boot in a
slow, grinding circle.

“Tell me you want me.” He moaned the words as I cried out desperately, forcing my hips into the
mind numbing friction. He suppressed a smirk by biting the middle of the crop, and stared down at
me with an expression of primal desire. I felt like I was going to explode.

“I want you!” I gasped. I had no idea how I had managed to speak at all.

He cracked the crop and his voice stung with command, “Louder.”

“I-“ My words broke off on a strangled cry as he worked his boot in the same delicious circle that
had left me reeling the first time. My hips were bucking uncontrollably now, urgent as I managed to
scream, “I want you!”

His boot left me and I gave a sharp cry of protest at the injustice. He struck the crop beneath my chin
with just enough force to sting and directed my gaze up to him. “Was that the sound of you
complaining?”

I panted heavily, staring up at him with eyes that were probably filled with a challenging anger. I
wanted to order him to put his foot back and make me come, but I knew that wouldn’t be earning me
the release I so desperately craved. I spoke in as obedient a voice I could manage, “Yes. I’m sorry,
Corporal.”

I assumed honesty was the best policy.

“Stand up,” he commanded and then gave a sharp snap of the crop when I didn’t obey immediately.
I was pretty sure my legs were jelly at this point and I didn’t trust them to hold up a feather, let alone
me. However, on the second crack I was scrambling up to stand, deciding that if I fell down I could
at least say that I tried. With a monumental effort and despite the protest of my knees, I stood and
stayed vertical.
I heard a click and caught a flash of silver right before he grabbed hold of my shirt and sliced the blade up the middle. The fabric fell away and I mourned the loss of what had been my new favorite shirt right before he followed it up with my pants. I was standing there in what were thankfully black briefs and nothing embarrassing, hoping that he would at least leave me those. He didn’t.

“Get your gorgeous naked ass in my throne.”

The compliment was almost enough to excuse the fact that he had stripped me bare in front of a room full of people I didn’t know. I hadn’t noticed them when I was under his heel, but now that I was naked I suddenly felt like I had been put on display. Trying to ignore the eyes I felt on me, I walked over to his throne and sat down. Where the hell was this going?

“Put your feet up on the edge of the seat and lean back.”

I stared up at him as if he had lost his mind and felt my cheeks begin to change from a lustful pink to a mortified scarlet. He returned my gaze and raised one eyebrow, probably wondering why I hadn’t followed the order yet. My mind passed once over the safe word before I realized that wasn’t an option. I was not leaving, not without being pushed far past this point. I would tolerate the humiliation for whatever was coming next.

I pressed my feet on the edge of the throne and leaned back, my ass partially off of the seat and my asshole bared for all to see. My heart was racing in my chest, both with excitement and embarrassment. Everyone was staring, and for some reason my cock twitched at the thought. Levi seemed to notice this because his mouth curved into a full smirk and he rasped in a voice that betrayed his lust, “Touch yourself.”

My hand wrapped around the base of my member and I felt the pulse thumping hard against my palm. I let out a shuddering moan, bracing myself as I worked my hand slowly up to my tip, giving a slow turn of my wrist just beneath it and drawing a choked whine from my throat. I stared at Levi as I repeated the motion, feeling the tension grow inside me as his eyes darkened with a desire that was enough to pull a low moan from my lips. Suddenly the people were fading from the room and there was only him. The rest didn’t matter and I didn’t care what they saw. He was the one watching me, and that was all I wanted.

He was rubbing the end of the crop between his fingertips and I noticed with the very small part of my mind that was still paying attention that his fingers and the thin leather handle were glistening. I would have wondered why, if I had time, but suddenly he was bending over to grip one of the armrests for leverage. His lips were near mine and he stared into my eyes as I felt the thin leather handle of the crop push into my ass.

I cried out as my body tightened against the invasion, definitely identifying a lick of pain this time. He stilled the crop and murmured close to my lips, “Keep touching yourself and relax… it’ll get better.”

He began turning the handle slowly; coating me with the lube he had spread over end of it. I felt my body opening up to the probing piece and my hips gave a little wriggle in response. I began to move my hand once more, focusing more on the head of my cock now that I had gotten a steady rhythm. My hand twisted beneath my tip just as he pressed the crop a little deeper, and I let out a whining moan as my hips instinctively thrust forward.

He chuckled softly, “Feels good, huh?”

I managed a sound that was supposed to be agreement but was mangled around another moan.
Taking this as his cue to continue, he began to work the handle of the crop in and out of me with a
far more determined speed and my hips followed suit, trying to match the pace he had created. I had 
forgotten the room around us, forgotten my name and anything other than the man in front of me as I 
moved. The only noises I heard were my own cries and whimpers, and the heavy panting of his 
breath.

“Tell me it feels good, brat.” There was a slight snap in his voice that told me I had not given a good 
enough answer the first time.

I opened my mouth to speak, only managing, “I-It… feels…”

He pulled the crop out of me and I was about to try to suppress another cry of disapproval when two 
slicked fingers took its place. My eyes peeled wide as my hips jerked forward, pressing urgently into 
the warm digits that had so much more versatility than the leather stick that had been in me moments 
before. My hand was giving quick little jerks that focused on my tip, squeezing tighter now that the 
pressure was building to its peak.

“Ah, ah,” he warned, “You have to ask to come, brat. Tell me you want to come and don’t do so 
until I say you can.”

I didn’t think it was physically possible for me to stop myself from coming, but I managed to slow 
my hand in an effort to try. This seemed to please him because he continued to work his fingers in 
and out of me in an increasingly fast rhythm that was forcing me to buck and whine underneath him. 
He met my eyes, smirking, “Say it.”

“I-wa-ah!-want t-to! Oh god!” The edges of my vision blurred and I saw white sparks crackling 
through what sight I had left. He laughed softly and once again moved his fingers in the beckoning 
motion that had broke off my last sentence. I shouted out whatever expletives chose to leave my lips 
and practically pushed off the chair as I rutted into his hand. “Le-Corpor-ah!”

I pushed my head to the back of his throne and bowed my spine as I worked my hips against his 
hand, trying to convince him to keep his fingers on the spot that was making me lose consciousness. 
My hand was working mercilessly on the head of my cock even as I tried to remind myself that I 
wasn’t told I could come yet. A whine stirred in my throat as I tried to ask for permission in garbled 
words that didn’t sound like any language, English or otherwise.

He must have admired the effort. “Come for me, Eren.”

The fact that he had used my name sent my mind reeling as the room filled with screams and moans 
that I only faintly realized belonged to me. I felt a wet warmth covering my hand as it continued to 
jerk hopelessly at the swollen head of my cock that had just spent all it had to give. It wasn’t until he 
took hold of my wrist that I finally released myself and slumped into the throne. My vision was 
brurred as I stared at him and I was almost certain I was incapable of any communication at all, but I 
managed a lazy smile.

He stared back at me, and in the easy hopefulness that came with my post coital state, I could have 
sworn I saw a hint of affection in his eyes.

“Come on, brat. Let’s get you cleaned up.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone enjoyed the smut in the last chapter! I've been looking forward to this one because... well, Eren speaks his mind and I love it when he does that. I'm also really excited for the next chapter because it will have a few pieces with a character that has only been mentioned briefly.

Oh! I received a question from a lovely follower on tumblr who asked if it would be okay to do some fanart of The Intern, so I figured I would put my answer here just in case anyone else was wondering...

YES! Yes, it is always, /always/ beyond okay (perfect, wonderful, fantastic, amazing) to do any fanart of The Intern. I will literally be in a world of bliss with any and all fanart I receive, so if you have any desire to create art, PLEASE DO! I will love you forever.

Oh, and for those of you who follow me on tumblr (lusty-levi or lootibles), I have been thinking about putting up quotes from the chapters I'm currently working on that aren't posted yet. I haven't decided for sure, but I'm thinking about it. None of the quotes would be spoilers, of course! ^_^;

Anyway, on with the latest chapter! As always, comments here and on tumblr are appreciated and well loved.

ENJOY!

I barely heard Levi’s words through the sexual haze that was still clouding up my mind. My muscles felt heavy and weak, and I was certain that I had lost the ability to move. Not that I was complaining, of course. As a healthy teenage boy, I had experienced my fair share of orgasms, but none of them had been as mind-numbingly good as the one that took place in Levi’s throne. And he didn’t even physically put a hand on me until the very end, when he finally allowed me to buck against his skillful fingers until my mind reached the sweet oblivion it was still stuck in now.

Whatever he had done to me was dangerous; I knew that much. I had been shaken down to my core, but I knew I was in trouble now. I was ready and willing to do whatever he commanded if it would give me another taste of what I had just experienced, and if he asked me to go after Erwin now I would do so without question. And while part of me was exhilarated by the idea that I could be submissively his, the rest of me was left screaming in frustration. It infuriated me that I had been thrown off my initial goal of yelling at him for leaving me abandoned at the apartment. It angered me further to know that I almost didn’t care. I was almost willing to drop what had happened tonight, and give in to his demands if it meant I could continue to have him tomorrow.

Almost.

But that wasn’t who I was. At the end of the day, I would never be the type to submit fully and completely to another. The realization terrified me because what future could I possibly have with him if this was what he wanted? Not that there was ever any guarantee of a future at all, but I kept finding myself hopelessly praying there could be. I had never wanted anyone the way I wanted him,
I knew now that I never would. He was it. The end all-be all.

Was this even possible? How the hell had I fallen so deep so quickly? I met him days ago, and learned his name this morning. I was discovering new secrets about him every moment, and each was far more alarming than the last. I knew so little about him and yet I had never been so sure of anything in my life. I was drawn to him; inexplicably and irrevocably so. As if I had been made to find him, and everything in my body remembered even when my mind did not. I hated myself for allowing this to happen, and even more so for allowing it to continue this way. I should have stopped when I had the chance; hell, I should stop now. I should leave the internship, commit to 62 flights of stairs and avoid him for the rest of my life.

He snapped his fingers in front of my face to draw my gaze up to his, and all thoughts of a life without him vanished. “Did you hear me, brat? Let’s get you cleaned up. And be careful when you stand. I swear if you get that shit on my throne you’re going to be blowing your allowance to buy me a new one.”

I stared up at him and then down at the mess that I had made in my lap; at the sticky semen that coated my stomach and hand, and suddenly I had an idea. Not exactly a brilliant idea by any stretch of the word, and I wasn’t thrilled with what I would be doing. However, he had done such a masterful job of unnerving me and I was eager to get back at him. I wanted to see his carefully composed exterior come undone through my actions. I needed to see him as wrought with desire as I was, while knowing that I was the one he wanted.

I lifted my hand towards my lips and stared up at him, “Should I clean myself, Corporal?”

All the air left his lungs in one rush and I had to suppress the triumphant smile that threatened to take over my lips. He was looking between my hand and my mouth, his eyes darkening in a way that made the tension build in me once more. This was exactly what I wanted.

“Yes, clean yourself.”

I was certain he wanted the words to be a hard command, but they came out in a broken rasp that betrayed his arousal. His pants, which offered little accommodation as it was, furthered the betrayal of his cool exterior. I had already begun to rattle him and I hadn’t even put my tongue on myself yet. Suddenly I was no longer dreading the taste, which I had tried once when I was young and curious, and I realized that I was not only willing but also eager to give him a show that he would remember after tonight.

I stared into those stormy eyes and dragged my tongue from the base of my palm in a slow line up to the tip of my index finger. I watched as his lips parted and could have sworn I heard his breath catch on the way in when I popped my finger into my mouth and began to suck. Admittedly, I was modeling the things I had watched late at night in the dark of my room, but if they had turned me on then they could work on him now.

His stare lingered on the ring my lips made around my finger and I had to wonder what thoughts were running through his mind. He made me bolder than I had ever been before, and every new act of bravery came easier each time. I couldn’t even remember why I had been embarrassed to be in a room full of people, and I knew I wouldn’t recall it until I was no longer under his spell. For now there was only him, and all I wanted to do was for him to want me as badly as I wanted him. I hollowed my cheeks and bobbed my finger up and down in a way that was suggestive enough to have him reaching for my wrist.

He grabbed it and pulled me up out of the throne, his other hand catching my naked hip before I could fall into him. He held me steady and away from his body, managing to keep his clothes clean
while not dropping me to the ground. My legs were wobbly, but I had more control than I would have had a few minutes ago. He leaned close and spoke in an exhale that spread warm breath against my neck, “We’re going into the back room now, brat. I’m not going to have your lips around my cock for the first time with an audience to boot.”

Audience?

And like that, the spell was broken.

The blood rushed straight into my cheeks as my mind decided to remind me of the rest of the room around us. My eyes scanned all of the faces, many of them focused on us and only a handful still off in their own little worlds. All of the embarrassment I had suppressed earlier came surging back now, and I felt my heart racing in my chest as the urge to run out of the room grew.

What had I been doing? My eyes turned down to the throne and the sounds I had made there just moments ago filled my mind. My first time being touched by anyone other than myself, and it had been in front of a room full of people. Everyone had seen me rutting against Levi’s hand, coming all over my stomach and cleaning it after. I had been in some kind of lustful trance that was completely shattered now. With a groan, I hid my face in my hands and flushed further when I heard Levi’s low chuckle.

“Oh, and now suddenly you realize what’s going on? Maybe I should have let you finish your little show after all.”

I groaned louder and pushed my fingers up into my hair. This was not happening to me. This could not be happening to me. I was not in the middle of some kinky fucked up fantasy club, where I had just put on some pornographic show for at least twenty people. Hell no. I was at home in my bed, asleep. That was what I had done. I had not chased Levi’s ass into this place.

“Calm down.” Levi’s voice was right at my ear, but it did nothing to help my calm. There was a command in his voice that I didn’t like. “What did you think? That it was supposed to be good? I told you this was a punishment. Why do you think I put you on display for your first time?”

I felt my hands curl into fists against my face, but I was not aware of when or why my left hand swung and collided, with impressive force, into Levi’s arm.

He stumbled back with wide eyes and I felt a moment of sick triumph followed by complete dread. I was aware that he was a master in this club, and although I knew very little about these kinds of places I knew that what I had done was neither a good nor intelligent thing to do. The look in his eyes reiterated that fact, and I felt myself wondering if he was going to give the audience a second, far more painful show to watch.

The room around us was silent; even the people who had not been watching before were staring at us now. I caught a glimpse of Hanji, who was teetering on her feet as if she were trying to make up her mind on whether or not she should step forward and stop whatever was about to happen. He moved too quickly to give her the chance to decide. He grabbed me by the shoulder and steered me towards a door I had not noticed before, yanking it open with his free hand before hauling me inside. I heard the door slam behind us, and felt fear twist in my gut when I realized that no one would be in here to stop him.

He shoved me away from himself and I stumbled back, holding my hands up in front of my face with my fists still clenched. I wasn’t sure whether I was getting ready to fight or defend, but I knew that either way I wasn’t about to cower. He stared at me with an incredulous expression before anger darkened his eyes along with another emotion I could barely identify. He looked hurt, but I couldn’t
fathom why. He leaned back against the door and folded his arms, the stance so relaxed that I felt my guard slipping.

“Put the fucking fists down, brat,” he snapped as he continued to stare at me with the same mix of emotions. “And stop looking at me like I’m gonna hurt you. I already told you I’m not, even though I have a good reason to now.”

He rubbed his arm as he said this and looked off to the side. I watched the profile of his face grow rigid as his jaw clenched, and part of me expected him to change his mind. The rest of me, however, felt guilty for thinking that he ever would. Despite all of my insecurities, he had never set a harmful hand on me and had even reassured me more than once that he wouldn’t. He was the most intimidating man I had ever met, and yet he was so surprisingly gentle that my mind couldn’t wrap itself around the concept. I expected him to hurt me, even though he never would.

“You really are a fucking brat, you know that?” He was staring at me again, his voice nothing but an annoyed snap at this point. “What the hell did you do that for, anyway? I’m going to have a bruise now because you just had to go and be a little shit.”

What had I hit him for? It had happened so quickly that I wasn’t sure at the time why I had done it at all. I remembered feeling a blinding rage at something he had said, and then he was stumbling away from me. It was on the edge of my mind, something lingering about the reason he had put me through sexual torture in a room full of people.

Punishment.

I lowered my hands to my sides, but they remained in fists that were so tight the whites of my knuckles were showing. He eyed my fists before returning his stare back to me, raising one perfect eyebrow in a question that he didn’t bother to voice. He knew he didn’t have to.

“You said you were punishing me.”

“I said that before we even got started,” he pointed out, “It’s not my fault you were too fucking horny to hear a damn thing I was saying. Next time tell your dick to take a chill pill and listen.”

“A chill pill? How old are you?”

“Fuck off,” he bit back and then continued, “So that’s why you hit me? Because I was punishing you? That’s a pretty shitty reason, you know.”

“Why were you punishing me?”

He moved away from the door as if he couldn’t stay still any longer, and walked towards me, “Tell me that’s not actually a question, brat. You know damn well why I was punishing you. You made me wait for your sorry ass.”

“Not on purpose!”

“Did I say I cared if it was on purpose?” Levi stopped in front of me, holding up a finger. “No, I didn’t. I don’t care what else you had to do today. I told you when you had to be there, and you weren’t. There’s no excuse for that.”

He walked past me and towards the office desk behind us, which I assumed belonged to him. I turned and opened my mouth to speak, but he cut me off before I had the chance to explain. “You lost your chance, so you can go. First you made me wait on you and then you threw a punch at me in my own club. You’re too much of a fucking pain in the ass to work with, so consider my little offer
null and void. I’ll find someone else for it.”

“My sister ran away!” I blurted out the words before he could add anything else, and by the confused look that took over his otherwise impassive features, I could tell he needed more information.

“What?”

“She left three months ago and she wouldn’t tell me why. My dad left because he’s been looking for her, and that’s when I moved to Trost with my mom,” I took a breath before continuing, “I haven’t heard from her in three months. No one has. I didn’t even know if she was still alive until tonight. I was going to be there on time! I was trying to be there, but then she called! What the hell was I supposed to do, hang up on her?”

My voice was rising and I barely noticed his expression change from confusion to guilt. I was too caught up in my own confession. “She wants me to leave with her. She said my dad hurt her, but he wouldn’t do that. He wouldn’t. I got so mad that I hung up on her, and I didn’t know what to think after that. All I wanted to do was to see you, because you are the only person I have felt normal around since she left! And you weren’t there. No, not only weren’t you there, you sent some asshole to go and make my day worse than it already was!”

I knew I was yelling now, and I didn’t care. My body was shaking and I couldn’t stop the anger rising in me. I hated her for running out on me without any explanation. I hated her for coming back into my life now that I had finally found some peace, and for wanting to uproot me from everything I had fought to rebuild. I hated him for sending someone to hurt me just because I had been late. I hated him for punishing me in front of everyone, and for making me like it more than I wanted to admit. Although most of my rage was in response to what Mikasa had done, she was not there for me to direct my anger at and so Levi got the full brunt of it.

“Fuck you!” The words felt so good on the way out, and I wanted to feel the release again. “Fuck you, Levi! Fuck you!”

He crossed the room towards me in a determined stride that had me sure he was going to lay me out on the floor then and there. I had said more than enough to push him to a point that I would have reached if had anyone talked to me that way. I braced myself, but the wind was still knocked out of my lungs when he grabbed me by the shoulders and slammed me against the wall. He quickly moved one hand to my face before grabbing the side of my head, pulling me close.

And then his mouth was on mine.

My arms were around his waist and pulling him against my body with a crushing strength that drew a moan from both our lips. He didn’t seem to mind the hold I had on him, and his arms reciprocated by winding themselves around my neck. His hands fisted in my hair, reminding me that he was the one with the dominant edge as he angled my head to give himself easy access to the kiss. I felt my lips part willingly when his probing tongue licked its way in, and I lost myself in the taste of his mouth.

I had no idea how much I needed this until I had it again, and my body felt weak with the relief of being pressed against him once more. I had been craving the taste of his lips since the moment we had last parted, and that desire had only grown with each horrible event that took place. I didn’t have to think when his mouth was on mine. Everything in my universe slid into place as if it always belonged there and I felt whole, even if it was only for a moment. I tried to suppress the sound of protest when his lips broke away from mine.

“Will you just shut up for one goddamn second, brat?” He spoke in a voice that was as breathless as
I felt, and scanned my eyes for some signal that he could continue. I nodded. “Good. Just stay quiet and let me speak.”

He pulled away from me and took a few steps back towards his desk, remaining silent as he pulled his thoughts together. Finally he turned towards me and spoke without meeting my eyes, “I’m an asshole. I fucked up. All right?”

I was positive it was as close to an ‘I’m sorry’ as he had ever gotten, and I was momentarily shocked speechless that he would say it to me.

Clearly my silence was not what he wanted, and he fixed me with an annoyed stare. “Are you even listening, brat? I hope you heard that, because it is the only fucking time I’ll ever say it to you or anyone.”

I’m not sure how I knew that this apology was difficult for him; perhaps it was the fact that he rarely showed any emotion at all. Either way, I knew better than to draw any more attention to it, so instead I offered my own apology. “I’m sorry for being late. I won’t let that happen again.”

I said this with the vain hope that there would actually ever be another chance for this to happen. He had said I was no longer needed, and despite my confession that could still be the case. I watched him, waiting for some hint that we were continuing this little game of ours, but the most he did was shrug. Then he walked around to the other side of his desk and sat down, gesturing to the chair on the opposite side.

The command was clear, and I filled the seat without needing to be asked twice.

He tapped his index finger against the desk as he watched me, his expression a peculiar twist of suspicion and deep thought, as if he were trying to decide if I were trustworthy or secretly a serial killer. He must have made up his mind, because he folded his arms and leaned back, “Oi, Hanji!”

The door clicked open so fast that I had a sneaking suspicion she had been on the opposite side the entire time. She shot me a wide grin before looking at Levi, “Hey, look at you! You didn’t split him in two!”

“Nice rhyme. Work on that all day?”

“I’m a poet, and I didn’t know it.” She tapped her boot to the ground, still grinning like a maniac, “And I’ve got the shoes to show it!”

“I doubt any poet anywhere wears six-inch shitkickers like that,” Levi muttered, eyeing her shoes. “Now, before you waste anymore time, spin that ass around and go get his clothes. Or what’s left of them, anyway.”

He had to suppress a smirk on the last comment, although Hanji made up for it with a loud laugh as she walked out of the room to fetch the tattered clothing. She scooted back in a moment later and held them out to me. As I took them, I noticed Levi give her a little waving gesture that she must have taken as her cue to leave, because the door was closing by the time I looked up. I held up my torn shirt, flabbergasted.

“This is ruined!”

“Yea, cutting fabric with a knife has a lasting effect,” Levi mused, glancing at the tatters that had once been my favorite shirt. “I was planning on making you walk home with a bare ass, but considering your excuse… well, I’ll find you something to wear.”
“I can’t wear anything of yours, I wouldn’t fit. You’re too shor-wee.”

I tried my best to twist the word ‘short’ into ‘showy’ because it seemed less offensive. However, the twitch in his eyebrow told me he knew exactly what I had been about to say.

“I’m sorry, what was that? You want to walk home naked?”

“No. No! I’m sorry-“

“Just be careful not to scare any of the kids with your…” He paused to gesture at my hips with a quick flick of his index finger and then offered up a cruel, teasing smirk, “Of course, it’s cold enough out that your dick might just head north for the winter, so they probably won’t see a damn thing.”

I dropped my ripped up pants into my lap and tried to ignore the blush that was now creeping into my cheeks. “I’m not small.”

Levi brushed the tip of his index finger along his lower lip, eyeing my hips with a contemplative expression before lowering his hand. He shrugged, “Oh, I know you’re not. Of course, I don’t have the firsthand knowledge I was planning to get tonight, but I’ve had enough of a look at you to know you’re not unfortunate.”

“It’s still tonight.” I decided to push my luck since he had just broached the subject. I couldn’t deny the fact that I was still eager to get into his bed, and if it was still a possibility then I was going to try for it.

“And that is not going to be happening tonight,” he said, putting emphasis on ‘that’ even though it was unnecessary. I knew exactly what he meant.

“Why not?” I tried not to sound like a petulant child and failed miserably.

“Because now I have other things we need to discuss. Blame your sister for ruining my plans. I’m not exactly in the mood after all the shit we went through tonight.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Yea, you might have mentioned that.” He waved away my apology and leaned back in his seat, gesturing to my pants. “Just so this doesn’t happen again, I’m going to give you my number.”

I probably looked beyond giddy despite my best efforts to suppress any reaction, because he held up one finger and narrowed his eyes. “It’s only for texting, and only if you’re going to be late. I don’t need you calling me every second like some chatty schoolgirl.”

I was already digging my phone out of my pocket of my tattered pants, “I won’t.”

He paused, staring. “Damn right, you won’t. What the hell is that, Jaeger? It looks like you hit it with a sledgehammer.”

I stared at my phone and suddenly recalled throwing it into Armin’s dash with enough force to break it. “Shit.”

“Maybe someone stepped on it.”

“No, it’s my fault,” I shook my head as I tried to push the pieces back into place. I had dropped it before and managed to put it back together. “After I hung up on her, I threw my phone and it… well, yea.”
“She really pissed you off, huh?”

I heard a satisfying click as the shell latched into place and tried the power button before glancing up at him. “I really trusted her.”

There was so much more that could be added, but that was what it had boiled down to. I had trusted her to be there for me, and she left. She did something I would have never done to her and she didn’t even have the decency to explain why. She betrayed me, and I wasn’t going to get over that anytime soon.

Levi gave a small nod, and the look in his eyes had too much understanding. Someone had hurt him, too.

My phone lit up to where it had been before I took Mikasa’s call, and Levi’s youthful face filled the screen. My eyes widened and I scrambled to hit the power button, but he was already snatching the phone out of my hands. He leaned back in his seat and stared at the screen for a long moment without saying a word. Finally he lifted his gaze to me and turned the screen to show me the picture I knew was there.

“What the hell is this?”

“Armin mentioned that he saw a picture of you,” I muttered, inwardly cursing my phone, “I just wanted to see what you looked like with long hair.”

“You’re looking at me right now, kid.”

The fact that he said kid and not brat gave me a little more confidence and I offered a sheepish smile, “Yea, I know, but you’re wearing a wig. I wanted to see you with your natural hair.”

He turned the screen back to face him and stared at the image, “I didn’t know any of these were still around.”

“Is the girl in the photo…” I hesitated and glanced over my shoulder to ensure the door was still closed before looking back to him. “Is that her out there?”

A smirk twitched on the corner of his mouth, “Yea, that’s Petra. She was my girlfriend, once upon a time in a fairytale land where I didn’t like dicks up my ass.”

I flushed at the thought, because it was hard to think of Levi in a submissive position with anyone other than Erwin. “Was she always into this… stuff?”

“Stuff?” Levi eyed me with an amused expression, “Well, I don’t think I’ve ever heard any of this called stuff, but sure. Let’s go with that. No, she got into this stuff when I got into this stuff.”

He was putting emphasis on each ‘stuff’ and making me regret the word choice each time. He was smirking though, and I knew he was having fun with it. I was surprised that he was being so candid with me, and I decided that now might be the only time that I managed to get anything out of him. So, I asked one thing I was certain I didn’t want the answer to, “How did you get into this?”

“I think you know the answer to that one,” his voice was lower as he looked back at the phone one last time before handing it over to me. I tried to ignore the fact that Erwin had such a hold on Levi’s life, and I wanted to know why that was. However, as I took the phone back, something else caught my eye.

“Is that a tattoo?”
He lifted his wrist to show the black wing I hadn’t noticed until now and fixed me with an incredulous stare. “Are you fucking kidding me, kid? You just noticed?”

He lifted his other wrist to show a white wing facing in the opposite direction and then held his wrists down on the desk for me to see. I leaned over and stared, in silent appreciation, at how well they complimented each other. When he crossed his wrists, they almost looked like they were overlapping. My mind was drawn back to his voice whispering the safe word in my ear.

“Wings.”

“Yea, that’s the idea,” he said, following my thought process. He took his wrists off the desk and stood up from his seat.

My gaze lingered on his wrists just as my mind did on the symbol. It was important enough to etch into his skin and to make it his safe word, and I had to wonder what it meant to him. It was a beautiful symbol, but there was more to it than that. “Why?”

He tilted his wrists to stare down at them and his eyes grew distant. After nearly a minute of silence I was certain he wasn’t going to tell me the answer at all. I had asked about something that was too personal, pushed past the boundaries into a territory I was unwelcomed in. My mind started to race for some way to change the subject, but then his eyes met mine and he seemed as though he had resigned himself to one moment of honesty.

“Because wings represent freedom. And that is something I’ve been trying to get since the day I was born.”
Halloween update!

So I've decided that Thursdays will be my update day! So, unless things get really backed up, expect updates on Thursday.

Yay, Chapter 12! A little more time spent with the other characters in this one, although still plenty of Levi as well.

For anyone who follows me on lusty-levi, I'll be in my Intern!Levi cosplay and posting on there today. Feel free to send asks, if you'd like to.

As always, thank you all so much for the reviews both on here and tumblr! Your feedback and comments absolutely make my day! ^__^ For anyone who isn't following me on tumblr and would like to, you can find me at lusty-levi or lootibles, and I'm following the tag 'fic: the intern' if anyone posts anything related. Thanks!

ENJOY!

“There is no way in hell I’m wearing that.”

Challenge flashed in Levi’s steel blue eyes and a small smirk curled the corner of his mouth. He lowered his one hand, which was still holding the offensive fabric, and instead held up a collar balanced on two fingers. It wiggled gently in its position; a simple black strip of leather adorned with nothing more than a thick ring that would no doubt have a leash attached to it by the time it made its way onto my neck.

“This then.”

“Fine, whatever. That and what else?”

“Just this.”

I felt the color drain from my face as I stared at the collar, which was suddenly far more intimidating than it had been two seconds ago. The thought of being collared by this man was something that I was only just beginning to consider, but being paraded around in front of everyone in nothing more than a strip of leather was something else entirely. It was bad enough that he had made my first introduction, ‘Hey, I’m Eren and this is me coming.’ I was not about to give him any more opportunities to humiliate me, at least not tonight. Somehow I knew he would have my resolve whittled back down to nothing in less than a day’s time.

“Okay, give me the damn shirt.” I held out my hand towards the fabric that made my skin crawl every time I looked at it.

He held the shirt out of reach, which was something he was only able to achieve in high-heeled boots. “Watch the attitude, brat. Keep it up and I’ll make you put on the collar as punishment.”
“Haven’t I been punished enough already?”

He gave a small roll of his eyes and threw the shirt at my face. I caught it in one hand and unrolled it to stare at the hideous magenta accented by tacky black sequins spelling out the words, ‘Shopping Diva.’ I meant to groan inwardly, but I knew the sound had made it out of my mouth when he started to chuckle, the sound low and amused. As much as I wanted to set this shirt on fire, it was almost worth it to hear him make a sound that was as close to a laugh as he had gotten.

“This isn’t yours, right?” I eyed the monstrosity, sure of the answer but wanting to get a little dig at him anyway.

“Fuck no,” he threw the black spandex pants in my face as he scoffed, “Like I would ever own something like that. No, Maria came in one night with that little number on and I made her take it off. I have a strict black and red policy in my club, and even if I didn’t, that would never make the cut.”

My mind drifted back to the three drag queens I had seen on stage and remembered that Maria had been the largest of the trio; far larger than me. I pulled on the shirt, which may as well have been a miniature muumuu, and tried to adjust it so that it didn’t pop right off my shoulders. Eventually I had to settle for leaving one shoulder uncovered, and I started to contemplate the benefits of nudity and a collar when I rolled up the black tights Levi had handed to me. These did not belong to Maria, and I wondered briefly if they were Levi’s. They were too small for me, but the tent of a shirt managed to cover the bulge I made in the stretchy material.

The entire outfit paired with my shiny black work shoes had me looking like some sort of deranged tap dancer. Levi didn’t even attempt to hide the shit-eating grin that had taken over his face. It was such a fantastic display of emotion and I would have been stunned if I weren’t so pissed off about my current situation. I looked like a pink nightmare.

Levi wiggled the collar in front of my face. “Suddenly this doesn’t look like such a bad option, does it?”

“It’s too cold to be naked.”

“I can warm your ass up, if you need.”

I eyed the collar and looked away before I could allow myself to consider it as a viable option. “I’d rather not go back out there naked after everything we just did.”

“You’re talking like we did something out of the ordinary, kid.” He leaned past me to set the collar on the desk before straightening up. I couldn’t get over the fact that he was at eye-level with me when he had boots on. How was he even able to walk in those?

“I’m pretty sure that public masturbation is not a daily occurrence.”

“First off, this is New York and stranger shit has and does happen on a daily basis,” he pointed out, eyeing my outfit speculatively. “And second, everyone puts on a show here, and everyone else is welcome to watch. Or did you not notice the fact that you weren’t the only one getting off in that room?”

Blood rushed to my cheeks as my mind scanned the memory, but I couldn’t remember anything past him and what he had been doing to me. “So they all just come here to… you know…”

“Fuck?”

“Yea.” I finished lamely. I was still having a difficult time wrapping my mind around what this club
“Well, that’s not the only thing they come here for, but I’d say it’s a pretty big draw.” He was still staring at my outfit as if it had offended him in some way. “This is your first time here, and considering you’re a virgin the experience is all the more terrifying. You’ve probably never even experienced handcuffs, and that’s some minor shit.”

I had used handcuffs once while playing cops and robbers with Armin and Mikasa. He had been a cop and I had pretended to steal my mom’s earrings. Mikasa was, of course, my accomplice and defended me heroically until she died tragically in a shoot out. Armin was an excellent shot. When he finally tracked me down, he handcuffed me to the swing set outside with a pair of flimsy plastic handcuffs. A few good tugs and the plastic snapped, and I was free. Handcuffs hadn’t been intimidating since.

I’m sure Levi was more than capable of changing that, however, and I knew that he would try if I gave him the chance. Somehow metal handcuffs clinking against the headboard still didn’t manage to intimidate me. I couldn’t pretend that the idea didn’t excited me on some level, and I found myself gazing down at the leather collar that was still sitting on Levi’s desk. Maybe I had made the wrong choice with the ugly pink shirt, but I wasn’t daring enough to change my mind now.

“I really should have just thrown that out or burned it in some ceremonial sacrifice to the fashion gods,” he shook his head slowly, waving a hand at my outfit, “Come on, I’m going to get a drink and so are you. Being drunk off my ass is the only way I’m going to get over the fact that you’re walking around in that eyesore.”

“I thought you said your club had a strict red and black policy.” I had assumed he was going to lock me away in his office until it was time to go, or sneak me out the back now. Either alternative was preferred at the moment, because I wasn’t sure I was ready to face the people in that room after they had seen me in such a vulnerable state.

“Oh, I do, but don’t worry. No one’s going to punish you on your first night,” he paused and hid a small smirk, “Well, not again, anyway. Besides, everyone knows you’re here with me.”

I had to ignore how my heart felt like it was ready to soar out of my chest and into the sky. I was here with him and everyone knew it. That made me too giddy for my own good, and I was reminded yet again of how deep I really was and how much this was going to hurt when it all went to shit.

“Wipe that smile off your face, Jaeger.”

I curled my lips inward to suppress the fact that I was still rejoicing over the last comment, but it didn’t stop the curve of my mouth. He rolled his eyes and grabbed the front of my shirt before walking me towards the door.

“You are so fucking lucky I’m not sending you out here bare-assed and collared on your first night. Because trust me, brat, I really want to. If I had my way, you would be on a leash attached to my hip for the rest of-” his breath caught and the word he used felt forced, as if it hadn’t been meant to complete his sentence, “Tonight.”

I looked back towards the collar and once again felt tempted to step deeper into this dark world he played in. It would be too easy if he were the one guiding me through it, and that wasn’t just because of his obvious expertise. The more time I spent around him in this place, the more comfortable I became. Of course, it had only been a handful of hours since I walked through the door, but I was relaxing quicker than I ever would have expected to in such a place. I may not have believed him the first time he said it, but I knew he wouldn’t hurt me now.
I had to keep reminding myself that this raven-haired sex god was still the short, dominant man I had become obsessed with days ago. There was still so much that I didn’t know about him, and every time he opened his mouth it was a new learning experience for me. At times I felt like I was talking to three different men who all shared the same base. There was the Levi I had met at Survery Corp, who was as temperamental as he was seductive. Being around him in that environment was like being around a really horny snapper turtle. I kept waiting to get my face ripped off for the wrong comment, certain that I was doing nothing but angering him and yet he pursued me like I was his favorite piece of meat.

Then there was the Corporal, who was currently dragging me by the world’s ugliest shirt out of his office and into his kinky club of fun. He was alive here, and there was no better word to describe it. I had noticed it the instant I saw him in that throne, before I had even fully entered the room. His eyes were vibrant in a way that I had never seen them before, and he had shown more emotion to me in the past few hours than I would have ever thought him to be capable of. Despite pinning me under his leather boot and shoving a crop up my ass, he had been far more gentle and reassuring than he was when he was stuck in that hellhole of a corporate building. I believed him now that this was the life he wanted, and part of me wanted to be the one to give it to him.

The third Levi was one I had only seen on so few occasions that were so brief I wasn’t even sure he truly existed. In those moments that he opened up to me and spoke about things that I was sure he had never told anyone else, I felt as if I were spying on someone who was exposed when they didn’t want to be. He was uncomfortable, almost timid in a sense and yet determined to divulge pieces of himself that he had kept tucked away. It was like looking inside at the person he had been at one point in his life, before he had been covered in the wants and demands of everyone else. I wanted to know him most of all, and yet I was terrified to know what I might find.

“Oi, brat.” The snap of his fingers in front of my face drew my attention to him. “Wake up before I feed you to one of the drag queens.”

“They might be happy to see me considering I have their favorite shirt.”

“Don’t you dare let Maria see you in that. As far as she knows, I turned that into ash the day I took it from her.”

I looked down at the shirt and grimaced at the sight. I was never going to be able to scrub my mind clean of the image. “Why didn’t you?”

“Because it makes a quick and easy Christmas surprise.” He shrugged and then angled his head to one side and stared at me with a contemplative expression. “You know, if I think of you as a Christmas gift, I can almost get past the fact that you’re in that fashion disaster. Almost.”

“I never took you for someone that was into fashion,” I muttered, although you didn’t have to know anything about fashion to know that this shirt wouldn’t work on anyone.

“Well, rule number one, don’t assume you know anything about me.” He walked me over to the bar that was glowing red in the otherwise dark room. “Because you know what they say about assuming. That makes an ass out of someone named Ume, and I hear she really hates that.”

He took a seat at the bar and rapped his knuckles against the surface to draw the bartender’s attention. He placed an order that I barely heard, although I wasn’t going to be of any use when it came to choosing a drink anyway. I would just have to trust him and hope that he didn’t give me something that would melt my tongue on the way down.

The bartender was walking over with two drinks that were flashing red with some fake ice cubes
when Levi’s phone started to vibrate on the counter. I saw Erwin’s face light up the screen before it was plucked off the surface and pressed to Levi’s ear.

“Pretty late to be hearing from you.” Levi started and then paused. He was silent for a moment and then held one finger up to me. “Hang on a second, it’s too loud out here for this. Let me go into my office. What? Yea, of course I’m at The Wall.”

Levi rolled his eyes and then gestured towards his office before leaving me at the bar to fend for myself. I watched his retreating figure and wondered for a brief instant if he would allow me to follow him. Of course, I was pretty sure he would have dragged me along with him if that were what he wanted. I stared down at the glowing red liquid in the mystery glass and tried to decide if I really wanted to try it before having the chance to ask Levi what it was.

“Redheaded slut.”

“Huh?” I turned to come face to face with the petite girl that had been chained to Levi’s throne. She offered me a small smile and gestured towards the drink sitting in front of me.

“It’s called a redheaded slut. It’s got Jagermeister, which I’m guessing is the joke he’s trying to make.” She took a seat on the stool Levi had occupied before and picked up the drink he had left behind. “It’s fruity and probably one of the less painful ones served here. Not terrible for a first timer.”

I stared at her as she drank Levi’s shot, a little surprised that she had so easily taken what was his. She paused and blinked at me, gauging my expression before smiling more openly this time, “Don’t worry, I’m not just stealing his drink. He told me to come find you because he thinks he’s going to be a while.”

“Oh.” I answered lamely, because what else was there to say? I wasn’t used to chatting up girls with thick black collars who wearing nothing more than a black corset with some red fishnet stockings. Not to mention that this was the girl who was chained to the throne that I had come apart in. My eyes suddenly widened as I realized I couldn’t remember if she had been chained to the throne while I was in it. “Oh! I’m sorry, I didn’t… did I…”

She blinked some more as she stared at me, confusion knitting her brow, “Did you?”

“Did I get anything on you?”

She stared at me unblinkingly for so long that I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks. Then she began to laugh, “No! Oh, no. Levi unhooked me before he started in on you. No, he wouldn’t do that to either of us.”

I still wasn’t sure what Levi was capable of, but I was relieved to know that he hadn’t hooked this girl beside me during my first public orgasm.

She was still laughing when she held out her hand to me, “I’m Petra, by the way.”

“Eren,” I said as I took her hand.

“Yea, I know who you are,” her smile was a little coy and her voice had a teasing lilt that made my cheeks heat further.

“So I’m guessing he does that often?”

“What he did with you?” She raised both eyebrows and then quickly shook her head, and I tried to
deny the surge of relief I felt. “Oh, no. I mean, he’s done plenty of things, but it’s rare that he ever puts on a show like that. And never with someone he brought here, although that’s mainly because he’s never brought anyone to The Wall before.”

“Well, technically I came here by myself.”

“He let you come inside when he could have just turned you away. That’s as good as him bringing you here.”

I took a breath and touched my fingers to the rim of my drink. “I saw you in a picture with him.”

I expected her to be surprised, but she just smiled in response, “We had a lot of pictures taken of us. We were high school sweethearts for the first two years before he met Erwin.”

I tried my best to suppress any distaste I had towards hearing the name, but she noticed it anyway.

“So I’m guessing you know Erwin?”

“I met him today at Survery Corp, although I heard about him before that,” I muttered bitterly and finally took a sip of the drink. It wasn’t nearly as offensive as I had anticipated. In fact, it was actually a pleasant sweetness that I could almost see myself getting used to.

“That’s strange… Levi doesn’t really talk about Erwin to anyone else,” she murmured softly and I wondered if she was actually talking to herself. “I’ve known him the longest and I still haven’t heard everything that went on there.”

“What happened?”

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, driven by a sick curiosity to understand anything I could about Levi’s relationship with Erwin. I told myself that it was because I wanted to know more about Erwin before I continued Levi’s game, but it came down to the fact that I was jealous. They had a connection that I envied, even if most of it was a lie. Levi wanted to hurt Erwin for some reason and yet every time I saw them together it was hard to deny that there was still something strong between them.

“Why do you need to know?” Her eyes were suspicious. I should have known it wouldn’t be that easy.

“Levi asked me to get Erwin into bed,” I said this with a shrug like it was your run of the mill request. “I was just wondering why he seems to hate him so much.”

“Because he killed his father.”

Any composed expression I had went straight out the window and I spluttered, “What?”

“Well, not directly or anything,” she gave a small shrug and chewed her lower lip, watching me with a wary expression. “It’s really Levi’s story to tell, though. I don’t feel right telling you things that he’s not ready to talk about.”

And that was probably the reason he had her chained to his throne. I couldn’t imagine Levi would willingly keep anyone so close for so long if they hadn’t given him every reason to trust them. Still, she had given away a little to me just now and it was enough to cause a problem. It would be difficult bringing up what she had told me without giving away where I had gotten the information, but now I had to know more. How had Erwin killed Levi’s father if he hadn’t done it directly? And if he didn’t do it himself, then what proof did Levi have that it had even been done on purpose?
“What are you two talking about?” I heard a laugh before a hand smacked down on my back and knocked the air out of my lungs. I was sucking in the air I had lost when I turned to see Hanji eyeing Petra with a curious expression. There was a silent conversation that I was missing, and I had no hope of figuring it out before Hanji fixed her grin on me. “Enjoying yourself?”

She wagged her eyebrows and I suppressed a groan, putting one hand over my eyes as a blush flooded my cheeks once more. I wouldn’t have to worry about any more erections for the rest of the night, considering all the blood was determined to stay in my face. I was pretty damn sure I would never stop being embarrassed over what had happened tonight.

“Can we not talk about that?”

“Sure,” she sighed and slumped onto the stool beside me like a sulking child. “Don’t see why not, though. It was nice to see Corporal in his element with someone he actually enjoyed playing with.”

She was trying to pique my attention and it was working like a charm. I slowly glanced her way. “He enjoyed it?”

“Well, not that you could tell with the king of all emotions, but yea. I haven’t seen him enjoy himself that much in… well, I honestly can’t think of the last time.” She shrugged and then snatched my drink up from the counter. She downed the rest of the contents and smacked the glass back against the marble, smacking her lips together in a loud pop. “No drinks for minors, by the way. I’m sure Levi would say the same if he weren’t busy with his head in the clouds.”

Petra was smiling as she joined in with Hanji’s teasing conversation, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen him so interested in anybody before.”

Hanji pointed at her with a grin, “That’s saying something coming from one of his only two relationships. And the other one is just fubar, so it doesn’t count.”

“Fubar?” I had heard the term before, but I wasn’t sure why or when.

“Fucked up beyond all recognition, sweety. That describes Levi and Erwin in a nutshell.” Hanji spoke as she waved down the bartender for a second drink. “Just one hot, sweaty rollercoaster ride of fucked up.”

I let out a slow breath and tried not to think about Levi, Erwin and sweat.

“What are you doing to terrorize him now, Hanj?”

The sound of his voice had my stomach doing somersaults, and I looked up to see Levi walking back towards the bar. He put his hands on Petra’s shoulders and leaned into her, speaking in mock surprise, “You stole my drink?”

“And I took his.” Hanji jabbed her thumb in my direction. “He’s how old, Corporal? It’s not bad enough you shoved a crop up his ass, but now you had to give him a drink, too?”

“Anyone would need a drink after that experience,” Levi replied with a smirk, and then his gaze settled on me. My cheeks heated for a reason other than embarrassment as he spoke, “Go get your shit together, kid. I’m taking you home with me.”

I had to remind myself that we both lived in the same building and ‘home’ did not necessarily mean his apartment. After a quick goodbye to Petra and Hanji, I left the three of them at the table and walked into his office, surprised that nobody attempted to stop me on the way. It must have been the ugly shirt’s magical powers of warding off anyone blessed with the gift of sight. I gathered up the
torn tatters that had once been an outfit and had started to walk out the door when Levi cut me off.

He held up a pair of handcuffs by the chains and flashed me a smile that had me holding out my wrists before he even made the command. If it put that look on his face, I was not about to deny whatever it was he had been about to ask. He eyed my wrists with a hint of surprised satisfaction and proceeded to cuff my hands together.

“This,” he said as he slid the second cuff into place, “Is so you keep your hands to yourself in the elevator.”

Handcuffs were the bane of my existence.

He read my expression of distaste, but didn’t seem to care and snatched the clothes out of my hands before hooking a finger around the chain between my wrists. He walked towards the front of the club and I stumbled along behind him, not sure how I would trip without face planting if I happened to lose my balance. When we were outside I realized it didn’t matter if I did fall flat on my face, because nothing could possibly add to the humiliation of walking the short distance from The Wall to Trost in the outfit Levi had concocted.

I tried to ignore the wide-eyed looks we received in the lobby as he walked me over towards the elevators, which were thankfully ready and waiting for our arrival. At least I didn’t have to linger under the stares for very long. He pulled me into the small space, turning the key for the penthouse in the lock before pushing me into a corner and leaning in his usual one. I felt like I had been put in time-out and I wasn’t even sure why. I stared down at my wrists and gave a small tug, feeling the hard metal press into the soft skin of my wrists. I had no hope of breaking these.

“You’re staying the night.”

It wasn’t a question and I wasn’t about to object. I simply nodded and lifted my eyes to him. He was staring at my outfit with the same look of disgust that he had worn in the club.

“And you’re going to be taking that off,” he eyed the change in my expression as if he were expecting it. “Don’t get ahead of yourself, brat. You’re not getting laid tonight. Trust me, that outfit is giving me a direction and no amount of your naked ass is going to cure it anytime soon.”

“I wasn’t the one who picked it out,” I reminded him, once again moving my wrists against the handcuffs.

“Sure you were. You could have gone with the collar, and then we wouldn’t be having this discussion at all.”

I squirmed slightly at the thought. He had to be putting these thoughts in my head on purpose. “So what are you going to do with me naked in your bed?”

“I wasn’t the one who picked it out,” I reminded him, once again moving my wrists against the handcuffs.

“Sure you were. You could have gone with the collar, and then we wouldn’t be having this discussion at all.”

I squirmed slightly at the thought. He had to be putting these thoughts in my head on purpose. “So what are you going to do with me naked in your bed?”

“Who said you get to sleep in my bed? If you’re lucky you might get the couch.”

My brow furrowed and I tried to fight back the annoyance that was trying to creep its way into my tone. “Why am I staying over if I’m not going to be in your bed?”

“Because I’m getting this shit sorted out before tomorrow. I want to know whether or not you’re doing this for me so I can decide if I need to make a plan B.”

“So you’re keeping me up all night until you get an answer out of me?”

“If I have to.” He gave a small shrug. “If you’re a little shit about it, then yea. But if you make up
your mind fast enough, then I’ll let you sleep.”

He seemed to be in a generous enough mood to give me time to think about it now, because silence filled the elevator for the remainder of the ride up. I expected to find myself tense by being trapped in a quiet space with him, but I felt oddly content. It was a comfortable silence that settled between us, and I allowed my mind to wander over the possibilities behind accepting his offer. Even if I did agree, there were still questions he would have to answer for me first; information I needed to have before I signed off my body to some man I barely knew.

Could I really do this?

The elevator doors rolled open to his apartment and he grabbed the chain between my wrists before leading me inside. He drew a key out of his pocket and with two soft clicks and turns my wrists were my own once again. I rubbed the tender flesh, reminding myself that next time I wouldn’t try to work my way free just to see if I could.

“So, what’s your answer?”

“You’re not wasting any time, are you?”

He walked towards me and grabbed the end of the shirt, pulling it up over my head in one quick movement before tossing it aside. “Not a damn second. Answer.”

It was hard to ignore the way he was suddenly stripping me, “Going to get me out of your system first?”

His hands paused on the waistband of the spandex pants and his lifted his gaze to meet mine. “No, that’s not what I’m doing.”

“Why not?” I pushed, only half disappointed by his response, “Wasn’t that the point of getting me up here in the first place?”

“It was.” He trailed off and then frustration furrowed his brow, “Fuck if I know why I’m changing my mind now. Maybe I don’t want you out of my system yet.”

He returned to the job of removing the rest of my clothes and I tried to keep my heart from hammering its way out of my chest. “So you want me to stay near you? Even after, if, I do this thing with Erwin?”

“Don’t get your hopes up, brat.” The snapping tone in his voice told me I had pushed a little too far. “It’s not like I’m confessing some undying love for you here. You just happen to be a toy that’s a little too interesting to put down after one play. Don’t flatter yourself into thinking you’re anymore than that.”

I watched his expression, expecting to be hurt by what he had just said but feeling no pain. After everything I had seen tonight, I recognized what I was seeing now as his mask. It was the barrier he put up when he was trying to keep people from seeing what he wanted them to see. He was spouting out hurtful words to keep me from looking past them to the real meaning. And even if I didn’t know how he truly felt, he had just told me one very important thing.

He wasn’t ready to let me go.

The fact that I knew that made my decision so much easier. It took away the fear I had that rejecting him would push him out of my life. He was here for a reason other than this deal, and I was positive I wasn’t the only one who wanted to understand what that reason was. I was as big a mystery to him
as he was to me, and I was ready and willing to use that to my advantage. He wasn’t the only one who could get what he wanted out of this little arrangement.

I could do this, couldn’t I?

“Last chance, brat. Yes or no?”
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

More about Levi and an answer from Eren in this chapter. The next chapter will actually be split between two POVs with Levi and Eren.

Thank you all so much for the comments both here and on tumblr! I'm so happy every time I read them, and it's great to know you were all excited about this week's update! I'm personally fond of this chapter because... well, you'll see.

As always, please feel free to leave comments and let me know what you thought of the chapter! Also, if you want to follow me on tumblr, you can find me at lootibles or lusty-levi (RP blog, but I also spend 99% of my time on it). I'm also tracking the "fic: the intern" tag.

ENJOY!

I honestly had every intention of saying yes, and I was prepared to use this deal to get as close to Levi as he would let me. Whatever his reasons were, he wanted this badly enough that he was willing to put all of his energy into making me to agree. Not that I wanted to, of course. Erwin was undeniably attractive and were I not already head over heels for a certain midget I might actually entertain the idea of wanting someone like him. But Levi had a hold on my heart that I was unable to break, and I didn’t want to try. Despite the ups and downs of the past week, I had felt more content with him than I had with anyone in last few months. I wasn’t willing to give up that feeling now, and I knew I couldn’t go back to the emptiness she had left behind.

“Just because I said I would work all night to get an answer out of you doesn’t mean I actually want to, brat,” Levi’s annoyed voice snapped me out of my reverie and reminded me that he was still waiting for my answer. “It’s a really simple question. Yes, you’ll fuck the billionaire sex god. Or no, you’d rather just hole yourself up in the mailroom and piss me off for the remainder of the internship.”

“Let’s say I say yes,” I started, and was a little surprised I didn’t have to shoot down any excitement on his end. He stared at me passively, awaiting the rest of my statement. He obviously wasn’t getting his hopes up, and realizing he might have already given up on me caused a stronger pain in my chest than I expected. “If I say yes, what does that mean for you and me?”

“What do you want it to mean for us?”

“Well, if I’m with him then I can’t be with you, right?” I knew I was reaching towards possibilities that weren’t even there, but I didn’t care.

“First off, Erwin’s not going to be openly committed to you in any way,” Levi said as he walked towards the kitchen island. He pressed a switch on his single cup coffee machine and the room filled with a soft hum as it started to warm up. He hesitated on his next comment, eyeing me with a wary expression that had my stomach twisting before he said the words, “He’s married.”

“He’s married!” I practically hissed the words as I started walking towards the kitchen. The slight
breeze cruelly reminded me that I was still buck naked in the middle of Levi’s apartment, but I was currently too flabbergasted to care. “And you decided to mention this now?”

“Oh, you’re right,” Levi’s tone was heavy with sarcasm. “Because Erwin’s a faithful angel otherwise. Yea, we’re really the ones fucking up that marriage bed.”

He rolled his eyes and then pressed a single cup into the machine, pushing the lever down before hitting the button for the larger serving. He leaned against the marble counter as the machine poured brown liquid into the waiting cup. He threaded his fingers together and watched my expression, analyzing it as if trying to decide whether he should stop pushing his luck now.

“Does he have kids?” It was the only other thought running through my mind next to the unknown face of some woman I would inevitably hurt.

“Two,” he murmured softly.

I let breath rush out of me, feeling my lungs deflate. I reached out to grab the counter, suddenly feeling weak and sick to my stomach. I had been so ready to agree to this and now every doubt I had before came hurrying back at full force. How could I possibly do this when he was married with a family? How could I hurt three innocent people simply because Levi wanted to get back at Erwin for who knew what?

“It’s not like you’re destroying a happy home, kid,” he continued when I didn’t say anything. “You think you’d be the deciding factor? Get over yourself. If it’s not your ass, it’ll be someone else. Erwin’s never been faithful and he’s never going to be. That family has been doomed from the moment he said ‘I do’ and the only thing you’ll be doing is revealing the lie he’s been forcing them to live in.”

“Maybe they’re happy in the lie.”

“Nobody is happy in a lie,” he snapped, “You’re trapped in a lie and you fool yourself into believing you’re content because there’s no other way out.”

I didn’t have to ask him if he was speaking experience to know that he was. The way his hands trembled told me the words had hit closer to home than he would ever admit to me. And maybe he was right. I’d been living in a lie for the past few months, pretending to be normal when everything had been crashing down around me. Now that I was suddenly seeing a life beyond the one I’d been trapped in, I felt free. Maybe they would feel free as well, but I couldn’t imagine that would be their first reaction. Even if I could believe it would be for the best, could I knowingly dismantle a family for reasons I didn’t even know?

“Tell me why.”

He blew the steam off the top of his mug and then took a slow sip, eyeing me over the rim of the cup. Finally he lowered it to the counter and spoke, “I was already planning to do that, although I was hoping for your answer beforehand.”

“Why?”

“Because I wanted to know how far you’d be willing to go just to please me.”

I felt like I failed a test I hadn’t been aware I was taking, “That’s unfair.”

“I’m sorry, did I ever claim to be fair?” Levi raised one eyebrow as he regarded my expression. Then a smirk twitched the corner of his mouth up and he shrugged. “Besides, who said that you didn’t
give me the reaction I wanted? Maybe I’m not actually looking for a mindless drone.”

I was proud of myself for managing an indifferent shrug. I didn’t want to let him have the satisfaction of knowing how his words made my stomach flip like an Olympic gymnast.

“So you were going to tell me this whole time? That was just a test?” I actually sounded offended. Cookie for me.

“Actually no.” Levi gave a small shrug, seemingly indifferent to whether I was offended or not. “I had originally planned on sending you into the whole scenario blind, but after tonight I’ve had a change of heart. Lucky you.”

I didn’t feel very lucky. “And why did you change your mind?”

“I told you I wouldn’t hurt you,” he said simply, watching my expression as he took another sip. Clearly the look I gave him told him he would need to offer a little more explanation than that. “When I said that, I meant it. That applies to more than what goes on in The Wall. I don’t make promises like that just to break them the second we’re outside. I’m not going to make you do anything you’re not willing to do and that now includes this little game. If you’re going to do it, you’ll do so knowing all the details. It’ll be your choice.”

“And if I choose not to do it, will there be consequences?”

“Not in the sense that I’m going to whip you or anything,” he paused with a smirk, “Unless you’re into that.”

I opened my mouth to answer, but then realized I didn’t know whether or not I was interested in being whipped. At least not yet, anyway. “Then what will you do if I say no?”

“I’m not going to do anything to you. I told you, it’s your choice,” he shrugged, “Just don’t expect me to keep talking to you after you make it.”

So that was the consequence. It was the last thing I wanted to hear and the first thing I was sure he was going to throw in my face if I refused to do this. He hid behind the lie of saying he wouldn’t hurt me, that he would allow me to make any choice I felt comfortable with, and yet he was clearly forcing my hand. He knew I wanted him badly enough to give in. I almost couldn’t blame him for using the only leverage he had over me, but at the same time I hated him for it.

What choice did I have now?

I expected him to play the game this way, so I shouldn’t be surprised about it. However, I wasn’t going to quietly give in when he was being a manipulative asshole. I wanted him to be aware that he was forcing me into a choice that I didn’t necessarily want to make. He had to know that all of his reassurances about this being my choice were nothing but a pile of shit. He was the one pulling the strings here, and he had been all along.

“You’re a fucking liar, Levi,” I spat, satisfied when he looked up from his coffee with surprised eyes. “It’s my choice? You won’t hurt me? Bullshit. You know the one thing I want from you and you’re threatening to take it away if I don’t do exactly what you want. So what choice do I actually have here? Who’s time are you actually wasting by trying to force a decision out of me when you already know what I’m going to say if you use that as leverage? I have no choice. You know I want you.”

“Eren.”

“No,” I cut him off, the anger starting to build up inside of me now. Who was he to think he could
manipulate me this way? And what kind of person was I if I would let him? “No, I’m not just going to let you jerk me around like that. This is my goddamn choice and fuck you for trying to control it!”

“Listen, brat…”

“No, you listen!” I shouted over him, satisfied by the annoyed twitch of his eyebrow. “I was going to say yes! That was my answer. I was going to do this for you even without knowing your reasons for wanting to destroy him. Even if it ended up hurting me, I was going to do it. But screw you, now you can find someone else. I’m not playing this fucking game anymore.”

I wasn’t going to give him time to respond or the chance to manipulate me further. I was making my choice now and I was regretting it with every shaky yet determined step I took in the direction of the elevator. I had almost reached my destination when he caught me by the arm and spun me around to face him. I opened my mouth to speak and all my words jumbled into one mass that stuck in my throat when his hand gripped me between the legs.

“You’re naked, dumbass,” he snapped, lifting chilled eyes to meet my gaze. “Or should I just let you run around the building like this? Will that make you feel better?”

In my rage I had completely forgotten the fact that he had stripped me bare shortly after I entered the apartment. However, his hand’s careful grip was an unfair reminder that I was too exposed to go into a public elevator. I almost had to wonder if that had been some masterful plan on his part. He stripped me of my means of escape when he took away my clothes.

“Give me my clothes.”

“First off, they’re not yours, they’re my employee’s,” he released me and took a step back. “Second, if you’re going to walk away after reaming me out like that, you can do so with your ass showing. I may as well get one last dig at you before you go.”

I took a very slow and careful breath, in and out. I counted slowly on the release, trying to remove the tension from my body. It was therapeutic, really. The best way to avoid crushing someone’s head. Not that it worked in the least, but it gave me just enough resolve to try for the elevator once more. It was late enough that my chances of encountering anyone were low, and at the moment I really didn’t care if anyone saw me this way. I had to get out of here.

I was standing in the elevator when he spoke, “Erwin’s the reason my father died.”

My hand moved of its own volition, pressing the button to hold the doors open. I didn’t make any movement to leave the small space, but I maintained his stare and urged him to continue. I never knew I could be so firm and bold while not wearing a stitch on my body. Maybe I was meant to be a nudist.

“Erwin’s the reason I-” He stopped and took a breath and it shook on the way in. This was hard for him, and that was almost enough to get me out of the elevator. “He’s the reason I am who I am today. Whatever you hate about me, you can blame him.”

“I don’t hate anything about you.”

“That’s a lie,” he spoke it as if it were an inescapable truth.

The elevator gave an impatient buzz, indicating it was going to go into alarm mode if I didn’t move soon.

“Please just get your ass back in here. I’ll give you some clothes and we’ll talk.”
I stared at the button, my thumbnail practically white with the effort of holding it down. I hated to admit it, but I didn’t want to leave. Through all of my determination to go, I had been waiting for any reason to stay and he had just given me plenty. I stepped out of the elevator and it gave a pleasant chime before closing its doors once more.

“None of your clothes are going to fit me.”

It seemed like the easiest thing to say after such a tense moment, and if nothing else it brought out an awkward laugh between us.

“I’m sure I have something loose enough to do the trick, and either way it’ll be better than what you had on before.”

I really couldn’t argue with that.

I followed Levi into his bedroom, although not without being invited first. It was a magnificent space, as spotless as the rest of his apartment and decorated in hues of blacks, grays, and sharp blues that reminded me of his eyes. I had expected the same black and red scheme of The Wall to be reflected in his bedroom, but there wasn’t a trace of the crimson color to be found. There was a black dresser accented with a cerulean table runner, and a flat screen TV mounted to the wall above it. His bed was made out of a dark wood, but it was dressed up in contrasting shades of blue, from navy to sky. Even the sheer curtains that covered the way to his balcony were a soft, welcoming sapphire. I hadn’t expected to feel so at peace in any place owned by him, but I quickly found myself never wanting to leave.

“I like your room.”

That was so lame. The most I got back was an indifferent hum that was more to let me know he had heard me than anything else. He busied himself with trying to find some outfit to welcome me to munchkin land, and I stood near his four-poster bed in awkward silence. Neither of us spoke and we both seemed equally determined not to bring up my outburst or his confession.

“Here you go. Can’t promise they’ll be a great fit, but that’s what you get for being abnormally tall.”

I took the clothes from him and examined the pair of soft black pajama pants and blue t-shirt. “I’m the one that’s abnormal? Don’t make fun of me just because you’re short.”

“I like to think that I’m an average height.”

“You also like to shove crops up unsuspecting assholes.”

“Well, I never claimed to be normal.”

I gave a small roll of my eyes before holding up the bundle of clothes in one hand, “Should I dress here?”

“Knock yourself out,” he shrugged, turning back towards his closet. “I’m getting changed in here anyway. And it’s not like I haven’t been seeing you naked for most of the night.”

He closed the door behind himself and I started the near impossible task of putting on his shirt. It was like trying to fit into the clothes I had back in middle school, and even that was a stretch. I was pretty damn sure I knew more than a handful of girls who were bigger than him, and I had always considered them to be on the smaller side. When I had finished squeezing what I could fit into the clothes he had given me, I turned toward the full body mirror positioned in the corner of the room and suppressed a groan.
The shirt looked like it had been painted onto my body, which would have been a flattering sight if it didn’t show part of my midriff. The pants, which were strained around all the areas that mattered, were at least a little accommodating in the legs as most pajama pants were. That small benefit was quickly forgotten when I realized the pants ended mid-calf. I looked like I was squeezed into clothes that were three sizes too small, which I actually was.

As I stared at myself, I started to wonder if I would be able to make a mad dash to change into the hideous pink shirt before he was able to stop me. As if hearing my plans to run, the closet door clicked open and I reluctantly turned to face him, promptly forgetting any desire I had to leave the room. He had removed his wig and his natural hair was left in a sexy unkempt mess. He was wearing a black long-sleeved shirt that must have been reserved for sleeping because it was loose and the cuffs of the shirt came a little over his hands, almost hiding the black of his nails. His dark grey pants were just as slouchy as the shirt, but still managed to hold to his hips in a way that made me think of more than-

Let’s just skip that. I was not thinking of cuddling. Even if he did look-

“Cute.”

I slapped a hand over my mouth and shut my eyes to hide myself from his reaction to the word that had somehow made its way past my lips. I was more embarrassed than I had been that entire night, and that was saying something considering the public show I had been forced to put on earlier.

“Well, I’m going to go ahead and say thank you, because I can assume you’re not talking about yourself.”

I opened my eyes to meet his amused gaze, relaxing only slightly when I noted the small smirk that was now playing on his lips. I lowered my hand to my hip and rolled my eyes, trying to seem nonchalant.

“I wasn’t talking about you.”

“Sure you weren’t, Miss Sassy.”

“What?”

Levi’s smirk grew and he popped one hip to the side and set his hand on it. It took me a moment to realize he was mimicking my own stance, and I quickly folded my arms. He chuckled, the sound too deep and sexy for someone who had just struck a pose. How did he do it?

He crossed the carpet to his bed and took a seat on the thick comforter. He leaned back against the mound of pillows that lined the head of his bed, one leg bent at the knee and the other outstretched. He somehow managed to look both casual and alluring in the same instant, and I found myself confused when he fixed me with an expectant stare. I was almost convinced he wanted me to strip once more and was ready to do so when he spoke.

“Are you just going to stand there? Because what I have to say isn’t exactly the shortest story in the world,” he paused as if considering something, “Not that I’m going to give you all the gritty details, of course.”

I gestured to an area of the bed that was close while still not invading his space, and he waved a hand at the spot I had indicated. I climb onto the mattress and sat, indian-style, setting my hands behind me to lean back. He regarded me for a moment and then spoke through a wry smile, “You know how to make yourself comfortable. Do you adjust like this everywhere you go?”
I considered his question and shook my head, giving the only honest answer I had, “Just around you.”

I was certain he had something he wanted to say, but he looked away before I could read it from his expression. He angled his head to the side and took a deep breath, preparing himself before launching into the story. “You already saw the picture of me and Petra, so you know I was different.”

I nodded, but kept my questions to myself. I was sure he would get to everything in time.

“I looked really fucking happy back then. Honestly, you wouldn’t recognize me,” he spoke through a humorless laugh. “Not that I was actually happy. To be honest, I was more miserable than I am now. I did every single thing my dad wanted me to do, regardless of whether or not it something I wanted. Not that it would have mattered. He didn’t care about what I wanted, so long as he had some perfect prodigy to hand the company off to when he finally croaked.”

Levi rolled his eyes and snatched up one of the pillows to hold it in his lap. He worked a silk tassel between his fingers, unraveling it before letting it twist back to normal, again and again. He was staring at the process and I knew it was because he didn’t want to meet my eyes. I was certain this was the first time he had talked about this with anyone, and it was more than a little obvious that it was uncomfortable for him.

“Erwin co-founded Survey Corporation with my dad, and I saw him a handful of times when I was younger,” he shrugged, like the information didn’t matter. “I didn’t really start to see him until I turned sixteen, and then it was practically impossible to keep him away.”

“Did he rape you?”

“No!” The shout was sharp and sudden, and Levi’s eyes snapped up to me, narrowed and offended. He looked as if I had reached over and slapped him or set him on fire. “No, he’s not like that. Fuck no. Fuck, don’t say shit like that. Damn it, brat, you’re throwing me off track. Just keep your damn mouth shut, all right? Shit.”

I pulled my lips in instinctively, and the imagery must have worked as a conformation to him. He looked back down to the tassel on the pillow and muttered another curse before continuing.

“Everything I did with him was consensual,” he put emphasis on the last word and shot me a quick look through his eyelashes. His eyes were like steel. “He took it slow and he made sure that it was what I wanted. And hell, it was really what I wanted. Not just the sex, which was fucking… just… good god, that man knows what he’s doing.”

I tried to suppress the sudden urge to light Captain America on fire.

“But the submission,” he breathed the word like it was a prayer, and I noticed how his fingers stilled on the tassel. “We just scratched the surface tonight, kid, so you won’t know what I’m talking about when I say this, but… there is nothing like giving yourself over to someone that way. The control he had on my life and me was the only thing that got me through the rest of high school.”

“Didn’t your dad have control over you, though? Isn’t that what was upsetting you in the first place?”

“It’s not the same.” He shook his head before continuing. “I never willingly gave control to my dad. He took my life like it was his own. It didn’t matter what I wanted with him, but with Erwin? He actually gave a shit. He took control because I let him. I was the one with the choice, and he would
always stop when enough was enough. He could tell me to do the same things my dad ordered, and it was okay. I wanted to do those things because it pleased him, and pleasing him had become a way of life for me. I could breathe because I knew he wanted me to.”

His hands had started to shake, fumbling as he tried to twist the tassel in the same methodical motion. The experience he was describing was nothing I could relate to, because I had never given anyone that level of control over me. I wasn’t even sure I could imagine belonging to someone in a way that would make me feel like a pet. I had never felt so out of control in my own life that I needed someone else to establish control for me. But it was clearly something he had needed at the time, and by the way his hands were trembling, I was sure he needed it still. The next time he spoke, there was crack in his voice that shocked me.

“I don’t know why he did this to me.” I wasn’t entirely sure the words were meant for me. They were spoken on a helpless whisper, one given by someone who was completely lost. When he spoke again, his voice was a little stronger and tainted by anger. “He changed who I was, and I don’t hate him for that. Fuck, it’s the opposite. I hated who I was before him. I was living in a lie, smiling for everyone but myself. It was always an act, but with him I could actually be myself. I didn’t have to pretend with him because he would see right through me if I tried.”

He released the tassel and let it fall back into place. “When I turned eighteen, he went to my dad and told him everything. He told him about all the BDSM shit I was into, the fact that we had been fucking since I was sixteen. Hell, he even called us lovers. He unloaded all of this crap on my dad and didn’t spare him any detail. He cracked my old man like he was doing it on purpose.”

Levi’s voice broke off and he leaned back into the pillows, tilting his head to angle his face towards the ceiling. He stared up as he spoke, “Erwin didn’t tell me any of that. I had to find out from my dad’s suicide note. Imagine getting a letter from your dad saying every horrible thing you’ve ever thought about yourself, and blaming that as the reason he killed himself. I was a ‘sick fag’ and a ‘disgrace to the family.’ A shame he would never get over, so he ate a fucking bullet instead.”

Levi pressed one hand over his eyes and I watched his Adam’s apple move up and down as he convulsively swallowed. He was silent for a long moment, and it was just long enough for me to decide that I didn’t care if he pushed me away. I couldn’t sit there and watch him struggle through words like these without knowing someone was there for him.

I moved across the bed and pulled him into my arms so quickly that a surprised yelp broke through his lips. I banded my arms around his body and held him so that his head fell against my chest. I pressed my face into his hair and shut my eyes, bracing myself for the violent reaction that I was sure would come.

“Let go of me, brat,” he muttered into my shirt but made no move to push me away, which was honestly the only way I was going to let him go. “I’m over it now. It doesn’t matter anymore, okay? It was years ago.”

“Shut up,” I spoke into his hair and tightened my arms around him to prove I wasn’t about to let go. “I don’t care if you’re over it or not. Just humor me and let me hold you. You owe me that much.”

“I don’t fucking owe you a damn thing, brat.”

“I’ll do it.”

He went silent for a moment and remained still in my arms. He knew exactly what I meant by those words. “You will?”
“Yea, I will,” I turned my head to rest the side of it against the top of his. It was a half-nuzzle, but he didn’t notice. I was pretty sure he would never let me hold him like this again, so I was going to take full advantage of the moments I had. “He ruined your life, so I’ll help you ruin his.”

“It’s not going to be easy, brat. This whole thing will be public. It’s going to blow up in the end and you’ll be caught in the mess.”

“You’re vastly overestimating how much I care about what other people think,” I muttered. At the moment I didn’t care about anything other than keeping this man in my arms. I had never felt so comfortable in my life, and I knew at any moment I was at risk of falling asleep this way.

“It’s not going to be easy,” he repeated.

“Stop trying to change my mind. I said I’ll help you, and I’m going to.” I acted like I was taking in a deep breath in order to sigh, managing to catch a whiff of his shampoo. It was a dark, rich scent that made my mind haze around the edges.

“Are you smelling me, kid?”

I let out the sigh in a rush, “Nope. Just breathing.”

“Yea, well, you’re breathing like there’s a tornado in your nose.” He said and finally pushed me away. He rubbed the top of his head, eyeing me with an annoyance that was only half real. “So, what do you want?”

“What do you mean?”

“For doing this for me.” He shrugged and leaned back into the pillows once more. When I didn’t throw out a response right way, he questioned me with one raised eyebrow. “What, did you think I was going to make you do this for free? No, you get something out of it. So what do you want? A car? Money for college? Money for whatever? Name it.”

“Do I have to decide right now?”

“No,” he paused and then continued, “But you don’t get an open-ended offer, either. Take all the fucking time you want to decide, but just know that I can turn down whatever you ask for if I find it unreasonable. Just because I’m letting you wait doesn’t mean you can have anything you want.”

I know exactly what I want.

Of course, I couldn’t just blurt out the things I wanted with him. I was positive I would be turned down if I tried. But still, I could at least ask for something small to start.

“Can I be around you?”

“Is that what you want?”

“It’s something I want, but not the thing I’m asking for.” I said with a small shrug. “I just want to be around you. Just while I’m doing all of this. It’s a good idea, isn’t it? You can coach me since you know what he likes.”

Levi considered this, eyeing me for a moment before nodding. “Fine.”

“Does that mean I can stay here tonight?”

He let his head fall slightly to the side, fixing me with a stare that said ‘you have got to be kidding
me.’ However, after I didn’t budge a muscle for a minute he rolled his eyes and grabbed a pillow, whipping it at me.

“Whatever, brat. One night. And you better not fucking snore.”

“I don’t snore.”

“Everyone says that and almost everyone is wrong. Let’s hope for your sake that you’re not.” He pointed to the other side of the bed. “You can sleep there, near the edge. Hands to yourself. I’m serious, brat. You put one hand on me and you’ll be sleeping on the balcony. Understood?”

I couldn’t keep the smile from my voice. “Yes, Corporal.”
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

So I originally planned to have Chapter 14 as a POV split between Levi and Eren, but Levi ended up having a lot more to say than I expected. This chapter ended up being a little shorter than the others, so I decided to post it today as a surprise. I'll still be doing the usual Thursday update this week as well.

Oh! And I want to thank the tumblr user asklebishousewife for inviting me to watch her draw some Intern!Levi art! Honestly, art makes me beyond giddy, especially when it involves Levi. XD

Thank you all so much for your wonderful comments - I'll be responding to them soon, so please keep sending them because I love hearing what everyone thinks of the chapter! As always, please feel free to follow me on lootibles or lusty-levi (RP blog) if you have tumblr. I'm tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you have anything you'd like to add!

ENJOY!

Levi

“I like it.”

I stared up at my mother as she fiddled with the white fabric around my neck, tying it into a familiar fashion. I was never able to get my little fingers to mimic the style, but the motions seemed to be second nature to her. She didn’t even need to keep her eyes on the task to know that she was doing it perfectly. She was gazing at my father as her thin, delicate fingers moved the cloth and tightened it just enough to keep it in place while still leaving me the ability to breathe comfortably.

“I don’t see why he can’t just wear a tie like all the other boys,” my father grumbled, his voice gruff. He was eyeing the cravat with a look of distaste, as he always did when my mother put it on me. “Ties are normal.”

“Levi is not normal.” My mother smiled at me as she said this, and I felt pride swell in my chest. To anyone else that would have sounded like an insult, but I knew it was the best compliment coming from her. I was special to her, and in my world that was all that mattered.

“He could be normal if you let him dress like the other boys.”

“Do you want to be like all the other boys, mon petit ange?” She spoke only to me and didn’t spare a glance at my father. It was like we were on an island separate from him, talking from a distance to someone who didn’t really matter at all.

I shook my head, as she knew I would, and she swept my cheeks up in her palms and pressed a kiss to my forehead. Then she moved her fingers through my long black hair, tousling the strands. “This is getting so long. All the girls are going to be envious.”

My father grumbled something else and took a sip of the golden liquid in his short glass. I knew it
was a comment about the length of my hair, as he had been making plenty of snide remarks since I had started to grow it out. It had been a short-lived argument between my parents, ending with him relenting to my mother. He was fighting a losing battle every time he tried to argue in favor of things he thought to be normal. I never understood how someone as captivating and intelligent as my mother settled for someone as dull and average as my father. I couldn’t imagine living my life with someone who challenged my happiness at every turn and tried to stuff me into a box I would never fit in. I didn’t know how she could smile around him so easily when all he ever did was suffocate her.

“I can’t believe the summer is nearly over,” she sighed, fanning out the end on my cravat. “We’ll have to do something fun before you start school next week.”

“Like what, maman?” I perked up at the idea of any adventure with her. Her plans always started out simple and quickly grew into a day of events. One day she had suggested going out for some ice cream, but apparently not any ice cream would do. We drove for hours to a number of locations; sampling all the flavors we’d never tried before. In the end, we wound up on the beach and spent the day in the sand with the sundaes we had carried over from the boardwalk.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said, although her smile suggested otherwise. There was always a mischievous glint in her sharp blue eyes whenever she was planning something, and I saw it there now. “I’m sure we’ll think of something.”

“Can we do it today, maman?”

“Oh, mon petit, I wish we could,” she placed another kiss to my forehead before standing up and reaching for her cream colored woven scarf. It was the one she always wore when she was going out for the day, with a uniquely stitched diamond pattern that tapered off into small tassels held together by little silver beads. “I have a meeting today, and I want the whole day for us. We’ll go tomorrow.”

She smiled down at me and then pulled her long black hair out of the way to drape the long scarf around her neck, tossing one end over her opposite shoulder. She had on a sleeveless white shirt and a black skirt, all summer wear and appropriate for the weather outside. The cream scarf would probably look silly to everyone who saw her today. They wouldn’t think it was normal at all, but she was not a normal person and neither was I. We weren’t like them and we never would be.

“I need you to think of ideas while I’m gone today,” she said as she bent down to tuck my long black hair behind my ears. She held my face in her hands and kissed my forehead once more. “Pick your three favorites for me, okay?”

“Yes, maman.”

“We’ll have the whole day together tomorrow, just you and me.” She smiled again and then stood to kiss my father. “You two be good while I’m gone.”

I stood in the doorway and watched her walk to the black car at the end of the driveway. Just before entering, she turned to me expectantly and I pressed my palm to my lips before holding it out towards her. She snatched the invisible kiss in the air and held her fist over her heart before returning the favor. I was holding my own fist over my heart as I watched the door close and the car pull away. I continued to stare even after the car could no longer be seen, my fist still in its place.

I think somehow I knew that would be the last time I ever saw her.
My body jolted up before my eyes opened and any sense of reality came back to me. I stared around the room with my palm pressed against my chest, my heart pumping a race beneath it. The city lights and approaching dawn streaming in from the balcony reminded me that I had never bothered to draw the curtains the night before. I couldn’t even remember when or how quickly sleep had taken me, but clearly it had been deep enough to allow me to dream of my mother. It had been months since the last time my memories conjured her up, and even after so many years I still wasn’t prepared to see her.

I rubbed at the ache in my chest and looked down at the warm body lying beside me. Somewhere in the middle of the night he had managed to snake one arm around my waist, and he was pressed into my side now. Part of me wanted to hold to my previous threat of pushing him out onto the balcony, but the rest of me couldn’t deny the fact that his warmth wasn’t exactly unwelcomed. I hadn’t slept so deeply in years and even if it had led to unwanted dreams I still felt incredibly rested and content. Not that I would ever admit that to him or anyone else.

I was still confused by what this brat was able to do to me, and in the span of a few days, no less. I was unwillingly to buy into the notion that it was anything more than a sexual desire I had yet to quench. I didn’t like the way he made me feel, or the lack of control I had around him. He was just a stupid child who refused to stop pestering me, and yet I didn’t want him to stop. Something about that thought irked me.

I reached out and touched his temple, brushing away a strand of chestnut hair. He didn’t even move. Eren’s face was smooth and serene, undisturbed by my rough awakening. How was it possible for anyone to sleep that deep? Even when I managed to drift off, my body remained hyperaware of my surroundings and woke me up for something as simple as a car honking a building’s length below me. Tonight was probably the first night I had managed a decent sleep, and my mind had made me pay for it in spades. I almost envied him for his ability to sleep without a care in the world.

I lowered my hand from my chest and turned to look at the clock on my nightstand, not at all surprised to find that I had woken up nearly an hour before the alarm would sound. Turning the switch off, I disentangled myself from the boy beside me, shoved the heavy comforter off of my body and slid out of bed. Even with my jostling, Eren didn’t stir and I was a little disappointed with that. Although I had my reasons for turning the brat down, I would have entertained his desire for me if for no other reason than to pass the time before I would actually need to prepare myself for the day.

I walked towards the door and grabbed the picture frame off the dresser on my way, heading into the kitchen for some coffee. As the machine warmed up, I leaned into the counter and stared at the wooden frame held between my hands. My mother’s face smiled back at me, her arms wound tight around a happy little boy I didn’t know anymore.

My mother had died when I was nine, and every smile I had made since that day had been a lie. My entire world had spun in on itself. Without her to protect me, my father bent me to his will in every way that he could. The only times I had fought back had been over my hair and the cravat; the uniqueness that my mother had loved and I refused to lose. He had allowed me those two things, but took away everything else. Even my mother’s scarf, which he had burned once he found it in a box under my bed.

I set the frame down and turned to make the cup of coffee, watching the warm liquid fill the cup. The steam billowed out, reminding me of the chill that had started to fill the air. It was late November now, and although the weather had been fickle and bounced between cold and hot for the past month, it seemed to have finally settled on the cold that was expected. It was normal.

“Is that your mother?”
I jumped and the cup slipped out of my hand, spilling its contents all over the counter. “Shit!”

I grabbed a fistful of paper towels and pressed it into the mess before it could find its way to the floor, shooting a glare at Eren in the process. I was never one to be caught off guard, but I was used to being alone in my apartment and in the brief moment of silence I had forgotten he was here at all. Even if I had remembered that little tidbit, I had expected him to be sound asleep in the other room.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

His voice was more amused than apologetic, and it did nothing to help my mood. “Shut up, brat. You didn’t scare me. I’m just not used to having anyone in my apartment.”

“I can’t imagine why. You seem like such a joy to be around.”

“Do you just naturally wake up a smart ass, or are you trying to piss me off right now?”

His sheepish smile told me it was definitely the latter.

“Well, it’s working like a charm, shit head.” I threw the soiled towels into the trash and popped another cup into the machine. “So how about you get out of here before I decide to throw the next cup of coffee at you?”

“She’s really pretty,” he murmured, leaning his elbows onto the counter to get a closer look at the picture sitting on the marble surface. I wasn’t sure if he was genuinely distracted or just determined to ignore me, but I was willing to bet he had heard the threat. I was about to repeat it when he looked at me with a stupidly gorgeous smile, “Is she your mother? Is that you?”

“No, I just keep the store photos that come with the frame so I feel like I had a family.” I quipped with a roll of my eyes before snatching the photo off the counter. “Yes, she’s my mother.”

“You look a lot like her.”

I stared down at her picture and shrugged. I had heard the same comment plenty of times before, but it made me ache even now. Every time I looked in the mirror I was reminded of the fact that I had lost the most important thing in my life.

“What’s her name?”

“Elise.”

“Is she French?”

“She was,” I shrugged again and set the frame back on the counter. He opened his mouth to ask a question I didn’t want to answer, and I cut him off before he could. “Born and raised. My father met her on one of his business trips and she moved to the States with him shortly after I was born.”

“Did she…” Eren trailed off on purpose and looked over at the picture. I knew exactly what he was asking, and I was almost grateful he didn’t ask the full question.

“When I was nine.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Yea, well, you didn’t kill her, so you don’t need to apologize.” I grabbed the cup of coffee and started walking towards the living room. I was eager for this conversation to be over now that it had taken this direction. She was the last thing I wanted to discuss this early in the morning after waking
up from that dream. “If you want any coffee, feel free.”

I listened to the machine churn into motion and took a sip from my cup, eyeing him across the length of the room. He was staring down at the photo with distant eyes, although he was smart enough to drop the subject. He remained silent as he sipped from his own cup, his eyes never leaving the picture. For someone who made so many stupid remarks over the past few days, he seemed to be lost in a very deep thought that I was certain I wanted to know nothing about.

I had never seen someone so relaxed in an unfamiliar place, but as he leaned against my marble counter I couldn’t imagine him anywhere else. He looked like he belonged in my otherwise cold apartment, and that thought pissed me off more than anything else ever could. I let him in further than I had ever let anyone, short of Erwin and Petra, and I had done it so quickly and freely that I was certain I must have lost my mind. This unremarkable brat had wormed his way into my life as if I had no barriers at all, and I wasn’t sure how I would get him out now.

But I knew I would have to try.

“I should go home and get dressed,” he finally broke the silence after glancing at the time display on the stove. “I don’t think I’ll make a great impression on Erwin in this.”

I hid my smirk against the rim of my coffee cup as I eyed the unflattering sight of my clothing stretched over his body. It was worth the loss of a shirt, although I was surprised that he had put up with it through an entire night of sleep. I had half expected him to rip out of the fabric like the Hulk, but the kid managed to impress me yet again.

“Be sure to wear something that makes your ass look good,” I said around another sip of coffee. I watched him walk towards the elevator and hit the button. “Are you gonna need a ride in today?”

“I always go in with Armin,” he said with a shrug and then worry knit his brow, “And I’m pretty sure he’s going to want to talk about what happened yesterday.”

I knew he was waiting for me bite, but I didn’t. The less I knew about his life, the easier it would be to break it off when he was no longer of any use to me.

“You should probably get going. It’s not going to look good if you’re late.”

“You should come with me,” he blurted out as if he had no choice in the matter. I stared at him and managed to hide my surprise. I honestly hadn’t expected to be invited to his apartment, although I wasn’t exactly going to reject the idea. The kid was probably incapable of dressing himself in anything that didn’t have a distinct color-matching scheme and I was willing to bet he wouldn’t be able to put together something worthy of impressing Erwin.

“I guess that’s not such a shitty idea,” I shrugged, wanting to feel as indifferent as I sounded. After my past few reactions to Erwin’s advances on Eren, I wasn’t looking forward to today. Yes, it was what I asked for and something I had actively pursued, but now that the brat had finally agreed I wasn’t so sure it was what I wanted. The thought of Erwin bending Eren over his desk filled me with a jealous rage that was as unfamiliar as it was unwelcome. Being the one who dolled up the boy to Erwin’s selective standards would only add to the anger.

“Then do you want to go down?” Eren hedged and moved closer to the elevator, “My mother’s probably awake. You could meet her.”

“Oh, awesome idea. I always try to make a habit of introducing myself to the mothers of my sex toys,” I quipped and watched the color drain from his face, “Should I lead with the crop story? Or
"just build up to it?"

"You’re going to tell her about that?"

Was this kid serious? "You’re so gullible it’s not even fun to fuck with you."

His stance relaxed and he rolled his eyes, turning to hit the button for the elevator. "Whatever, it’s early and I didn’t exactly get a lot of sleep."

"Your snoring would suggest otherwise."

He spun towards me, his face caught between chagrin and horror, "I did not snore!"

I offered up a small smirk and turned away from him to head in the direction of my bedroom, talking over my shoulder. "I’m not going downstairs yet. I’m going to get ready first, and then we can try to find something to put on your ass."

"Should I wait for you?"

"I really don’t care what you do, just don’t expect me to follow you down before I’ve shit, showered, and shaved."

"You shave?"

"No, I’m a naked fucking mole rat. Christ, brat. Yes, of course I shave."

"You just seem so…" he paused, "Hairless."

"Not every man that shaves is a wooly mammoth." I said as I moved into the bathroom. "I have hair just like you do. Or will, when you finally reach puberty."

He leaned against the frame of my bathroom door, looking casual as fuck. It was almost unfair that I had to put forth an effort of resisting him even when he had on ridiculous clothing. I avoided the sight of him and instead focused on my mirror and the task at hand.

"I’ve already hit puberty. I think you saw enough of that last night," his voice was lowering to a dangerously tempting octave, "But I could always remind you, Corporal."

I pointed my razor in his direction and fixed him with what I hoped was a murderous stare and not one that betrayed the lust that was now coursing through my veins like wildfire. "Go get your ass on my bed. And not for the reason you’re hoping, brat. Stay there until I come out. Otherwise you’re going to make both of us late."

"Would that be a bad thing?"

"Don’t test me. Out. Now."

I turned back to the mirror and didn’t wait for his response, but I did hear the creak of weight shifting on the bed a moment later. It was good to know that he was able to follow directions, although he took a few prompts to get there. If he actually lasted with Erwin, that would be trained out of him quickly enough. I tried to convince myself that I didn’t care if Erwin changed everything about the kid, but in truth I didn’t want him to alter a damn thing, especially not his spirit. Although he pissed me off constantly, Eren had a passionate way of approaching everything he did. He was so alive and his fire was so strong that it made me feel warm every time I was near him.

I rushed through the rest of my bathroom formalities and rejoined Eren in the bedroom with a towel
around my freshly washed hips. The way his mouth dropped open told me he appreciated the view, and the tightness in his already unaccommodating pants announced that he was ready to do far more than stare. If only we had all the time in the world to get to the things I wanted to do to him.

“Keep your titan in your pants, Eren,” I murmured around a small smirk as I made my way over to the closet. I didn’t have to look to know that he was currently staring at my ass.

“Do you,” he paused and gave an audible swallow, “Do you need any help?”

“Getting dressed? I’ve had years of practice, kid. I’m sure I can manage.”

I could practically feel his eyes on me as I dropped the towel and made a show of sliding the thin black boxer briefs onto my body. His eyes followed the path of my hands and lingered on the area that had been unclothed a moment before. I had to fight to the urge to fuck with him further, because I was sure with his lack of restraint and my ability to tease, he would have me up against my closet wall in no time. As it was, he was nearly moving off of the bed. I noted the way his hands clenched around the sheets, as if serving as a reminder that he needed to stay in place until told otherwise.

Such a good boy.

I moved out into the bedroom once I had the majority of my clothes on, and paused in front of the full-length mirror to work the cravat into place. As I moved the fabric around my neck, I tried not to remember the dream that had woken me up in a cold sweat. That was impossible, of course.

“Why do you wear that?” Eren spoke up from his place on the bed, although his tone was far more curious than mocking. “I’m so used to seeing ties. Everyone wears ties.”

“I’m not everyone,” I spoke the simple truth and met his eyes through the mirror.

“No, you’re not,” he agreed, holding my stare, “You’re special.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“Is it supposed to be?” His brow knit together as if he were actually considering the question. “No, special is good, isn’t it? Who wants to be normal?”

“A surprisingly large amount of the world,” I muttered as I finished working the fabric into place.

“You were wearing that in the picture. Is it because your mom was French? Did she teach you to wear it like that?”

“Oui.” I knew he wasn’t expecting the sudden change in language, brief and simple as it might have been.

“Do you really know how to speak French?” The eager curiosity in his voice was almost enough to make me launch into a few phrases I knew would impress him, but I only shrugged.

“Like the back of my fucking hand. But you’re going to have to wait if you want to hear more. If we don’t get your ass downstairs and dressed, you’re not going to be making it in on time.” I started walking towards the elevator, glancing over my shoulder once to check if he was following. He was. “And trust me, I won’t be enough to save you from the tongue lashing Mike will give you if you’re late on your second day.”
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Oh this chapter... it's a long one, and a lot happens in it. I will warn you all now that there is some angst as well. Personally I'm just happy that Armin is back in this chapter.

And thank you all again for all of your comments! I'm glad to know that you enjoyed the last chapter with Levi's backstory. There will be more in time, but it was nice to reveal a little more about his past. Hopefully you enjoy this chapter, too.

As always, feel free to leave comments here or on tumblr (you can follow me at lusty-levi or lootibles). I'm tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' on tumblr as well.

ENJOY!

“Is this really all you have?”

I watched from my bed as Levi picked through my dresser with a look of extreme distaste coloring his features, and I wondered what he had expected to find in there. He had already combed his way through the contents of my closet, which was where I had hung anything worthy of being called business casual, and he had rejected everything. My drawers were hopeless in comparison, and even I knew he wasn’t going to have any luck in finding anything suitable there.

“I told you I only bought an outfit or two,” I said with a small shrug, eyeing the tan shirt he was holding up. “I still need to shop for the internship. I wasn’t exactly expecting to continue it.”

He paused to fix me with a small glare before tossing the shirt at my face, “Well, now that you’ve changed your mind we’re going to have to go shopping.”

“Who says I’ve changed my mind?” I challenged for the sake of challenging. We both knew I was full of it at this point.

Still, he was in a good enough mood this morning to act as if he were actually taking the bait. “Well, if you’re not going to be continuing the internship, then I guess I’ll just have to find a new piece of ass to award the position to…”

Jean’s face flashed through my mind and I cringed. Even if Levi was joking, I couldn’t stand the thought of Jean anywhere near him. The idea alone made my skin want to crawl off my body, and I soon found myself twisting the only shirt Levi had liked enough to select.

He snatched it out of my hands and unrolled it to stare at the freshly formed creases. “You little shit, did you have to do that?”

“Did you?” I challenged once more. He met my stare and I noticed the corner of his mouth curve into a knowing smirk.

“You were the one suggesting you weren’t going to continue the internship. Shame on you.” He set the shirt on the bed, laying it out in an attempt to salvage it. “Serves you right for trying to piss me off. Who got your panties in such a twist anyway? So I know, for future reference.”
“So you can use it on me later?” I asked as I watched him smooth the creases. He made a soft sound of acknowledgement. “Jean. I don’t want him as your secretary. Near your office. Near you at all, really.”

“Isn’t he your best friend’s boy toy?” Levi questioned, not looking up from the task at hand. I snorted and rolled my eyes at his choice of words.

“He’s been with Armin for a while now. I can’t say I’m thrilled about it, but if he makes him happy then I’m not going to complain.”

“Makes him happy, huh?” Levi’s hand stilled on the shirt and he glanced up at me. “Maybe you’re going blind or you’re just shitty at noticing things, but it was pretty damn obvious that Jean is more than a little jealous over Armin. And for a relationship that’s lasted that long and should have some degree of trust, jealousy like that isn’t normal.”

“Jean’s just that kind of guy.”

Levi watched me for a moment more before shrugging. He straightened up and pulled the shirt off of the bed, holding it out to me. “This thing isn’t going to do the trick.”

I held the shirt and frowned as I glanced in the direction of my closet. “Armin says I look good in a vest.”

“He’s not wrong.”

I felt my stomach do a little appreciative flip in response to the words and watched as Levi walked back to the closet and removed a dark brown vest and matching pants. “Do you have a green button up?”

“Uh, yea…” I started as I set the shirt back on the bed and joined him at the closet door. “In the back. There should be a green one somewhere.”

He plucked the shirt out of the back and held the three garments towards me. “Not the best, but at least it’s not the worst I’ve seen in here or on your ass. Better than plaid, anyway.”

“No one’s ever going to let me live that down.”

“No one ever should. Friends don’t let friends wear grandpa’s pants.”

With another roll of my eyes, I nodded in the direction of my bedroom door. “Are you going to leave so I can change?”

“Tch. After I helped you pick out your prosti-tot uniform? No, I think I get a free changing show for that. Now hurry up and strip. I’m tired of seeing you in my shirt.”

I had to admit that I was eager to get out of the restrictive clothing. I would have thought that I’d enjoy sharing his shirt, but it was too small to get the desired effect. Not the effect I wanted to see on him, anyway. I could practically see him slouched on his bed with my sleeves too long for his arms, and the hem coming down a little past his thighs. The thought of him wearing one of my shirts was almost too tempting to keep to myself. Almost.

I peeled his shirt off my body and held it out to him, assuming he would take it. I was wrong, of course. He stood there with his arms folded and slowly raised one eyebrow, “You’re kidding, right? That thing’s all stretched out now, you incredible Hulk. There’s no way in hell I can wear that again. You keep it.”
“It’s not my fault you represent the lollipop guild.”

“Are you seriously calling me a fucking munchkin right now? Take off your damn pants, Dorothy.”

I suppressed a smirk and did as I was told, folding the pants and tossing them onto the bed rather than offering them back to him. I was certain he would reject those as well, so there was no point in even trying. I grabbed for the boxer briefs on my bed and noticed his stare lingering on my hips. Deciding to take my time getting dressed, I slowly bent over and slipped one foot and then the other into the boxers. I watched as his eyes followed the path of my hands when I rolled the fabric up my thighs and towards my hips.

“Enjoying the view?”

“Sometimes you’re too bold for your own good, brat,” he snapped, “Hurry up and get your pants on.”

“We could be a little late,” I offered, although it was more for the sake of teasing the erection that was starting to grow in his pants.

He let out a soft curse and shifted slightly before fixing me with a glare and continuing in a demanding voice. “Get dressed. Now.”

“Eren, is that you?”

My door was opening before I could stop it, and I stared at my mother with wide eyes. She had been a silent specter in this apartment, rarely leaving her room except to eat, and she chose now, when I barely had underwear on and a strange man in my room, to open my door? Her timing could have only been worse if it had been a few seconds beforehand, when I was still nude. Regardless, I was mortified and at a loss for words.

“You must be Eren’s mother,” Levi spoke from his position by the closet.

“I am,” my mother drawled slowly, a note of suspicion in her tone as she stared at Levi. I could tell she was trying to figure out who he was without asking, but she didn’t have any hope. “Who are you?”

“Oh, I’m his fashion coordinator,” Levi explained with a wave in the direction of the closet. I had to bite my cheek to keep from laughing and instead focused on rushing through the rest of the changing process. I was almost fully clothed when Levi said the next words, “Survey Corp. provides each intern with their own personal stylist. We like our company to look good.”

“Is that so,” my mother’s voice made it a little too clear that she didn’t believe a word he was saying. However, she must have decided that now wasn’t the time to discuss who this stranger was, because she glanced to me and spoke, “Your father’s in the area. He’ll be back tonight and here until tomorrow. He wants to talk to you about something, so make sure you’re home in time for dinner.”

“Yea, sure, I’ll be here,” I murmured, my brain busy trying to process what he could want to talk about and why. Did he know that Mikasa had called me? Did he know where she was? Was she with him now?

“Are you listening, brat?” Levi called my attention to him with another snap of his fingers in front of my face. I blinked for a moment and then turned my gaze to him. “There you are. Damn it, brat. Spacing out like that isn’t a good thing, you know. You might want to get that checked out sometime.”
I glanced back to my doorway to find that my mother had already left and then looked back to Levi, “Is this outfit going to work?”

Levi looked me over, his eyes lingering in a way that made heat coil inside me and my cheeks flush. It was unfair how easy it was for him to unravel me, even when he wasn’t doing so on purpose. It was exceptionally unfair that he had just dressed me in something he clearly enjoyed just so he could parade me around in front of another man. Although I had agreed to do this for him, I hated the fact that I was nothing more than a pawn in his game of revenge.

“I think you’ll be just enough to get his interest,” he mused, his eyes still pausing on parts of my body, “At least to do what I need you to do. You’re a worthy pawn in that get up.”

I felt anguish twist uncomfortably in my gut when he used the very word that had just run through my mind. It was bad enough to think that I was being used, but to have his words confirm it for me made me feel physically ill. I hid my reaction by looking over my shoulder, trying to appear eager to leave and get the job done. Maybe that would be best, considering this whole mess. The sooner it was over the sooner I could move onto other things. That, and I was fairly certain I was still teetering on the edge of changing my mind entirely. If I didn’t act soon, it was likely I wouldn’t act at all, even if I did want to do this for him.

“Good,” I muttered and then cleared my throat. I had to be more convincing if this would ever work. I turned to Levi and fixed a grin on my face. “Then maybe this won’t be so hard after all. The faster he gives in, the better.”

Levi rolled his eyes and then started to walk past me and out the door. As he did so, I noticed a tightness to his jaw that wasn’t there before and my curiosity was piqued. Something in my words had unsettled him, that much was obvious, and I had a vain hope that it had to do with jealousy. Of course, I didn’t know whom he was jealous over and it was very likely that I was reaching for things that weren’t there. Still, I had to.

“I actually kind of want him, to be honest.”

Levi stumbled into the doorframe and managed to catch himself by putting a hand against the wall. He stood still for a long moment before turning his head to stare at me. He stared long enough that I felt myself growing uncomfortable, fully aware that I had made a mistake of some kind but not entirely sure what the mistake was. Finally, he let out a slow breath and removed his hand from the wall.

“Come on, we’re going to be late.”

We walked out of Trost Tower to find Armin leaning against his car, phone in hand and thumb moving across the screen. My phone buzzed in my pocket and let out a little chime that had Armin’s gaze lifting to meet mine. I didn’t bother to check my phone; by the amused expression coloring his features it was obvious that he was the one who had sent the message.

“I was worried you were going to be late,” he explained, pocketing his phone.

“Is there such a thing when he’s arriving with me? I think I count as a free pass, personally.” Levi mused, drawing Armin’s attention his way. Levi faltered in his steps, pausing for a moment to take in the sight of Armin now that he had his full attention. “Holy… damn.”

I was taking great efforts to ignore how perfectly that statement really fit my best friend. Honestly, save for the one quick glimpse I took, I was trying to keep my stare off of him. It was alarming how good he was able to make himself look when he didn’t have the adorably childish haircut and a loose
sweater. Apparently Armin had decided to take up fashion to go with his new reverse bob, and unlike me he knew exactly what he was doing. He was wearing a long sleeved grey shirt that hung a little low on his hips and led off into black pants, which he paired with a long black vest that was left open. Three black necklaces hung in varying lengths around his neck, completing the look with an elegance I would have never thought of.

“Well, he’s just gone and made your job a whole hell of a lot harder,” Levi said, clapping me on the shoulder before walking in the direction of his car, calling once over his shoulder. “Don’t be late, brats.”

“Job?” Armin glanced to me with curious eyes. “What job? How did I make it harder?”

I was actually dying to tell Armin everything that had happened, excluding the events at The Wall, but I knew that wouldn’t be wise. I was already close to talking myself out of the entire situation and I was sure Armin would give me more than a few reasons not to continue Levi’s game. And while that was probably exactly what I needed, I knew I was in too deep. At this point I was determined to try, at the very least. If nothing else, I would be able to say that I made the attempt for him.

“The internship. He was teasing me about my outfit choice,” I said the lie so easily that it caused a pain in my chest. I hated being dishonest with Armin. “Apparently I don’t dress professionally enough for the job.”

“Oh.” Armin looked at my outfit, the one he had helped me put together, and frowned.

“This was actually the only thing in my closet that he liked,” I hastened to explain, not wanting Armin to blame himself for the outfit choice. It was true that he had selected the only thing Levi approved of.

“He was in your room?”

Well, fuckity fuck fuck.

“Ah, yea,” I muttered as I wracked my brain for some logical answer to the question I was hoping he wouldn’t ask.

“Why?”

“I saw him last night,” I started with a half-truth and found it was easier to breathe through it. I could do this without lying. “He was complaining about my clothes.” Also true. “And he offered to come by in the morning to help me get dressed for today.”

Well, mostly true. He followed me down to my room from his, but it was close enough.

“Is there something going on between you two?”

“W-What?” I spluttered, waving my hands in front of myself as if trying to scrub the idea away, “No! No, not at all. What the hell would give you that idea?”

“Well, you had a boner around him most of yesterday. That’s a start.” Armin said with a sheepish smile. I could tell he was sorry for bringing up the reminder, but he was also clearly too determined to uncover the truth not to. “And the two of you kept going off together. Honestly, you spent more time with him than you did with the group.”

I groaned and put my head in my hands, “Armin, we’re going to be late.”
‘Oh!’

Nothing could get that boy to move faster than thinking he might be late to school or work. He was one for making good impressions, unlike me. We were buckled in the car a moment later and driving down the road in an uncomfortable silence. I could feel his gaze drifting in my direction, knowing that he was trying to find the best way to approach a subject I didn’t want to talk about. His curiosity was so palpable that it was almost funny.

‘Yes. Okay?’ I glanced over in his direction and found that he was now keeping his gaze diligently on the road ahead of us. ‘There’s something going on between us, but to be honest I don’t really know what it is.”

‘Do you like him?’

‘Too much,’ I admitted and leaned back in my seat. I should have kept it to myself, but talking to Armin was the kind of release I needed.

‘Does he like you?’

That was the question I had asked myself too many times and I still didn’t have an answer. I had no idea how Levi felt about me. At times I was certain he felt something, but I could never tell if he saw me as just a pawn and a pawn alone. I hated the idea of being nothing more than a toy, but I didn’t want to put my heart on the line by dreaming for anything more.

‘I really don’t know,’ I sighed.

Armin was silent for a moment longer and then seemed to decide it was best to let that particular conversation go for now. ‘Did Mikasa call you back?’

‘No,’ I responded, my hand instinctively moving to the phone in my pocket. ‘After I put my phone back together I checked to see if she had, but she never did.’

‘And you don’t have her number?’

‘She never gave it to me,’ I shrugged, ‘I didn’t know the unknown was her until last night, and you saw how that conversation went.”

‘Go easier on her next time,’ Armin spoke after a pause, his tone colored with concern. ‘We don’t know what happened or why she ran away. Give her a chance to explain next time.”

‘Yea,’ I muttered and tilted my head back against the headrest. It was too early in the morning to talk about her or what had happened. To be honest, I wasn’t willing to think about it. I wasn’t ready to face the next phone call or her face if she showed up with dad tonight. ‘How’s Jean? Did you hear from him?”

‘No,’ Armin chewed his lower lip as worry furrowed his brow. ‘Not at all. He didn’t answer his phone or anything.”

‘Probably still has his panties in a twist over President Handsome,” I joked to lighten the mood, glancing in Armin’s direction. It didn’t seem to work.

‘Maybe,” he said through a sigh. He pulled into the first free parking space we came across and he sat there in silence before speaking in a soft, worried voice. ‘What if he leaves me?’

‘Then he’s a madman who doesn’t deserve you,” I shrugged, ‘And I’ll have to kick his ass.”
Armin gave a small roll of his eyes and a short laugh, and even though that last piece hadn’t been a joke I was happy to be able to get something out of him. Not that it lasted long. I watched his hands tighten slightly on the steering wheel before his shoulders started to tremble. Without a second thought, I reached over and put my arms around him, ignoring his small yelp of surprise when I pulled him part way into my lap. I tightened my arms around him, squeezing him gently when I felt him relax. It was an innocent hug, of course, and we both knew that despite the precarious position. I was comfortable with him enough to hold him this way when he really needed it, just as he did now.

“He’s not going to leave you.” I wasn’t sure I believe the words myself, but he needed to hear them. “Jean’s really stupid, but he’s not that stupid. So stop worrying, okay? Everything’s fine.”

Armin gave a small nod, resting his head on my shoulder before letting out a sigh that tickled my neck. I rested my head against his, deciding that I would hold him for as long as he needed. We had arrived a few minutes early, and I didn’t really care if we walked in late. He had been bottling up his emotions and putting on a brave face for too long, and I knew that I was the only one he could be candid with. He was too scared to tell Jean how he was feeling, so I was willing to be the one he confided in. Even if it was a little hypocritical. Armin was jealous that Jean was spending time with Marco, and yet here he was sitting in my arms. If Jean saw this he would probably-

“What the fuck, Jaeger!”

Armin and I jumped, extracting from each other in a split second to stare wide-eyed at Jean, who had shouted loud enough to be heard through the glass. I pushed the button to roll the window down and fixed him with an innocent expression, “Oh, hey Jean. What’s up?”

“Don’t ‘what’s up’ me,” he snapped, gesturing between us. “What the hell was that?”

“Mikasa called,” Armin spoke up, and I glanced towards him. He was a convincing liar when the situation called for it. “We got in a fight and I just… I was upset. I’m sorry.”

Even I was duped into believing that Armin was more upset than he actually was, and Jean was even easier to convince. He immediately crossed the front of the car to Armin’s door, pulling it open and taking him into his arms, “I’m sorry. I was being stupid and jealous. I’m sorry.”

I watched Armin relax into Jean’s arms and then looked away, suddenly feeling more than a little uncomfortable to be so close to their display of affection. As I stared across the parking lot, I noticed Levi staring in our direction. Our eyes met and he raised one eyebrow, a questioning look in his eyes. Clearly he had seen what had taken place and was just as confused as I was. I pulled open my door and got out, shutting it behind me.

“We should hurry up if we don’t want to be late.”

The look Jean gave me from over Armin’s shoulder made it clear that he wasn’t going to forgive me quite as easily for touching his boyfriend. I rolled my eyes and glanced back over in Levi’s direction. I couldn’t care less what the horse face thought about our friendship. He was never going to be able to change a thing about it. I wouldn’t let him.

“I want to take you out tonight,” Jean spoke to Armin in a soft voice I wasn’t supposed to hear. “We need to talk. It’s important.”

I really didn’t like the sound of that, or the tremor in Armin’s voice when he responded. “Okay.”

“Are you just going to stand in the parking lot all day?” Levi chided as he walked towards us. “You little shits might still be in high school, but this is not your hallway. We don’t need you making out...
before class, we need you to get your ass inside the building and punch in.”

I don’t think it would have been physically possible for Armin’s face to get any redder. He closed his car door and shot ahead of us at a fast pace, clearly determined to follow the order he had just been given. It was an effort to catch up with him at all, but I managed to meet him just before he walked into the break room where the rest of the interns would be meeting for the start of the day. Of course, the only reason I was able to catch him at all was because he had been stopped in the first place.

“You cut your hair,” Erwin didn’t keep the surprise from his voice or the lust from his eyes. Honestly, he should have been arrested for looking at Armin that way. Every protective instinct I had was on high alert as I came to a stop at my best friend’s side.

“Oh, yea,” Armin unconsciously tugged at a strand of hair, unaware of how horribly cute the gesture was. “I wanted to look more professional.”

“Well, you look incredible.” Erwin’s tongue purred the last word in a way that set my teeth on edge. I heard Levi chuckle as he walked past us and into the break room, my attention drawn away briefly as I watched him move towards the coffee machine.

“Do I?” Armin either missed the seductive tone or was ignoring it entirely. “I tried to pick out something that matched. I’m kind of new to this whole thing.”

“Oh, are you?” Erwin reached forward and held the lapel of Armin’s vest between his fingers, pretending to admire the fabric. “You’re good for a novice. But if you want some help, I’ve had years of practice. I could show you a thing or two.”

I ran a hand down my face, unable to suppress the reaction. Knowing what I did about Erwin, that comment had nothing to do with clothing and everything to do with handcuffing my friend to his headboard. I tore my gaze away from Levi, who was now walking towards us, and looked at Erwin who was too focused on Armin to notice I was there at all. Now seemed as good a time as any to start this ridiculous game, and if it would get him to back off of Armin it was an added bonus.

“Could you show me?” I interjected and stepped towards Erwin. I tried to ignore every screaming urge I had that told me to stop, that I was making a fool of myself. This was so horribly wrong. Still, I reached up to grip his vest, and was at least grateful that I had enough control to keep my hands from trembling. Maybe I would seem bold. His expression certainly seemed surprised. “You seem like you know your stuff. I could really use a master.”

Inside, I had fallen to my knees and curled into a ball of hopeless embarrassment. Had I really just said that?

“Oh my god, Levi! Are you okay?”

Armin’s shout drew my attention to the mess of coffee that had just spilled all over the tiled floor. Levi’s fingers were pressed into the Styrofoam cup, which had clearly collapsed under the pressure of his grip. He was staring at Erwin with a dangerous glare that he fixed on me a moment later, his jaw tight in an effort to restrain himself from saying a word. Finally, he looked to Armin and uncurled his fingers from the cup.

“I’m fine,” he waved his hand dismissively, but I noticed the reddened skin that was clearly burned. “These stupid cups. What the fuck were you thinking, Erwin? We should have something that doesn’t fall apart every time you take a sip.”

“I’ll look into having the cups replaced,” Erwin replied. I noted a hint of suspicion coloring his tone,
and tried to keep my expression impassive when he looked once at Levi and then to me. “Eren, could you join me in my office for a few minutes?”

“He should really be in the meeting,” Levi cut in.

“It won’t take long,” Erwin insisted, “I’m sure he’ll be able to make up whatever he misses. He seems like a very smart boy.”

Erwin gestured towards the elevators and then started walking without waiting for me to follow the order. As if he were already sure that I was going to. I glanced back at Levi who was staring at me with a guarded expression, and felt a sudden anger well up inside of me. How could he continue to jerk me around like this? How could he beg me to do this for him and then act like I had betrayed him when I had done exactly what he wanted? This was what he had asked for. This was what he wanted, and suddenly I wanted to make him pay for that.

“Eren.”

I ignored the warning tone of his voice and walked after Erwin without another word. I tried to deny the fact that Levi was walking towards us as the elevator doors slid shut. And then it was just the two of us.

“I know what you’re doing.”

“Excuse me?” I looked up at Erwin, who was currently staring at the floor number as it ticked by.

“I said I know what you’re doing,” he repeated, “And I know why he’s asking you to do it.”

“Because you-”

“Not here, Eren.” Erwin’s voice was enough to make me shut up immediately despite the fact that it was calm and controlled. The elevator doors opened and he led me in the direction of his office. I remained silent as I followed, not sure what I could possibly say at this point. I had done something wrong. Not even the first hour into this game and I had already failed.

“Get against my desk.”

I turned to stare at him with an uncomprehending expression, but he was too busy closing the door of his office to notice.

“W-What?” I stammered, certain that I couldn’t have heard him correctly.

“You heard me, Eren. Get against my desk and bend over.”

“I don’t… I…”

Suddenly the situation was very real. Everything had been a game up until this point, one that I had been determined to play, but now all I wanted to do was run. What would he do once I was on the desk? I was certain I knew what the answer was, and I knew now that I couldn’t do this for Levi. What had I been thinking? I had been so willing to satisfy him that I had signed up for something I couldn’t handle at all. And now I wasn’t even sure there was a way out.

“Eren,” his voice was so calm and authoritative that it drew my eyes immediately to his. “I’m not going to hurt you. I’m not going to do a single thing that you won’t ask for. I promise.”

My mind was drawn back to The Wall, where Levi had repeated the same promise to me in his own
words. And although every sane thought I had urged me to leave this room, my instincts drove me towards the desk to comply with an order I wasn’t ready to follow. I bent over and stared at the wood, prepared to wrestle my way out the instant I felt uncomfortable. What was I doing here? How had it come to this?

I felt Erwin’s heavy weight on my back as he bent over me and wrapped his arms around my chest. All of the air left my lungs as my nails slid across the smooth wood, my body tensing in preparation to throw him off. But his voice at my ear stopped me, “I don’t want you.”

“Then why are you-”

“Not so loud,” he cut me off, his voice still a low rumble at my ear. “If you think he’s not glued to the security camera right now, you’re wrong. He can’t hear us this way, and I know you’re not about to get into my limo unless I say this.”

“Say what?”

“The story you heard is filled with half-truths. I know what Levi thinks, Eren. I know what he wants to do and I know that you’re trying to help him.” He paused, as if considering his next words carefully. “I also know that he wants you. And it’s a little too obvious that you want him just as much.”

“He doesn’t want me.”

“Take it from a man who’s known him inside and out for most of his life,” Erwin chuckled, and the sound was deeper beside my ear. “I’ve never seen him act this way towards anyone, but he’s going to be a stupid shit about it, I can tell. But that works out for the both of us.”

“What are you talking about? How the hell does that work out?”

“Because we can help each other, Eren. Believe it or not, I hate seeing him hurt this way. I can only imagine what he’s told you about me, and I’m sure you’ve already made up your mind about the whole situation, but I’m asking you to give me a chance.”

“A chance to what?”

“To explain my side of the story,” he said simply, “Let me tell you the things he doesn’t know, and then you can decide what you want to do from there. We could help each other. Because honestly, Eren, I’m not interested in you and you’re not interested in me. This isn’t going to go anywhere, so what use is he going to have for you? You want to stay in his life, don’t you? Or do you want that to end now?”

I shut my eyes and listened to the silence of the office, which was broken only by him breathing next to my ear. Was it even a question he had just asked? The answer was too obvious. I couldn’t bear to have this end now. I couldn’t watch Levi decide that he had no use for me and walk out of my life as if our time together had never happened. And Erwin was right. Once Levi realized I wouldn’t be able to do anything for him, what use would he have for me?

“What do I have to do?”

“You’re excused from today’s meeting. Honestly, I could teach you everything you’d need to know about the mailroom in a few minutes. You’re going to go downstairs and get into my limo. It will be waiting outside for you.”

“Why?”
“Because we need to talk in a place where I know he doesn’t have cameras watching our every move,” he murmured, and then suddenly he slid his hands down my sides and to my hips. My entire body tensed when I felt him push his own hips forward, but I was grateful to find that he seemed to lack any form of arousal. “That was for him, not you. Obviously I’m not interested, but he is and that is going to drive him insane.”

“I don’t think you know him very well,” I muttered. I was almost positive Levi was jealous over Erwin, not me. And who could blame him?

“Oh, I know him very, very well,” Erwin chuckled. “When he stops you downstairs, and trust me he will, you’re going to have to ignore him. I don’t care what he says to you, you’re going to get into my limo. Understood?”

Honestly, my previous bout of anger with Levi was still in full force. It wouldn’t be difficult to ignore him if we actually crossed paths, but I was certain that Erwin was reading too far into Levi’s emotions. He wouldn’t be there waiting for me, no matter how much I wanted him to be.

“Understood.”

He moved away from me immediately and gestured towards the door. “I’ll be following in my car. You’ll arrive before me, but I’ll notify the concierge to send you up.”

I left the room and pushed into the elevator before I could lose my nerve. I felt like everything in my body was set on vibrate; I was so overcome with confusion, anger, and anticipation that I couldn’t think. I had no idea what had happened, but I was suddenly so desperate to hear Erwin’s side of the story. I wanted it to be able to change everything. I wanted this game to end without the chance of losing Levi completely, and I knew that Erwin might be the only way that could happen. If I could even bring myself to trust him.

“Eren.”

My head snapped up as the elevator doors opened to reveal Levi’s face and I felt my heart race and my resolve drain. “Levi.”

“What did he say? What happened?”

Of course. Of course that was what he wanted. The game was all that mattered, after all. Fine then. “Plenty. I’m going to his apartment right now.”

I brushed past Levi and started walking towards the front doors. I was proud of myself for maintaining a consistent pace even when he walked after me and called my name.

“Goddamn it, Eren! Stop!”

“I’m going to be late,” I snapped back and then pushed my way through the doors to the outside. He grabbed me by the shoulder and spun me to face him, but I didn’t meet his eyes. I wouldn’t be able to do this if I did.

“I don’t want this,” he spoke in a rush, “I don’t want you to go.”

I shrugged his hands from my shoulders and stepped back. “Sure you do. I’m a worthy pawn, right?”

“Eren, that’s not-”

“Sure it was. It was exactly what you meant,” I didn’t keep the anger from my voice, letting it
tremble around my words, “You’re using me in your game of revenge.”

“But I don’t—”

“And I agreed to play along,” I cut him off, “And that’s my fault. I get that.”

“I don’t want you to play along, damn it!” Levi finally shouted, startling me. I couldn’t remember ever hearing him raise his voice that way before. When he spoke again, it was in his usual soft tone, “Eren, look at me.”

I had resisted the urge before, and I wasn’t about to give in and look at him now just because he had ordered it. “No.”

“You fucking brat, just get your ass back inside the building,” he snapped, “We can talk about another way to approach this. It doesn’t have to happen right now.”

But he didn’t say it wouldn’t have to happen at all. So what was the problem? Was it all moving too quickly for him? Or perhaps it was because it would be happening out of view, where he wouldn’t have the footage to use against Erwin. Honestly, that made the most sense. No wonder he wanted me to get back inside. Erwin had outsmarted him, and he knew it.

“No,” I shook my head and grabbed the door handle of the limo. I had to get out of here before I lost my nerve. “It’s going to happen right now. I said I would do this, and I’m going to.”

I was determined at this point. Levi had twisted me around at every turn and I was sick of it now. If I walked back into that building I knew the mess would continue to repeat itself until I lost my sanity. He couldn’t decide what he wanted, and I couldn’t decide for him. I had no idea if he wanted me at all, but each display of jealousy put hope in my heart that was always shattered in one way or another. He was breaking me slowly and I was going to end that now. I knew he would let me go once he found out I was no use to him. Would he even want me once he knew that Erwin figured out the game? Of course not. Which is why I needed whatever information Erwin could give me. Losing Levi wasn’t an option, but neither was continuing this twisted game.

I pulled open the limo door but paused on the desperate words that left his lips. I had never heard that tone in his voice before. There was fear, and I couldn’t understand it.

“Eren, please.”

“No!” I snapped, finally meeting his eyes. I regretted it instantly. I had never seen so much emotion in one person’s eyes. It was like he was experiencing every pain all at once. He looked hurt beyond reason and I felt myself cracking inside at the sight. I almost gave in, but my anger was too strong. He had asked for this. I couldn’t just give in now. “You wanted this.”

“Don’t leave me, Eren,” he snapped the words like they were an order, but they broke on the strain in his voice, “Not you, too.”

I couldn’t let myself think of the meaning behind those words. I couldn’t let him get to me this way. He was trying to manipulate me into staying by using emotions that weren’t truly there. They couldn’t possibly be there, not for me. He didn’t want me. I stared at him, my legs ready to give up in their effort to keep me stable. If he was going to twist words at me, I would do the same to him. Even if they would never be able hurt him, I would use them anyway.

“Goodbye, Corporal.”

I got in the car and shut the door before he could say another word to make me stay. I could feel my
heart shattering in my chest, breaking into pieces that might not be repaired after this moment. Somewhere in the back of my mind, my brain was screaming at me to get out of the car. I was leaving him, too. Too. That had meant something. It had to mean something, but I couldn’t believe that. I couldn’t break myself once more just to go through it all again tomorrow. This was changing today. I had come this far and I wouldn’t turn back now.

My hands were trembling uncontrollably as I fought the urge to look and see if he was still standing there. I was breaking apart. I wanted him to pull me out of the car as much as I wanted to get out, but the most I could do was manage was one broken word to the man in the front seat.

“Drive.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Oh, this is a very long chapter.

So, for those of you who don’t follow me on Tumblr, I updated with a little Levi POV that took place directly after Chapter 15. I’m tacking it on to the start of this chapter, so you won’t miss anything. For those of you who do follow me on Tumblr, you can just skip ahead to the part starting with Eren. ^_^

There’s a lot of explanation in this chapter, and you finally get to hear Erwin’s side of the story. I’m looking forward to hearing what everyone thinks of him after this chapter. >_>

Oh, and wow! There were so many comments on the last chapter! ^__^ You all made me so happy! I love hearing what you all think and I’m glad you all enjoyed the last chapter, even if it was very angsty.

And… okay. I squealed in the middle of a tinychat session because… SOMEONE DREW INTERN ARMIN! It can be found here: http://lusty-levi.tumblr.com/tagged/intern%20art and was done by the talented shingekinoai. It was my first piece of colored Intern art. ^__^ Ooooh, I fangirled so hard. I’m a sucker for art. XD

As always, if you’d like to follow me you can do so on lusty-levi or lootibles. I’m also tracking the tag “fic: the intern”. All the comments I found there for the last chapter had me smiling – you are all so wonderful!

ENJOY!

Levi

“Goodbye, Corporal.”

I heard the car door slam shut and the soft scrape of tires as the limo began to pull away, but I saw none of it. My vision was blurred for reasons I would never admit to, and I turned my gaze to the sky above as I willed away the offending emotion. I didn’t care. It didn’t matter that he had ignored me entirely and gotten into the car, despite the fact that I had begged him not to. He was going to Erwin’s apartment to be fucked senseless and it really didn’t matter at all. I asked for this. I had spent days trying to get him to agree and he finally did. He was doing everything I asked for, so it didn’t matter if he said goodbye to me now. There was nothing between us to begin with. It didn’t matter. It didn’t.

But fucking hell, it did. God damn it, when did I start to care?

Somewhere in the brief time that I had known him, this shitty little brat had managed to worm his way past my defenses and into a place in my chest that I was sure had died long ago. I was so certain that I had stopped caring, that my walls had become so thick that no one could ever break through,
but every time I saw his face my heart moved as if it was trying to get out of my chest just to get to
him. I hated him for making me feel this way, for making me feel at all, and I hated him more for his
ability to break me. There was a pain in my chest that I wasn’t used to, and he was the one who had
put it there. When had I let him in?

I wiped a hand over my eyes and ignored the dampness I felt there. I would not get emotional over
some teenage brat, at least no more than I already had. He had set out to hurt me when he said those
words, and maybe it was in vengeance for all the things I had done thus far but I was going to make
him pay for it regardless. I was certain I had made him feel plenty and were I in a better state of mind
I might have even found him justified in his actions, but there was no chance of that right now.

I never let anyone hurt me and the fact that he had was something I couldn’t easily forgive. If he
wanted to play this game, we were going to play it my way and he wasn’t going to like it. I was
giving him the chance to back out of it when I followed him out those doors. I had been ordering him
to give up. I wanted him to drop the stupid game because I realized I wasn’t willing to sacrifice him.
This entire mess could only end in him being hurt and a few days ago that didn’t matter, but it
mattered now. Or at least it had, until he said goodbye.

Goodbye to the Corporal, no less. I could have swung at him for that, if I hadn’t so shocked when it
happened. It was as if he had thought of the perfect way to hurt me; one I wasn’t even aware of. He
had taken the only identity I had ever been comfortable in, the first one I had met him in, and he told
me goodbye. I was sure he must have physically stabbed me then because it hurt to breathe even
now. It had been so long since I had let anyone in and I could feel the walls beginning to board
themselves up once more.

I turned to walk back into building and jerked to a stop when I saw Erwin walking out the front
doors. I’m not even sure I managed to compose my features before our eyes met, but I did my best to
put on a stony mask. I couldn’t let him see how any of this was affecting me. None of it should have
mattered to me in the first place, and maybe if he believed that then I would start to as well.

“Levi, what are you doing out here?” Erwin’s face was a mask of curiosity and nothing more. He
knew exactly why I was out here.

“I saw Eren leaving and thought the brat was trying to skip out on work,” I said the lie so easily, but
I knew neither of us believed it. “I came out here to drag his sorry ass back inside.”

“I just finished telling Mike that Eren will spending part of the day with me,” Erwin smiled and I
fought the urge to claw the grin off of his face. I wasn’t in the mood to see anyone smiling. “He’ll be
back in time for lunch, so he won’t be missing a full day.”

“He’s not going to be able to do a damn thing in this internship if you keep wasting his time like
this,” I chided him as if I were actually concerned about Eren’s work habit and the job he did here.
The mail would get sorted whether or not Eren was in the room, and it wouldn’t take him long to
figure it out once he was finally working.

“I’m not the one who kept him in my office for the majority of yesterday,” Erwin pointed out with
the same smile. He was keeping a calm expression despite the fact that he knew he was setting me on
edge. He must be enjoying this.

“He said something in orientation to piss me off,” I explained it away with a shrug, “I couldn’t just
let it go, but lecturing him took a little longer than I expected. It’s hard to get through to the brat. You
really have to nail things in.”

Erwin gave me a knowing smile and angled his head to the side. “Oh, is that all? And here I thought
you’d taken a personal interest in the boy.”

“Hardly,” I scoffed.

“Well, that’s good.” Erwin started to walk past me and then paused, placing one hand against my neck as he bent to whisper in a seductive purr at my ear. “Because now it seems I’m interested after all.”

I felt my entire body tense and put all of my energy into suppressing any further reaction. He was trying to get a rise out of me and I wasn’t about to give him the satisfaction. “Is that so?”

“Oh, it is,” he continued in a husky voice, “You were right to think I’d want him. He’s exactly my type. Just enough innocence to break in, but not so much that he won’t be open to… trying new things.”

I didn’t want to think about the new things that Erwin would be introducing him to. I could only imagine, and I was certain that most of the images in my head were more than accurate due to personal experience. I closed my eyes and let out a slow breath, focusing on maintaining my calm. Days ago I was a master at suppressing my emotions and now they were running through me like wildfire, and it was all because of one green-eyed brat.

“Well, be sure to take your time,” I managed to make the words sound casual and kept the growl from my voice. Good for me. “He’s a slow learner, so you’re going to have to be patient with him.”

“I was patient with you,” he murmured next to my ear, and I felt a sudden familiar heat burning inside of me.

“Keep telling yourself that,” I rolled my eyes and took a step back from him. If I stood there much longer I knew he would start to unravel me and I couldn’t allow that to happen. “If that was patience for you, then I pity the little shit. I recall being unable to walk for a good week.”

“It was a very good week,” he said with a throaty laugh. The deep sound of his voice had always been unfair and was still enough to make my knees weak even when I was this angry with him.

“Yea, well, just make sure he’s able to walk through the doors by lunch,” I replied with a wave of my hand, trying to make my voice sound as indifferent as possible.

“I’ll start him out slow,” Erwin replied and then held out his hand, working two fingers in a beckoning motion. “Speaking of which, do you have a condom on you? I’m not sure I have any left in my drawer at home and I’d hate to refuse him when he seemed so desperate in my office.”

I stared at Erwin as if he had just asked if it would be okay to rip all of the skin off my body. I was more than certain that he was trying to hurt me now, and by the look on his face I had just given him the reaction he was looking for. He wanted to see that this was affecting me in some way and I had just made it all too clear that it was. I inwardly cursed myself for reacting at all, for letting my guard down around a man who was more strategic and cunning than anyone I had ever known.

“Sorry,” I snapped the words and patted the pockets of my pants, “Fresh out.”

“That’s a shame,” Erwin said through a smile that had nothing to do with our conversation and everything to do with the fact that he had managed to unnerve me. “I’ll just stop at the store on my way. That’s probably better, to be honest. We might need more than one.”

Oh, you fucking asshole…
“Just make sure he can walk after,” I said through clenched teeth, and this time I was sure the growl had made its way into my voice.

“Oh, he’ll be able to walk. Barely, but he’ll walk.” Erwin laughed and started walking towards his car. He honestly could not get in it fast enough. “He might be a little hoarse, though. Is he a screamer?”

I stared at Erwin in silence, not sure if he actually expected me to answer that one and unwilling to do so either way. Eren had made his fair share of noise at The Wall when he was squirming and rutting against my hand, and the thought of him making the same sounds beneath Erwin was enough to crack me. I clenched my hands at my sides and fought back the tremor of rage that was urging me to pull Erwin out of the car and force him back into the office.

“He seems like a screamer,” Erwin continued, obviously content in answering the question himself. “I guess I’ll just have to find out for myself.”

Erwin shut the car door and I could see the smile still on his face as he drove off down the road. I stared at the retreating image and tried to keep my mind from racing over all the horrible possibilities that would be happening once Erwin got to the apartment. Yes, I had asked Eren to do this for me and things were going exactly as planned, but this was not what I wanted. I couldn’t stand the idea of Eren’s body writhing beneath any but my own, and the thought that Erwin might be his first rattled me in a way I couldn’t control. I didn’t want Erwin to have him. He was mine.

I dug my phone out of my pocket and scrolled through a screen of numbers until I found the one I needed. I had entered it there yesterday, unsure if I would ever use it but thankful that it was there now. Even if this didn’t make a difference, I had to say the words. I had to try one last time before something happened. If all of this went to shit, it wouldn’t be because I didn’t try to turn it around.

I heard Eren’s voice on the other end of the line and closed my eyes.

------------------------------------

Eren

Once the limo had pulled away from the curb and traveled down the road, I allowed my gaze to turn out the window. I had no chance of seeing him now, and something about that thought made my heart ache worse than if he were still standing there with that pained expression. His pleading words had been echoing in my head since the moment I shut the door, and they refused to stop now. But even worse than that was the sound of my voice repeating the words that I had said to him.

“Goodbye, Corporal.”

I groaned and pushed my head into my hands, my fingers twisting up into my hair to grab two fistfuls. Why had I said that to him? Why had I twisted the knife and told him goodbye in that way? It would have been more than enough to simply get in the car and leave, but as sick as it sounded I had wanted to see if I could actually affect him at all. After I had said the words, it was too clear that I was able to do more than that. I hurt him. The expression on his face had been one of shock and pain, pure abandonment, as if I had told him I was leaving forever. Thinking about it now made me physically ill and I was suddenly grateful that I had yet to eat anything today.

How could he ever forgive me after that? How would I ever be able to get close to him now? I
suddenly understood why Erwin had told me to ignore Levi and get into the limo, and I knew now that I should have listened. But no, I let him stop me and then I pushed too far. I bid farewell to his identity, the Corporal, something that was special between us and left him standing on the curb after he had begged me not to go. How could I face him after that? It didn’t even matter if Erwin had a way to help me at this point. It was clear that I had gone and shattered any chance I had left with Levi. I had lost him now, hadn’t I?

My shoulders started to tremble and I took a shuddering breath, slowly lowering my hands down to my knees and clenching them there. No. No, I was not going to let this get the best of me. Levi had tried to push me away once before and I had clawed my way back in. I would do it again, and every time after that if necessary. I wasn’t going to back down and wallow in my self-inflicted misery. Yes, I was a fucking dumbass for choosing those words, but I would be even more of a fool to let them stop me from getting what I wanted. I wouldn’t lose him over this mistake or any other that I was sure to make. I would fight for him, forever if I had to.

A faint buzzing drew my attention to my pants, and I pulled out my phone to stare at the screen. The number was unknown, and after the lecture I had received the night before from Mikasa I knew better than to ignore it. I hit the button and held the phone to my ear, “Listen, now’s not the best time…”

“I don’t give a shit if it is or not, brat. This won’t take long anyway.” Levi’s voice snapped on the other end and I felt the air leave my lungs. He didn’t give me time to respond, but even if he had I wouldn’t have been able to form words. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

The line went dead and I pulled the phone from my ear to watch the screen flash the end button as the call disconnected. My grip tightened on the phone until my hand started to tremble, an overwhelming wave of emotion surging through me. I had expected to feel rage or agony the next time I heard his voice, but now all I felt was hope. He had dug the number out of my file just to make this call, just to tell me not to do it once more. I felt a sudden hope that perhaps he thought of me as more than a game piece. Maybe I wasn’t the only one fighting for us.

The limo rolled to a stop outside of Stohess and I stared up at the impressive building. It dwarfed the surrounding structures in both height and sheer size, nothing but beautifully cut crystal glass rising high into the sky. Pure elegance. I should have figured that this would be where Erwin lived, considering it was the most prestigious residence available in the entire city. Actually, I was surprised that Levi didn’t live there as well, but considering the short distance between Trost and The Wall there was probably a reason for that.

The driver held the door open for me and I got out of the car a little too quickly, stumbling as I offered an awkward ‘thank you.’ I wasn’t sure how to react to that kind of treatment, but I was sure I didn’t like it. I was capable of holding the door open for myself; I didn’t need anyone else to do it for me. I pushed my hand into my pocket in search of some form of tip, but he was already back in the driver’s seat when I managed to find the crumpled dollar.

“You must be Mr. Jaeger.”

I jumped in surprise and turned to face a well-dressed man with black hair. I could only assume this was the concierge that Erwin had mentioned, “Uh… yea, I am.”

“President Smith told me you would be arriving before him,” he said and then gestured towards the entrance of the building, “Follow me, please. I’ve already prepared the elevator to his floor.”

I followed after the man, taking one last glimpse at the mountainous structure spanning up into the sky before ducking inside. I was willing to bet that I would be on the highest floor in a few minutes;
probably less considering Stohess’s elevator system was no doubt one that could put Trost’s to shame. Of course, nearly every elevator in existence was able to do that.

“The elevator travels quickly,” the concierge cautioned and then glanced to me. Something about his smile was almost a little condescending and I felt for a moment that I was being teased. “You don’t get sick easily, do you?”

“Not really.” I hadn’t eaten enough for it to matter if I did.

“Very good,” he murmured and then waited until I had stepped into the elevator to continue. “My name is Nile Dawk. If you need anything else, please call the front desk and I’ll be happy to assist you. President Smith should be up shortly.”

He tapped a button and stepped back, allowing the doors to close and leaving me alone in the elevator. I reached out to hold the golden railing that lined the enclosed space and realized a moment later that it was probably the best decision of my life. The elevator shot up at an alarming speed to a height that I had never reached outside of an airplane. When the doors chimed and spread open, I stumbled out into the foyer and dropped to my knees. I was pretty sure all the blood in my body had rushed to my feet.

I stayed there for a moment, allowing the blood to return to the other parts of my body as I stared around the massive apartment. It was an immaculate space that was almost as clean as Levi’s, with the exception of a desk that had papers scattered all over its surface. The entire expanse was filled with an array of warm colors ranging from soft yellow and deep gold to umber brown and cherry red. It was the complete opposite of Levi’s cold apartment filled with blues and grays.

There was vibrant warmth here that I would have never expected to find in a place owned by Erwin. Of course, that was a biased statement. I had grown to hate the man through stories alone. Now standing in his apartment, I realized it was hard to know what was fact and what had been taken out of context. Of course, it was possible that this welcoming decorative scheme was the crafty work of his wife. However, after walking once around the spacious living room I realized that there wasn’t a single photo of her. There were plenty of Erwin’s children and other family members. There was even one of Levi; the sight of which made jealousy flare up in me and I had to fight the urge to steal it.

I lifted it from the mantel and stared at the image. Levi was leaning against a brown armrest, which must have belonged to the chocolate colored couch that I noticed across this very room. His brow was lowered in a look of annoyance and he was reaching for the camera. His mouth was open, which I imagined must have been because he was bitching at Erwin not to take the photo. He was shirtless and his hair was a mess, alluding to the act that must have taken place prior to the photo. I tried not to think about it.

“He hates having his picture taken.”

I quickly returned the photo to its rightful place and turned to find Erwin standing in the foyer, removing his suit jacket. He hung it up and then began to loosen the black tie from his neck as he watched me with curious eyes. I suddenly felt like I was on display and fought the urge to squirm, instead opting to turn the attention back on him.

“Why would you have that photo in your home?” I tried to keep the accusation from my voice, but I was sure I failed. “What does your wife think?”

“I don’t know. But if you ever visit Oregon, please let me know.”
“Why would I…” I trailed off and settled on the only word left in my head, “Huh?”

“My wife and I are separated,” he said the words as if they were a simple truth and nothing more. As he crossed the room towards me, he nodded in the direction of Levi’s picture, “Over that boy, no less. Although he has no idea about any of it.”

“You’re separated?” I breathed the words. I felt like the floor was going to give out from under me. Levi’s entire game relied on Erwin being in a relationship. With that one peg removed the entire structure would fall and there would be no point to any of it. “Since when?”

“A few months now. As far as the press knows, she’s just visiting her family and will be back soon enough. It’s a temporary fix until I can figure out how to handle the coverage along with the divorce.”

“Divorce?”

“That usually follows a separation,” Erwin smiled, and although it was a teasing joke I didn’t feel as if he were trying to be condescending. “Especially when your wife realizes that you both happen to be into men.”

“Young men,” I pointed out.

“I have selective tastes.” Erwin said through a laugh and then sunk into a seat on the couch, leaning against the armrest in the very same position Levi had in the photo.

“Selective tastes,” I repeated the words, “Like Armin?”

Erwin regarded me for a long silent moment before answering with nothing more than a smile and a small tilt of his head. “Sit.”

Although I felt like defying him by staying put, I knew that I was here for his help and pissing him off would get me nowhere. I took a seat on the couch and tried my best not to think of how many times Erwin must have had Levi spread out and naked against it. Unfortunately, that was the first place my mind went and it decided to linger there for longer than I would have liked.

“So you left her for him?” I had to ask the one question that had been twisting through my mind since he suggested it.

“Not exactly,” he said with a glance in the direction of the mantel. “He was the catalyst for it, but things were already drawing to a close between us. It would have happened one way or another.”

“But he was the reason?”

“In his own way, even if he doesn’t know it,” Erwin paused and then smiled, “No, I’m sure he doesn’t know it, actually. I was trying to keep my family together for the longest time. I wanted to stay with her to keep a stable family for my kids, but eventually I realized that separate homes would be far better than living in a destructive environment. She and I were fighting constantly and eventually I couldn’t take it anymore.”

“Were you fighting over Levi? Did she know about him?”

“No, she didn’t know about him,” he sighed and sat forward, knitting his fingers together and holding his hands in his lap. “I was cold and distant with her. She hated me for it and I resented being stuck with her. It was a toxic relationship. One day Levi mentioned that I could lose her if she ever found out about us and I realized that would be the best thing for me.”
Levi wanted to use me to unravel Erwin’s marriage in order to hurt him, and yet he had no idea that he was the reason it had already ended. In the end, Levi had been the one to pull the trigger and the separation hadn’t hurt Erwin at all; it had liberated him. There was no point to Levi’s game now. It was over. There was no revenge to be had.

“You seem upset that I’m separated,” his voice had a note of suspicion that had my stomach twisting into nervous knots. “Is it because Levi will be upset?”

I felt like I was playing a game where I didn’t know the rules and my opponents were always twenty steps ahead of me. There was no point in trying to make up a lie. I could tell with one look at Erwin’s expression that he knew exactly what was going through my head.

“I guess you already know the answer to that.”

“I do,” he said with a sage nod and then sighed, pausing to pinch the bridge of his nose. “I told you in the elevator, I know what you’re doing. I know what he wants to do. And it doesn’t matter.”

“Because your marriage is already over.”

“No,” he corrected me so quickly I barely had time to finish the sentence. “No, Levi never would’ve done it. I could’ve given him all the evidence in the world and he still wouldn’t have gone to my wife with the proof.”

“I think you’re underestimating how much he hates you.” It felt good to say the words, even if I wasn’t sure they were true.

There was a moment of pain on his face that passed just as quickly. “No, that’s not why he wouldn’t have done it. Although I’m sure he must hate me at this point, Levi hates hurting people even more. Especially those he considers to be innocent. Revenge might sound like a good idea in its planning stages, but when you actually have to hurt people in order to get it, it’s a different ballgame. Levi wouldn’t have been able to take that final step. He wouldn’t have hurt them just to get at me.”

I was starting to realize that I didn’t really know Levi at all. I had been certain that he was ready to tear apart the rest of the world to get at Erwin, but Erwin had sounded so confident that I couldn’t hope to question it. Somehow I knew that he was right. Levi would have backed down at the last moment. He wouldn’t have sacrificed a happy wife and two loving children just to hurt this man. There were other ways to get his revenge.

“Why did you do it?” I blurted out the words before I could stop them from escaping. From the look in his eyes I was sure he knew exactly what I meant.

“I never expected him to kill himself,” Erwin spoke the words softly and he turned his attention to the empty fireplace. “Levi’s father was a wonderful businessman, but he didn’t have a loving bone in his body. After Elise died, he lost what little caring he had to begin with, and he seemed determined to make Levi feel as little as he did. He destroyed everything that was left of her. He even stole his mother’s scarf and burned it.”

The photo I had seen back at Levi’s apartment flashed through my mind, the one where she had worn the same beautiful scarf. “But Levi has a photo of her. I’ve seen it.”

“He’s already had you in his apartment?” Erwin raised both eyebrows and then an amused smile crossed his lips. “I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. And yes, he has that photo because I gave it to him. I was always close with his family and I had my own photo album with a few of their pictures. I gave it to him when his father died.”
I tried not to feel a twinge of gratitude, but it was difficult. It was obvious by the way Levi had carried the photo into the kitchen that it was an important item. Probably one of the only pieces that he had left of his mother, and that was thanks to Erwin. Thinking back to last night, I hadn’t seen a single photo of Levi’s father, but it could be because he had none. I had a difficult time believing that Levi would want any kind of revenge over someone who really didn’t matter. Someone who never cared about him in the first place.

“Levi wouldn’t want revenge over someone who didn’t care about him.”

“Levi is holding on to the only fragment of his past that he has left,” Erwin countered and met my stare, “He’s lost everyone he ever cared about. His father was the only link he had back to his mother and he wasn’t willing to lose that, too. Even if the man was physically and emotionally abusive, Levi strived to impress him. He let his father shape him into the perfect prodigy like he was some living statue.”

I looked away when Erwin mentioned physical abuse, unwilling to give my mind the chance to conjure up images of anyone who would lay a harmful hand on Levi. “What were you trying to do when you told him everything? If he was already abusive, he could have hurt Levi more. What were you trying to accomplish?”

“I was trying to free him.”

I returned my gaze to Erwin and waited for him to continue.

“Levi lost the person he was when his mother died. He was a shell that did whatever his father said. When he started his internship he was nothing more than an obedient puppet, and it wasn’t until I got my hands on him that I started to see the boy that was buried underneath. It took years to get him to where he is now, which is actually alive compared to the person he was.”

Erwin paused to stare at the photo sitting on the mantel. “I wanted to help him escape, but I knew he would never go against his father on his own. He had done too much to him at that point. He was a whipped dog that couldn’t fight back, so I did it for him. I wanted to shock his father into seeing who Levi really was; that he was his own person apart from what he had tried to make him. I wanted him to accept his son so that Levi would be able to accept himself.”

“You were his business partner,” I snapped, feeling a sudden wave of anger. Although it was probably due to the close relationship he shared with Levi, Erwin was able to set me off faster than anyone. It didn’t help that his inconsiderate move could have potentially ruined Levi’s life. “How could you not realize he would act that way?”

“I knew he wouldn’t be happy,” Erwin’s tone was harder now and he met my stare straight on. “But I never expected him to do that. I expected a struggle, and I was prepared to help Levi through that. I didn’t go into any of it expecting it to end the way it did. I wanted to free Levi. I didn’t want to ruin his life.”

“So you didn’t do it to betray him?”

Erwin gave a short, sad laugh, “Is that what he thinks, then? No. I would never do a damn thing to hurt Levi. In this whole fucked up world, he has become the most important thing to me.”

My hands clenched into fists instinctively and I turned my attention anywhere but at the man sitting on the other side of the couch. I knew, of course, that there was a relationship between them. They had a history, but I didn’t want to face the fact that they might have a future as well. Levi was the one that I wanted for myself, and knowing that he could so easily be taken from me was a sickening
idea.

“Eren.”

I waited in silence for him to continue, but when the quiet dragged on I realized that he was waiting for something. I turned my attention back to him, reluctantly meeting his eyes as if scared of what I would find there. Scared of what I would hear next.

“I won’t deny the fact that I love him. I’m sure I will always love him, and I’ll continue to be with him in any way that he’ll have me,” Erwin paused and then sighed, “But as much as I hate to admit it, I can’t ignore it. He’s been different since he’s met you and not in a bad way. You’ve aroused more passion and life in him in a matter of days than I was able to in years. He’s happy with you, Eren, and you’re an idiot for not seeing what’s right in front of your eyes.”

“It’s hard to see something that isn’t there.”

“See?” Erwin pointed at me, an annoyed glint in his eyes. “Right there. Exactly what I’m talking about. Do you think Levi spilled coffee all over himself this morning just for fun? He crushed his cup because he was jealous.”

“He was jealous over you.”

“I couldn’t get Levi to be jealous over me if I tried,” Erwin shot back. “Trust me, if that were the case then you and I wouldn’t be having this discussion. Instead I would be having Levi against my office desk.”

I clenched my teeth together and bit back every smart remark that wanted to make its way onto my tongue. I wasn’t certain if he was trying to make me jealous, but it was working beautifully if that was his goal.

“He doesn’t want me, Eren. He wants you. He’s just too stubborn to admit it.” Erwin spat the words like they were poison in his mouth. It was obvious that he was losing something he wanted, so why was he trying to help speed along the process? After a moment he lifted his expression back to me and it was once again controlled. “Which is why we’re here. I’m going to help you win him over.”

“Why?”

“Because you can help me get something I want.”

Ah. So that was the point of offering his help. Of course. I should have seen that coming from miles away. I stared at Erwin for a long moment and then stood up from the couch to make my way towards the elevator. Unlike Levi, he wasn’t able to predict my reactions and had to hurry to catch me at the doorway. Even then I wrenched my arm free of his grasp.

“It’s not happening. Don’t even bother to ask,” I snapped at him as I hit the button for the elevator. At least it would be a fast ride down.

“You’re awfully protective over your friend.”

“You have no idea.” I wasn’t about to let this man touch Armin just so I would have a chance with Levi. I would figure it out on my own.

“Eren, it’s not like I’m asking you to tie him up for me.”

“No, I’m sure you’re the one who wants to do the tying.”
“Yes, but that’s beside the point,” he said through a laugh and then grabbed me by the shoulder, turning me to face him. “I’m asking you to talk to him, that’s all, and it doesn’t even have to be now. When his relationship with Jean goes sour, and it will, I just want him to know that I’m interested.”

“You’re too old for him!”

“And Levi’s too old for you, but here we are,” Erwin countered, “Armin’s smart enough to decide for himself, Eren. If he says no, then I’ll respect his decision.”

“Oh, trust me, he’s going to say no. I’ll make sure he says no.” I turned back towards the elevator doors, which had thankfully opened up for me.

“If you make things hard for me, then I’ll make them hard for you.” His voice carried a severe note of warning that made my insides ice over.

I froze and slowly turned to look at him, trying to quell the rage that was now rising in me. I could only imagine what he meant by that, but I was more than certain it involved him bending Levi over his office desk. Although I was sure that I would stand a chance without his help, I had no hope with Levi if Erwin were working against me.

“I just have to talk about you?” I said the words through clenched teeth, hating the way they tasted in my mouth.

“In a positive light,” he added and I wondered if the bastard could read my mind. He leaned close to push the button for the elevator and the doors slid shut as he turned his gaze back to me. His voice came out smooth and alluring, as if he hadn’t just threatened me at all, “Eren, you’re his best friend. He trusts you. All I’m asking you to do is put it in his head that I would be a good idea for him.”

I was pretty damn sure that was impossible. Actually, I was positive I wouldn’t be able to do it at all, but saying that wouldn’t help me get what I wanted. If everyone was so intent on using me in their game, I would use them in my own. Erwin didn’t have to know what was said to Armin, he just had to think that it was good. Armin responding positively to any of it wasn’t a requirement. I was sure I could do this, and so I nodded my agreement.

“Good. Then I’ll play along,” he replied, his tone once again reserved, “If Levi feels the need to destroy me in order to move on, then I’ll give him the chance. He doesn’t realize there’s no family left to destroy, so as far as he knows he still has his chance at revenge. Which is good. Trust me, the jealousy he’s going to feel will be a big help for you.”

“Or it will push him away entirely,” I muttered, my mind lingering on the events of this morning.

“He doesn’t work that way, Eren,” Erwin countered, “Levi doesn’t pursue things that come easily. Make him work for it. Make him realize you’re something worth fighting for. Become someone he can’t lose.”

“If we’re going to do this, if we’re going to make him jealous, do we have to... you know...” I trailed off, hoping he would follow my train of thought. I didn’t want to think about the prospect of having sex with him, even if he was admittedly an attractive man.

“We’re going to do things, but most of it will be for show and none of it will go as far as we’re going to make him believe.” Erwin said simply. “That’s just part of the game. It’s unavoidable. But this isn’t just about you, Eren. I’m doing this for Levi, too.”

“What do you mean?”
“Maybe I’m willing to let him destroy me,” Erwin shrugged and then regarded me with an expression that had too many emotions to count. “I tried to free him and in doing so I found him a new cage. I’m tired of seeing that boy suffer. I just want it to stop. If playing out this game and making him believe that he truly got his revenge will make him happy, then so be it. I’ve caused so much pain in his life that I owe him at least that much.”

It was an undeniable truth that Erwin was the most confusing man I had ever met. He was able to make me both hate and love him in the same breath, and while I wasn’t sure if I could trust him with Armin, I knew beyond a doubt that I could trust him with Levi. There was so much love in his eyes when he spoke about him that I honestly believed him when he said he wouldn’t hurt Levi. Somehow I knew he wouldn’t. As much as I hated the idea of them together, Erwin had been good for him. He was willing to sacrifice part of himself in order to give Levi peace of mind; something I hadn’t been able to do myself yet. But that didn’t mean I couldn’t.

“So we’re going to continue this?” I confirmed, although I had to wonder if Levi would even let me continue after today. “We’re going to make him think that we’re together?”

“We’re going to make him think I’m very interested,” Erwin smiled and then suddenly leaned so close that there was no space left between the wall and me. “Which I am.”

I had only enough time to open my mouth to speak before his lips were on mine, muffling any word I would have said. His arms circled my waist and pulled me against a solid body that made my knees weaken despite every protest I had. His massive size made me feel as if I were being enveloped by muscles and somewhere in the back of my mind I wondered if Levi felt the same every time he was in his arms. My hands were on his chest and I was trying to find the strength and resolve to push him away when his tongue found mine and my mind went hazy with confusion.

I wasn’t sure I could struggle away, but with the way his tongue moved skillfully against my own I almost didn’t want to. A traitorous moan escaped my mouth and he laughed softly in response before taking my lower lip between his teeth and giving it a playful tug. I realized then that I could hate him all I wanted, but I couldn’t deny that Erwin knew exactly what he was doing when he kissed a man.

When he finally came up for air, I was left panting and confused; aroused against my will and hating him for making my body react this way. “What the fuck?”

Erwin chuckled softly, the sound low and hopelessly sensual. He traced his thumb around my lower lip, which was now swollen from our kiss. “That was for him, not you. Now get back to work.”

As if on cue, the elevator doors swung open. I stared at him after stepping inside, knowing the bewilderment was still plastered across my features. “I can’t figure out if you’re a good person or not.”

It was really the only thought left in my mind.

“No one truly is. We’re all self-serving in one way or another.” He smiled as he leaned forward and pressed the button. “I’m just a little more straight forward about it.”

The doors slid shut and carried me swiftly to the bottom floor. Getting outside was a herculean task considering Erwin had made my knees weak before sending me on an elevator that had a drop worse than the Tower of Terror. I wasn’t sure how I had made it back to the limo, but I was relieved when I felt my back hit the cushion behind me. I stared up at the massive building that was Stohess and let the limo carry me back to Survey Corporation.

It was noon by the time I arrived, which meant that most of the interns would be eating in the
cafeteria. Without Levi complaining to Mike, I wasn’t sure which cafeteria they would be in, but I was willing to bet it was the one closest to the mailroom. Mike seemed like the type to opt for efficiency over comfort and the lunchroom that Levi detested was located conveniently near the mailroom.

I started walking towards the elevators when I felt a hand close around my wrist, pulling me towards the bathroom to my right. I stumbled in through the door and turned in time to see Levi flipping the latch to lock us in. My heart started racing as I prepared myself for whatever he planned to do to me, whether it was good or not. He stood there for a moment, staring at the door before he finally turned to face me and spoke.

“How was he?”

Erwin hadn’t prepared me for this question, but I should have expected it nonetheless. Of course Levi thought that had happened. I had been gone long enough and he didn’t know that it was for conversation alone. It didn’t help that my lips were still bruised from the intense kiss Erwin had given me before sending me on my way. I could tell by the way Levi’s eyes lingered on my lips that he noticed it, too.

“We didn’t do anything,” I blurted out, sounding far more defensive than I wanted to. I knew I should be making him jealous at this point, but the majority of me just wanted to stop fighting for today. I had torn his heart out enough already and I wasn’t prepared to see any more pain on his face.

But it wasn’t pain that I saw there now. It was anger. He crossed the room towards me and pinned me up against the sinks behind me, our hips pressing together in a way that had me fighting for control. Now was not the time to get aroused.

“You left before I could tell you. You didn’t give me a chance to say it.”

“To say what?” I could feel my heart racing in my chest, hoping beyond hope that I knew what it was.

He ignored my question and grabbed my hair to pull my head down to his. His mouth covered mine in an instant, claiming it in a possessive kiss that made me forget any other I had before it. My body surged forward; I was unable to control myself now that his lips were finally back on mine. I had been craving this since I shut the door on him, certain that I would never have him again. My arms closed around his waist and I spun the both of us as I lifted him onto the sinks. He formed no protest as I fisted one hand in his shirt and the other in his hair, my grip desperate with the need to keep him in my arms.

We were both fighting for some edge of control as our lips worked together in a demanding kiss. I felt his tongue sliding against mine, replacing any lingering taste of Erwin with his own. A guttural moan escaped my throat as he pressed his hand in between my legs, gripping and rolling his fingers in a way that had me seeing stars. I needed him and I was willing to take him in this bathroom if he would allow it. At this point I didn’t care where my first time was, so long as it was with him.

He bit into my lower lip with a little more force than Erwin had before, eliciting just enough pain to let me know that he was more than a little jealous. This time I was certain the jealousy was over me, and that idea thrilled me beyond reason. He wanted me as badly as I wanted him and I truly was a fool for not seeing it until now. I pushed into the kiss, suddenly desperate to reassure him that I was his alone, but he didn’t give me the chance.

A moment later I was stumbling back and he was moving off of the sink, thumbing his lower lip with an annoyed expression. Somewhere in the middle of our heated kiss I must have bitten back.
“I made a fucking mistake,” he rasped, his voice husky and out of breath. From the look on his face I could tell he was annoyed that the words hadn’t come as harsh as he intended, but he more than made up for it with the next thing he said. “And now so have you.”

The door slammed shut before I had a chance to react, and the loud sound reverberated through me along with his words. I touched my lips as I stared at the mirror, wondering whom the bewildered man was staring back at me. There were tears collecting in his eyes that matched the anguish I was feeling in my heart. I had really fucked up today, and I wasn’t sure he was going to let me repair it at this point. All I knew now was that I had to try.

Trying would prove to be difficult, though. Levi avoided me like the plague for the rest of the day. I wasn’t sure whether he left his office at all, but if he did he was careful not to be on the same floor as I was. Which probably wasn’t a difficult task, considering he had no reason to be in the mailroom. I spent the remainder of my day learning the ins and outs of a job I really couldn’t care less about, waiting for the moment when I could catch him on the way out the door.

“What are you waiting for?” Armin drew my attention to him. He was sitting in the driver’s seat of his car, looking more than a little impatient. He was anxious for his date with Jean, and if I weren’t so desperate to see Levi I would have felt bad for making him wait at all.

“I was just hoping to see someone.”

“I think Levi left early today,” Armin said, reading my mind a little too easily. “His car’s not even in the parking lot. Maybe you could catch him at Trost?”

I looked around for Levi’s car, but then realized I had no idea what I was looking for. Knowing Armin, he had probably memorized the make, model, color, and exact position this morning, so I had no reason to doubt him. I got into the car and shut the door, buckling myself in place and resigning myself to the fact that I would probably not have another chance to see Levi until tomorrow.

“Did something happen?” Armin hedged as he drove down the street. “You’ve been off all day.”

“It’s nothing,” I lied, staring out the window. I hated lying to him at all, but neither of us had the time to get into it right now. Armin had a date to get to and dinner was waiting for me at home along with my father. In all honesty, I just wanted to get into my bed. The events of today had dragged heavily on me and now I was nothing but exhausted.

We remained silent for the rest of the ride, and I’m sure part of that was due to the fact that Armin was trying to think of a way to help me that didn’t involve bringing up the subject again. He offered me a small, reassuring smile when I got out of the car. “Maybe you’ll catch him inside.”

“Maybe.” Doubtful.

“If you need to talk, call me.”

“Armin, you have a date with Jean. I’m not going to-”

“Call me,” he cut me off, “Promise me you’ll call me.”

I sighed, knowing better than to argue. “I promise.”

I watched him pull away from the curb before walking into Trost. I held my breath as I waited for the elevator doors to open, hoping beyond hope that Levi would be in there but he wasn’t. I stepped into the small space and resigned myself to a sluggish ride up to my apartment. I had grown so used to riding up with him that the trip seemed twice as slow without his presence.
When I walked into the apartment, the smell of steak and potatoes wafted into my nose and my stomach rumbled in response. I hadn’t eaten anything today and it was taking its toll.

“Eren, is that you?”

My father walked out of the kitchen and a smile spread across his face as he crossed the distance and enveloped me in a hug. “It’s been so long. How have you been? How’s school?”

“School’s fine,” I shrugged, returning the hug that I didn’t realize I needed. “I’ve been doing this internship that Armin signed me up for.”

“At Survey Corp. Your mom told me.” he released me from the hug and looked at me, holding me by the shoulders. “You look exhausted, Eren. They must be working you to the bone.”

I shook my head, although I was sure I must have looked drained. This day had been so eventful that it had stripped me of any energy I had left. ‘I’m fine. It was just a long day.”

“Well, let’s not make it any longer,” he said as he directed me into the dining room. “I need to talk to you, but it can wait until tomorrow morning. Let’s get some food in you and then you can go to bed.”

I didn’t understand how Mikasa could have suggested that this man would ever hurt her. He had his harsh moments, but he always had a reason behind them and I couldn’t bring myself to believe the worst of him. I still didn’t understand why she left in the first place, but if it had anything to do with him then maybe she was wrong. Maybe this was all some stupid misunderstanding that he could fix just as soon as he found her.

I ate in silence, letting my parents control the conversation and losing myself to the sound of their voices. I shoveled the food into my mouth, letting it fill the void in my stomach and feeling the exhaustion drag over me like a heavy curtain. I wasn’t sure when I had collapsed in my bed, but the pillow beneath my head was a sweet relief. Someone turned out the light and closed the door, but I didn’t have enough energy left to thank them.

This day had taken everything I had, and I was ready for it to be over.
I know that today isn't Thursday, but since Thursday is a holiday I decided to switch the update to today. So yay! Early update! ^__^ 

Oooooh, this is such a long chapter and so, so much happens in it! I'm honestly really excited about everyone's reactions to this chapter. I will warn you now that there is definitely a good amount of smut in this chapter, but I won't say who the smut happens between. 

So, while I was editing this chapter, I found someone who posted some amazing art / a comic for a scene from Chapter 8! ^__^ Thank you so, so much to the wonderful epicmonkeyturd on Tumblr! I have been completely fangirling over it for hours now. You can find it on my lootibles blog under the tag 'Intern Art'. I'll actually be tagging any art I receive under the same tag, in case anyone wants to see what art has been made so far. 

Thank you all so much for all of the kudos and comments! I really do appreciate each one and I enjoy hearing what you all thought about each update.

As always, you can follow me on Tumblr at lusty-levi or lootibles, and feel free to send any comments or questions there as well. I do post little extras there, and I recently posted a playlist for The Intern if anyone is interested. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to add anything there.

ENJOY!

I watched as Levi walked towards the door and my legs carried me forward, moving me until I had him pinned against the wall. I stared down into his surprised eyes, certain that he would fight me back and positive that I didn’t give a shit. I had almost lost him too many times over the past few days and I wasn’t just going to let him get away now. Not when I was just starting to realize what he meant to me. Not when I was starting to understand what I might mean to him. I wouldn’t lose him this time. I refused to have my heart shredded over and over again by this man.

“Tell me what you meant by that,” I demanded. I wanted to sound determined and self-assured, but I knew the crack in my voice showed the desperation I was feeling inside. What was this man doing to me?

“What are you talking about?” Levi snapped back, feigning either innocence or stupidity. Neither of them fit him, and the confused expression on his face wasn’t enough to throw me off track.

“You said I left before you had the chance to tell me,” I pushed forward with the question. I had come this far and even shoved him into the wall. I couldn’t just give up now. “What were you going to say?”

“I forgot,” his voice was cold and defensive, and he punctuated the words by trying to shove me away from him but I held my position.
“Bullshit!” I yelled. I didn’t care if anyone else heard us now. “You know exactly what you wanted to say, so tell me!”

“It doesn’t matter anymore, brat.” Levi’s voice was so cold that I could almost feel the barrier he had built up between us. Was it too strong and too thick to shatter now?

“It does matter,” I interjected, my voice cracking more this time. I didn’t really care at this point. If I was going to lose him, it wouldn’t be without tears and a struggle. I was in too deep for anything else. “It matters to me. It matters so fucking much. You have no idea how much.”

“Maybe you should have thought about that before you left me on that curb,” he retorted and pushed at my chest. I almost gave way and freed him, but I stopped myself by wrapping my hands around his wrists.

“I’m sorry,” my voice trembled as much as my hands, “I shouldn’t have left you there. You begged me not to and I don’t know why… damn it, Levi, I don’t know why I got in that car. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

“You’re sorry, huh? Of course you’re sorry now,” his words were clipped and he spun his wrists so quickly that my grip on him broke and I was held captive instead. It was almost alarming how easily he could overcome me. He had allowed me to restrain him up until now. “You’re sorry that things didn’t turn out the way you wanted. Well, tough shit. That’s what happens when you hurt someone. Don’t expect me to drop down and kiss your ass just because you apologized. It’ll take more than that.”

“Then tell me what it will take,” I interrupted and pulled my wrists out of his grip. He let me but the guarded expression on his face told me he was ready to restrain me again if I tried to touch him. I wasn’t about to. I was too focused on trying to put together the broken pieces that were left of us. “Tell me what to do and I’ll do it.”

“I told you what to do.” Levi stared up into my eyes as he spoke the words in a cold, unfeeling voice. He wasn’t letting me in at all. “I asked you to stay, and you didn’t. There’s no second chances for you.”

“You say that like there was a chance in the first place,” I said through a bitter laugh and tried to ignore the all too familiar ache in my chest.

The expression on his face, which had remained an impassive mask until now, melted into one of regret and pity. He stared at me as if I didn’t know anything about the world, and he was probably right. When he spoke again, there was so much emotion in his words that his voice trembled as hard as my body, and my heart broke in my chest.

“There was a chance. I wouldn’t have chased after you if there wasn’t. I didn’t even realize it myself until I saw you walking out those doors and then I realized,” his voice cracked as he stared into my eyes, holding my gaze despite the fact that his expression was completely unguarded and baring all of his emotions, “I realized that you’re more important than revenge. I didn’t want to lose you.”

“Then don’t give me up,” I choked out the words. Tears were blurring my vision, but I didn’t care if he saw me cry now. So what if he knew how I felt. We were in this mess because neither of us had been honest in the first place. Even if it was too little too late, I would be honest with him now.

He let out a bitter laugh and stepped away from me, grabbing the door handle with a tight, white-knuckled fist. He stared down at the floor, his expression hidden from me as he spoke the words in a defeated, broken voice. “I already have.”
He was walking out of the room and everything in my body screamed for me to stop him. To take him into my arms before it was too late and he was gone. I wanted to keep him from leaving me, but my legs were rooted to the spot. The most I could do was yell his name, my voice strained with the desperate hope that he might actually turn around.

“Levi!”

I sat up in bed, my chest heaving with the force of the breaths that were pulling in and out of my lungs as if I had just run a marathon. My body was drenched in a cold sweat and my clothes were stuck to my skin. I felt disgusting and shaken straight down into my core, half of my mind still stuck in that terrible dream as if hoping for the chance to drag him out of it with me. I pressed a hand to my chest and tried to calm my racing heart.

“Who’s Levi?”

I shouted a garbled phrase that was caught somewhere between “What the fuck?” and “Who the hell?” although it honestly sounded like neither at all. I had my hands up in front of me, ready to defend against whoever had made their way into my room. The soft laugh that followed caught me off guard and I stilled, lowering my hands back to the blanket.

“Dad?”

“Sorry,” he said through a smile that I could just barely make out. My eyes were still adjusting to the room, which was dark save for the hallway light shining through the crack of the door.

“What are you doing? What time is it?”

“It’s a little past six,” he said with one glance in the direction of the electronic blue numbers displayed on my bedside table. “Your mom said that you usually get up around seven and I wanted to have some time to talk to you. I won’t be here when you get home.”

“You’re leaving already?” I muttered, rubbing a hand over my face and then through my hair. Sleep was pulling at the edges of my mind and I had to give my head a little shake to jar it awake.

“I have to,” he shrugged and leaned back. He was sitting in my desk chair, which he had rolled over to my bed sometime before I had woken up. “She’s not exactly easy to find, and who knows where she’ll be if I just sit around here waiting for her to show up.”

I’d known he would want to talk about Mikasa, but the topic stung just as bad as it would have if it had been a surprise. The phone call and everything she had said during it was still too fresh in my mind. She’d sounded panicked on the phone, but I couldn’t tell if it was an act or not. I knew she wanted to get me out of the house, but her motives weren’t clear at all. It was obvious that she was running from something, but there was a possibility I wouldn’t agree with her decision to leave regardless of the reason why. I didn’t know what to believe anymore.

“Have you heard from her?”

That wasn’t the real question, was it? If I answered truthfully then I would be choosing not to believe Mikasa, and if I lied I was deciding to follow her down whatever road she had taken. I didn’t want to betray her but at the same time I had no desire to leave, and that wasn’t just because of Levi. I would be leaving everyone I knew, including Armin. As much as Mikasa meant to me, the thought of abandoning Armin, possibly forever, sickened me. I couldn’t just walk away from the life I had here, especially for someone who couldn’t even give me a good reason to. Mikasa was family, but so was Armin. I couldn’t blindly give up one for the other.
“Yes.” I spoke softly and suddenly became very interested in my comforter. I picked at the fabric, giving it my focus as I tried to choose my next words carefully, “She called me. Two days ago.”

He let out a sigh of relief. “What did she say?”

“She said that she couldn’t tell me much,” I shrugged, deciding to give a partial truth. I didn’t believe the things Mikasa had said, but I wasn’t about to divulge all of her secrets either. I could meet them both halfway, if nothing else.

“Did she say anything that might help us find her? Anything about why she left?”

“She made it sound like,” I paused and gripped the blanket. I hadn’t meant to let that slip out, but it was too late now. “Like you hurt her.”

“Why would I hurt her?” His voice was so confused that it drew my attention to his face. He was staring at me like I had just told him the sun and the moon were the same thing, and I felt a wave of relief wash over me. She had to be lying. He couldn’t have hurt her. Not intentionally.

“I don’t know,” I shrugged and held his gaze. I felt more comfortable now that I had some feedback from him. “She wasn’t very clear about it. She just said that I couldn’t tell you that she called me.”

“Well, I’m glad you did,” he assured me, a frown marring his features and his brow still knit with confusion. “At least she got in touch with someone. I’d almost given up hope in ever finding her. Do you have her number?”

“She said she’d call me back,” I said, shaking my head to answer his question. “Her number came up unknown, and I didn’t get the chance to ask her for it the last time that she called.”

“When she calls you back, I need you to get her number. I don’t know what’s wrong with her, but I’m worried she’s gotten herself into some kind of trouble.” He paused and shook his head. “And if I did something wrong, then I want to fix it. Maybe there was a misunderstanding, and I don’t want her getting hurt because of that.”

“I’ll get her number when she calls back,” I reassured him. I had already intended to do so, but at least now I would be able to do something useful with her number. “And I’ll figure out as much as I can.”

“You’re a good boy, Eren.” My dad smiled and then moved out of his chair to stand, placing one hand on the top of my head. “You should start getting ready for work. We both have long days ahead of us.”

He didn’t know how right he was about that.

I watched him leave my room, waiting until the door was closed to peel the blankets back and pull myself out of bed. I wasn’t ready to start the day, but I was pretty sure that no amount of sleep was about to change that. I had been a rollercoaster of emotions yesterday and it had left me exhausted and drained to the point that I still felt it the morning after. The fact that Levi had avoided me for the rest of the day after cornering me in the bathroom had been too much for my mind to take. I had spent most of the time waiting for him to walk around the corner rather than actually working, only to find out that he had left early in the day.

The dream certainly hadn’t helped.

I had to see him. Even if I had to barge my way into his office, I was going to talk to him. Everything had gone terribly wrong and I had the worst fear that there was an expiration date on us now. Just
like milk left out on a counter, if I let this problem sit too long it would start to spoil and then there would be no chance left in saving what little we had.

I showered longer than usual, taking the extra time to use the body wash I had bought when I was still toying with the idea that I might ever like women. The commercials boasted that it would work like a charm, but I never noticed a difference. Then again, I was probably never interested enough to cue in when someone was flirting with me.

I dressed quickly in a black button up with grey slacks and a vest, hoping that it would be acceptable enough to impress him. He would probably just make some snide comment that I had managed to dress myself, but at this point I was willing to take what I could get. I rode the elevator down to the ground floor and stepped out when the doors finally swung open.

Levi was walking out of the gym, a towel draped over his shoulders and his hair wet with water. He must have just gotten out of the pool. Clearly someone hated me today. It was bad enough that I wasn’t sure how to approach him, but now he was half naked and glistening like some kind of Greek god. How the hell was I supposed to manage English around him now?

He looked up and caught sight of me, his jaw tightening for a brief instant before he turned to walk back into the gym.

“Levi!”

I ran forward before I could stop myself, the dream playing back through my mind. This would probably go horribly wrong, but I would hate myself if I didn’t even try to talk to him. I grabbed him by the shoulder and turned him to face me, opening my mouth to speak before a look of disgust crossed his features and stopped any words I would have said.

“Oh, what the fuck,” he leaned back, waving his hand in front of his face, “Why do you smell like you fell into a vat of prepubescent boys?”

I frowned, holding my shirt towards my nose and giving a small whiff. I knew I washed this shirt, so I wasn’t sure what smell he was talking about. The only thing I had done differently was the body wash and spray, “Axe?”

“Axe? Really? What are you, twelve?”

The tone of his voice stung worse than the comment. His entire demeanor was cold and disinterested, as if I was some small child interrupting his important day.

“You know why they call it Axe? Because you want to take one to your fucking nose after getting close to a shithead that put it on.”

“Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed,” I muttered, giving a pathetic attempt to change the subject or lighten the mood or anything other than this.

“Went to sleep on it, too,” he snapped, “Are you going to keep wasting my time, or are you going to get your ass to work?”

“Aren’t you going to work?” I chanced a glance at his mostly naked body and regretted it immediately. It was unfair for him to be so cold when he looked so hot.

“Don’t worry about what I’m doing. It’s none of your fucking business what I do,” he continued in a harsh voice, pushing past me, “Not anymore.”
“Wait, Levi,” I turned to grab his arm, but he was already out of reach and walking towards the elevator. I probably would have been able to catch him if it weren’t for the choked sob I heard behind me.

“Eren.”

I turned so quickly that I threw off my own balance and almost fell into the wall. Armin was standing a few feet away, and his usually perfect hair was a disheveled mess and the tip of his nose was reddened from crying. Tears were streaming from his bright blue eyes, and he was making a small effort to wipe them away with the sleeve of a cream sweater that was much too big for him. He had always been smaller than me, but in that moment he looked like he was ready to shrink away entirely. I had never seen so much defeat and anguish in those beautiful eyes, and I had to fight back the urge to slaughter whoever had caused him this amount of pain.

He opened his mouth to speak, but I had him in my arms before he could get out any words. I gathered him into a tight hug and let him hide his tear-soaked face against my neck, feeling his shuddering breath against my skin as he trembled. I could feel his body weaken and sag against mine as he finally gave into all the emotion he must have been holding back until now, and his hands twisted in my shirt as he gripped the fabric tight.

“What did he do?” I tried to keep the anger from my voice, but the words were all spoken on a dangerous growl. I was going to skin the bastard the second I saw him, and not a person in this world could stop me.

“He…” Armin’s voice cracked and he pressed his face against my shirt, the words muffled, “Jean and Marco… they…”

I took a very slow, long breath in through my nose and then let it out in a rush, tightening my grip on my best friend. Holding him was the only thing I could do at the moment, because my other choice was hunting Jean down and beating him into the concrete. Which honestly would have sounded like the best thing in the world right now if I knew Armin didn’t need me more.

“So that’s what he wanted to tell you last night,” I managed to keep my voice stable, although the anger was still evident. “I knew that asshole had done something. Is he leaving you for him? Is that what he said?”

“No…” Armin stammered against me, shaking his head. “He was begging me to stay with him. He said it was just one time; that he made a mistake. But…”

Armin pulled back enough to stare up at me, the pain evident in his eyes as his voice shook, “I can’t stop picturing them together. It’s all I see in my head and I just can’t make it stop.”

“He doesn’t deserve you.” I had always thought that before and now I truly believed it. Armin was too good for someone like Jean. Honestly, Armin was too good for most people we knew, and maybe that was a biased opinion but nobody could convince me otherwise.

“No, I wasn’t enough for him.” Armin’s words trembled on the way out and his eyes turned down.

I felt rage boil like a hot fire inside of my belly. The fact that anyone would ever make Armin feel like he was less than the fucking trophy that he was made me want to lash out at the world. It was true that I had fallen for Levi at this point, but Armin would always be the first person I cared for
outside of my family. I would tear down armies to keep him happy and safe, and the fact that I couldn’t fix this made my vision blur.

I cupped his face in my hands and forced his gaze to meet my own, holding off my words until I knew I had his attention. “You are more than enough. For the person who is lucky enough to have you, you are everything. Don’t let some asshole with a wandering dick make you think anything else. You are perfect, Armin.”

Armin stared up at me and took one deep, shuddering breath before he leaned up and pressed his lips in a quick, chaste kiss against my own. My eyes peeled so wide I must have looked like I’d seen a ghost, and when Armin pulled away an instant later he gave a small laugh.

“Thank you,” he tried to smile, but there was too much sadness still in his eyes, “For being here for me. I don’t think I could make it through the day without you here.”

“Do you—” my voice cracked and I had to clear my throat. My cheeks were probably the deepest shade of red at the moment, but Armin was being kind enough not to take notice. I knew it had been an innocent kiss, but my heart was still hammering up a pounding beat nonetheless. “Do you want to skip work today? I can tell them you’re not feeling well.”

“No,” Armin sighed and then shook his head. “No, I don’t want to let this keep me from doing something I enjoy. Hiding in my room all day won’t change anything. I may as well continue to do what’s important.”

“You’ve got a strong spirit, Armin. I would be hiding under my covers.”

“That’s just because you want an excuse to get out of work,” he smiled, and this time it seemed genuine. “If it was actually something you enjoyed, you’d fight tooth and nail to keep doing it.”

“I guess you’re right,” I shrugged and then held out my hand, “Give me the keys. You’re in no shape to drive right now.”

“Eren, really, I’ll be fine.” Armin started, but then sighed when my hand remained in its demanding position. He dug the keys out of his pocket and dropped them into my waiting palm. “Fine, okay. But just for today.”

We both got into his car, and once again I remembered to buckle up on my own. I was getting good at this. I had just started the car up when I heard Armin make a pained sound beside me. I glanced over at him to find him staring determinedly out the window. “Armin?”

“I found those in his car,” Armin said simply, pointing towards the condoms and lube resting in the cup holder. “He didn’t have those before last night. How could he say it was an accident when he had time to get that?”

I eyed the small foil packets and little bottle, cursing Jean once again. It would be a struggle to get through the day without beating his face in. The only thing that had any chance of stopping me was the fact that Armin might still be in a relationship with the asshole.

“Are you going to stay with him?”

“I don’t know,” he sighed and then closed his eyes. He pressed his forehead to the glass window and then muttered, “Is it okay if I don’t say anything on the way there?”

I reached out and squeezed his shoulder, deciding not to say anything he might feel obligated to respond to. I turned the car onto the road and drove in silence the rest of the way to Survey Corps.
Knowing that Levi probably wouldn’t be there left a dull ache in my chest, but I had other things to deal with today that would keep me occupied. Trying not to skin Jean would be a full-time job.

An impossible job, I realized, as I pulled into the parking space and spotted him walking over to us.

“I can’t talk to him right now,” Armin’s voice was breaking again, and he looked over at me for help that I was a little too eager to provide. I got out of the car and shut the door, walking towards Jean whose brow was now knit in confusion.

“Why were you driving Armin’s car?”

“Because some fucking dumbass left him too upset to drive,” I snapped. My hands were instinctively clenching into fists and I felt the familiar rush of adrenaline buzzing through my veins. This was not going to end well, but I couldn’t stop myself now. “What the hell were you thinking?”

“He told you?”

The accusatory note in Jean’s tone pissed me off more than it probably should have. “Of course he told me. He’s not going to keep shit like that from me. He doesn’t keep anything from me. I’m his best friend.”

“Well, I’m his boyfriend.”

“Just because he lets you stick your dick in his ass doesn’t make you good enough for him.”

“Oh, fuck you, Jaeger.”

“Not that I’m interested, but I heard you got plenty of that from Marco already.”

“That was an accident!”

“An accident?” I spoke through a laugh. Was he really going to pull that shit? “What the hell did you do? Trip and fall into Marco’s ass?”

“Yes, it was an accident!” Jean snapped back, “Don’t act like you’re so innocent yourself. I’m sure he’s gone and fucked around with you behind my-”

My hand collided into the side of Jean’s face with a loud crack, and I felt pain light up across my knuckles as I watched his body stumble back. I moved forward, determined to inflict as much pain as I could before anyone stopped me, but someone got to me too quickly. Strong arms banded around my waist and lifted me up, rendering me useless as I struggled to get down.

“Woah! What the hell is going on! Erwin!” Mike barked as he ran over towards us. Erwin remained as silent as a statue, letting me struggle in a grip that was too hard for me to ever break out of.

“Eren!” I heard Armin’s voice as he ran over, and as he approached I caught sight of the streaks of dried tears on his face. I wondered if Erwin would see them, too.

He did.

“I told you,” he muttered next to my ear. He set me down and released me when Armin came towards us, speaking to Mike. “Some fight between these two. Sort it out and then take Jean inside and get him bandaged up.”

Armin was staring between Jean and me, his expression filled with worry. More pain that I had helped put there. I should have just taken Armin inside and ignored Jean. Why did I bother to
approach him? How was I stupid enough to think that I would manage to keep my cool when he had hurt Armin?

“I’d like you to come to my office.” Although it was a command, Erwin’s voice was a soothing purr. I would have almost enjoyed the sound, actually, if he hadn’t been talking to Armin. He put an arm around his shoulders and I felt my body tense with more rage. Either he didn’t notice or he didn’t care, because he continued to speak. “I have a feeling you know what this fight was about. Let’s go work it out and then you can get back to work.”

“I know what it was about. I can talk instead.” My voice was harsher than I wanted, but I was too angry to care.

“You need to stay here with Mike,” Erwin’s tone left no room for arguing. “Armin’s going to come with me and convince me why I should let you continue this internship.”

Armin’s eyes widened and he looked up at Erwin, “It wasn’t his fault. He’s just upset.”

“We can talk about it in my office, Armin.”

“Armin, I don’t—” I started, but he cut me off.

“Eren, it’s fine,” Armin’s eyes pleaded with me. “It’ll be fine.”

I watched them turn and walk into the building, the rage rising up and threatening to take over as I screamed after them, “I don’t give a fuck about this stupid internship!”

“Is that so?” Mike spoke up, “Good, because we don’t need you here. Consider your internship over. I’ll send whatever you have home with Armin. Go home.”

I was shaking so hard that I wasn’t sure I would even be capable of driving, but there wasn’t a chance in hell that I would spend one more second here. I got back into Armin’s car and slammed the door shut, pulling out of the parking lot and onto the road. I would come back to get him at the end of the day, but right now I had to get away. I cursed under my breath and struck the steering wheel as I drove at a speed that was a little too fast. How the hell had things gone to shit so quickly?

I pulled into the first space I saw near Trost and started to get out of the car before I noticed the condoms and lube in the cup holder. They had triggered Armin’s sadness earlier, and I wouldn’t have them upsetting him again. I grabbed the offensive material and shoved it into my pockets before getting out of the car and locking the door. I could throw it out once I was back in the safety of my room.

As I walked through the glass doors of Trost, I noticed the all too familiar man stepping into the elevator. Levi. Suddenly every emotion I was trying to suppress rushed through me and I realized that all I needed in that moment was to have him in my arms again. Nothing had been right since yesterday, and it was all because I had made the wrong choice. I wasn’t going to let that happen again. I was going to fix this now.

“Levi!”

He looked up and met my eyes, and I noticed him reach forward to hit a button on the elevator. The doors started to slide shut and I ran towards him, determined not to let him shut me out once again. I cursed Trost to the bottoms of hell for having such an extravagant foyer as his image started to disappear from my view. I watched the small slit of the elevator close just as I reached the doors and slammed my fists against the cool metal with an angry cry.
“No! Damn it, no!”

I turned and ran, pushing open the door to the stair well and running up the steps as fast as my feet would carry me. My thighs burned with the effort, but none of that mattered right now. Even if I collapsed when I got there, I was going to find my way to him. After five flights of stairs, I stumbled through the doors to the fifth floor and hit the button for the elevator, my chest heaving as my lungs struggled in their attempt to get more air.

Had I made it? Even if the elevator was painfully slow, it wasn’t necessarily something I could beat by running. I had chosen the fifth floor because I had enough hope that I would manage to reach it in time, but I was probably putting too much faith in my own speed. The pleasant ding that sang through the air sent my heart leaping out of my chest, and I stood trembling as I waited for the doors to open. Levi’s head shot up and his steel blue eyes widened as he met my heated stare.

“What the hell are you-”

I lifted him into my arms as I crushed my lips to his, fisting one hand into his hair to keep him from pulling away. He didn’t even try. I felt his fingers twisting in my hair as his mouth slanted down on my own, his legs tightening around my waist to hold his position. With one probing lick he managed to open my mouth and then his heated tongue was tangled with my own, flooding me with the taste I had missed so much. I groaned against him and when he gave a sharp tug on my hair, I stumbled back against the elevator doors. They had already closed and we were moving upwards. I had no idea what floor we were on now and I didn’t care.

He bit into my lower lip and gave it a playful tug that sent a shock of electricity straight into the head of my cock. My body was already stirring with desire and I could feel a tightness in my pants that was demanding my immediate attention. He must have noticed it as well because his hips rolled forward and gave me just enough friction to tease. I gasped against his lips and he swallowed the sound in another kiss, his tongue invading my mouth once more. I felt like he was attempting to devour me, and I was all too ready to let him.

I felt his hands slip out of my hair and his fingers curled around the front of my shirt, taking purchase of the fabric for a fleeting moment before he tore his hands in either direction and scattered the buttons everywhere. There were a few soft clinks as they landed, followed by my throaty moan when Levi raked his nails down my exposed chest. He stilled his hands on my hips and gripped the skin there until his nails dug in just enough to pull a gasp from my throat. He smirked against my mouth and flicked his tongue across my lower lip before giving it another tempting bite.

He was so alluring that I almost couldn’t keep up. Each kiss and touch blurred my mind until I had no idea what I was thinking anymore. All I knew was that I wanted more. I wanted to taste every inch of his body just as he had tasted mine. I wanted him to squirming under me and to know that I was the one causing the pleasure he was feeling. I wanted him to belong to me in every way it was possible to have a person. I wanted to own him. I wanted to come inside him.

With that one thought burning a place in my mind, my hand slipped lower and cupped his ass, squeezing it tight and driving his hips forcefully into mine. His head kicked back as a satisfying cry broke its way through his lips, and I watched as desire and lust lit up his features as his aching need throbbed against my own. Instinctively my hips started to move forward, desperate to keep our bodies connected and grinding together. I muffled the moans spilling from our lips by claiming his mouth once more, this time my tongue taking possession of his and probing his mouth for more of his delicious flavor.

I worked my tongue against his and marked every inch of his mouth with my taste, wanting him to know that I belonged there. He was mine. I was going to take him; there was no doubt in my mind
about that. I had waited too long to have him, and I wasn’t going to waste time in preparing myself to be fucked. I knew that he at least had experience with Erwin, as much as I hated to think about it. Of course, I was ready and willing to erase any trace he had left on Levi’s body and replace it with my own.

The need to claim him was pulsing through my body so strongly that I never heard the elevator chime its arrival. The doors spread behind my back and suddenly there was nothing left to support our weight. I toppled out of the elevator with Levi in my arms, hitting the ground and ignoring the lick of pain that shot through me. It probably would have hurt worse if my entire focus weren’t on a very specific part of my body. Levi started to laugh, but the sound caught in his throat when I flipped our positions and held his body beneath mine.

“What do you think you’re doing, brat?” Levi questioned with one eyebrow cocked.

The amusement on his face was inescapable and I got the feeling I was being taunted for even trying to dominate him. Under normal circumstances, I might have backed off and admitted defeat. However, the past two days had been too painful for me to care about my pride now. There was a very good possibility that I was going to suck at this entire thing. I was a novice and there was no denying that, but I had to learn sometime and that time was now.

“I think I’m finally getting what I want.” I said in a deep, breathy voice. It was far sexier than it would have been if I had actually tried for it. Our kiss had left me short of breath and it had certainly paid off. Levi’s eyes widened infinitesimally, almost completely unnoticeable, but I felt a small victory when I saw the change in his expression. He hadn’t expected that from me. Driven by the desire to surprise him further I grabbed the front of his shirt, prepared to repeat what he had done to mine in the elevator.

He grabbed my wrists in a steel grip and his eyes narrowed, “You break it, you buy it. And unless you have a bank hidden in your tight ass, you’re going to remove my shirt like a fucking gentleman.”

I tried to fight back a smirk, but it curved its way onto my lips anyway. I bent down and claimed his lips in a kiss that was softer than the rest, my fingers working their way down each individual button. Despite his brief show of anger, he must have been just as eager to have me because he was unbuttoning his shirt from the bottom up. Our hands met in the middle and then I pulled his shirt apart, breaking away from his lips to turn my attention to the glorious chest before me.

His skin was creamy and smooth, stretched taught over the rigid muscles that made up his well-sculpted chest and abdomen. His nipples were a rosy pink without a trace of hair and hard with arousal. I bent down and took one into my mouth, satisfied when he let out a gasp and arched up against me. It felt like a hard bead beneath my tongue and I gave it a quick lick before pinching it between my teeth and eliciting a lustful moan from Levi that sent shivers running through my body. With noises like that, I could spend the rest of my life exploring his body and never get bored.

I wanted to hear more. I was desperate to have him crying out my name, knowing that I was the one pulling it from his lips. My mouth traveled in heated kisses down his chest and towards his abs as my hands fumbled with the belt of his pants. Once I had managed to work it open, my hands busied themselves with undoing the rest of his pants as my lips maintained their focus on his body. I stilled when I came across his belly button, giving a slow lick around the rim before dipping my tongue inside and listening to him hiss with surprise and arousal, his hips jerking off the floor.

“F-Fuck, you pushy brat!” Levi managed to gasp as he settled back on the ground, fixing me with a hard stare that was too salacious to be angry.

I tugged his pants free of his hips and paused only long enough to pull his shoes off so that I could
free the fabric from the rest of his body. The clothes landed somewhere behind me, although I
couldn’t care where. I worked quickly to remove my own pants, since Levi had already done the job
of ripping off my shirt. As the fabric slipped off my hips, I felt the items I had left in my pocket and,
for the only time that day and possibly ever, I blessed Jean’s existence.

“Where the hell did you get that?” Levi snapped as I uncapped the bottle of lube. I had used the stuff
on myself before, so at least I wouldn’t be a complete novice where Levi’s asshole was concerned.

“What? The lube?”

“Yes.” Levi’s voice had the same angry tone. “Did Erwin… is that why you have that shit in your
pocket? Because of him?”

“Actually, it’s because of Jean,” I muttered, spreading the lube onto my fingers and eyeing Levi’s
expression. It was almost comical now that it was caught between anger and absolute confusion. “It’s
a long story that doesn’t involve any sex with me.”

Levi opened his mouth for another question, but the moment my slick fingers brushed against his
entrance all of the words seemed to be lost. I ran the tips of my fingers in a slow circle against him
before working one digit into him, feeling the heat of his ass surround my finger with a tightness I
could only begin to imagine around my cock. I groaned in the same moment he did, the noise
causing my body to ache with the need that had not yet been fulfilled.

I began pumping my finger slowly, watching his body arch and move into my hand. I felt like I had
accidentally discovered that I was a skilled musician who had just found his perfect instrument. His
soft sounds started to grow more impatient as his body adjusted to my finger, and I pushed in the
second slick digit to ready him further. I wasn’t sure exactly what would be enough, but I was certain
he was going to tell me. Right now I was too lost in the exploration of his body, driven by the need
to make him moan as much as possible. I was moving my fingers inside him, desperate to find the
same pleasure button he had pressed inside me back at The Wall.

“Give up, brat,” he said in a husky laugh, “You wouldn’t be able to find it with a fucking map and
five hours-AH!”

Levi’s entire body arched and shook as I moved my fingers in a quick beckoning motion, brushing
over the sensitive part inside. Triumph flared like a white-hot flame in my chest and I worked my
fingers in the same motion, watching him writhe on the floor with a second cry. When I finally stilled
my fingers, he fixed me with a glare that was only half convincing with the way he was panting. I
tried to keep the smile from my face, but I knew I failed.

“You’re so fucking full of yourself,” he said in a breathy moan.

“I am,” I murmured as I drew my fingers out of his body. I paused just long enough to roll the pre-
lubed condom onto my aching member and then bent over him to speak an inch from his lips. “And
now you’re going to be, too.”

“Not with a fucking line like that,” he chuckled, the sound low and deep. He grabbed the back of my
head and pulled my lips down to his, claiming them in a hungry kiss. His hips rolled up invitingly
against mine and, as if to further the invitation, he wrapped his legs around my hips.

I took the hint.

The head of my cock pressed against the tightness of his entrance and began to throb harder as if it
knew that it was about to get exactly what it wanted. With a sudden worry, I broke the kiss just
enough to stare at him for some sort of conformation. I wasn’t going to brag about my size, because my concern had nothing to do with that. I could have had a baby carrot down there and I still would have worried that I was going to hurt him somehow.

“I’m not a china doll. You’re not going to break me.” Levi said as he grabbed the back of my neck and pulled my head back down towards his. His lips brushed against my ears as he spoke, “Do it, Eren.”

I thrust into the exquisite heat and felt his body engulf me like it had been made to hold me there. As soon as I was encased in the tightness of his body, I stilled my hips and allowed us both a moment to adjust. I must have cried out when I entered him, because there was a sudden soreness in my throat that wasn’t there before. He was panting beneath me, staring up at me with an expression caught somewhere between amusement and lust. Judging by his face, I had definitely made a noise and I wasn’t even sure it was a flattering one.

God, I hope I didn’t sound like a dying cow.

“E-Eren.”

Levi moaned my name in a trembling way that had my hips springing back to life. I moved slowly at first, terrified to tempt myself into an early finish with too much friction. Levi seemed to accept this fact at first, but as my thrusts continued in the slow and steady rhythm he began to lose patience. With a growl of frustration, Levi reached down and dug his nails into my ass, the small lick of pain shooting through my body and lighting my arousal as he jerked my hips forcefully forward and pushed me back into him.

“I don’t expect you to last an eternity on your first time, brat,” he snapped as he gave my ass another insistent jerk, “So for the love of god, fuck my ass like you mean it.”

The only response my body could muster was a deep and rolling growl as I gave in to his demands. If I wasn’t expected to last long, then I was going to make this worth the time we had. I set a new rhythm that had both of us panting, our bodies working together in the effort to keep my member buried and grinding in his tight heat. My left hand gripped his shoulder for some form of leverage and my fingers dug into his skin as I pulled him along with each thrust. He was all too willing to be pulled around on the floor, sliding with each push as he kicked his legs up higher onto my hips, angling his ass until a sharp cry tore from his throat. Clearly he knew how to position himself to get exactly what he wanted.

“Th-There!” Levi’s voice was strained as he steeled his legs around my waist and dug his nails into my ass, gripping me with both hands. “Eren, there! Oh g-god!”

The heat of his body had an insistent throb that took away any hope I had left of lasting a moment longer. I buried my face into the crook of his neck and bit into the skin I found there to muffle the cries and moans that were erupting from my throat. My cock was jerking with each hot, thick stream that pumped out of it, and it took all I had to keep my hips in the same place as he bucked himself against me. My nails dug into his shoulders and my arms shook with the effort as I fought to keep myself up, my entire body wanting nothing more than to sag with exhaustion. It wasn’t until I heard his moans grow louder and my stomach grow slick with his release that I finally allowed us to settle back on the ground.

Our chests moved together as we panted, each of us struggling to consume the air in the room. I was convinced that there was nothing left.

“You’re going to have to move, kid,” Levi spoke in a breathy chuckle, “I can’t breathe when you’re
With a protesting groan, I pulled out of him and rolled onto my back. While I preferred to be on top of him, I had to admit that the coolness of the floor was a relief to my hot, sweat-soaked skin. I stared up at the ceiling and I tried to focus on my breathing, but my mind kept wandering back to the man beside me. Had I been enough to satisfy him? Would everything go back to normal the moment we had our clothes on? Would he ignore me again?

“Damn,” I breathed the word, cursing the tidal wave of thoughts that continued to push their way through my mind.

“Damn is right,” he chuckled softly, and my heart skipped a beat at the sound. I turned my head to stare at him, satisfied that he was still breathing as heavily as I was. He met my eyes and for a long moment he said nothing. We stayed there; searching each other’s expressions as if we could clear away the worries with looks alone. Finally he pushed himself into a seated position and leaned over me, waiting until I met his gaze to speak.

“You fucked up and so did I.” Levi murmured, his steel blue eyes searching mine. “I get the feeling that’s going to happen a lot.”

He paused and then smirked, “But fuck, kid, if that’s the way you apologize then I’m looking forward to our next argument.”

“There’s going to be a next time?” I didn’t bother to hide the hope from my voice and I was certain he knew exactly what I meant. He gave a short, soft laugh and brushed his thumb over my lower lip.

“With the way we piss each other off, I’m sure there will be an eternity of next times,” Levi bent down and spoke the words, his warm breath tickling my lips, “And I’m looking forward to it, Eren.”
Finally, it's time for the boys to have a talk! Or at least attempt to have a talk, that is. This is another long chapter, but I'm really happy about two special character appearances in it. ^_^  

And WOW! o___o Thank you all so much for all the comments and kudos! Really, that all made me so happy! ^_^ I'm really glad everyone enjoyed the chapter, although many of you seem to be as conflicted about as Erwin as I am. XD There will be more about him (and Armin) soon.

I haven't decided officially yet, but I may add a piece about Armin and Erwin on tumblr. If I do, it may or may not be included in the next chapter.

As always, please feel free to leave comments/questions on here or on tumblr. If you would like to follow me on tumblr, you can find me at lusty-levi or lootibles. ^_^ I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern'.

ENJOY!

Levi’s skin was hot against mine, and the white marble floor did little to provide a cool relief under the sweaty warmth of my own body. But despite what would have normally been an uncomfortable heat, I found myself far beyond any bliss I had ever known. After what had been some of the most reassuring words Levi had said to me in days, I had tried to pull him down against me and was shocked when he actually let me. He had been in my arms with his head resting on my chest for a good two minutes now and I was pretty damn sure that those hundred and twenty seconds were the best of my life up to this point. I couldn’t even bring myself to be embarrassed that he could hear the way my heart was beating against my chest. And why should I be? It was racing because of him, after all.

How was it that he was able to affect me this way? He did it so easily that I wasn’t even sure he was trying to do it anymore. My body reacted to him as if it had known him long before I did. I had known him for such a short time, and yet the hold he had on me was as inescapable as it was unavoidable. Everything came second nature, and in the moments that we weren’t fighting I felt truly at peace. I was comfortable with him in a way I had never been with anyone else. It was more than the way I was with Armin and Mikasa. I was bare around Levi, stripped straight down to my core, and willing to let him see everything inside.

“It sounds like you have the fucking Macy’s Day Parade in there,” Levi muttered, his warm breath tickling my chest.

I had to stifle a laugh. I should have known he would say something like that sooner or later. “Way to ruin the moment.”

“What moment?” Levi withdrew his head from my chest and sat up to stare at me. I would have protested the loss of contact if he weren’t still lounging against my body with his arms folded on my chest. He cocked one eyebrow. “We were having a moment?”
“I’d say letting me hold you for longer than five seconds counts as a moment.”

He rolled his eyes, but the mock annoyance on his features was betrayed by the small curve of his lips. “You really are a sentimental brat, you know that? This isn’t me letting you do anything. This is me being unable to walk after you fucked me silly.”

“I didn’t know you had such little stamina,” I teased. I probably wouldn’t have attempted such a comment with him before, but now things were on a different level. Not that I had ever been good at holding my tongue, but there was no need to restrict myself now that I had his body bare against my own.

“Considering I had to take care of myself halfway through I’d say that my lack of stamina is your fault, not mine.”

“It was my first time!”

That came out more defensive than I intended it to, but I had been criticizing my own performance for the past few minutes. The fact that I had finished before him had come as no surprise, but I felt like I had failed him somehow nonetheless. Even though it was obvious that he didn’t blame me for my lack of sexual prowess, I was still ashamed that I couldn’t perform on his level. At least not yet, anyway.

“Calm down, brat,” he smirked and moved his thumb slowly along my lower lip. The nickname I had hated so much in the beginning had become an affectionate pet name now. “You did fine for your first time. Fucking incredible, in fact.”

Even if they were just meant as supportive words to lift my mood, they were enough to make my chest swell with pride. “Incredible?”

“Don’t let it go to your head,” he murmured, his gaze lingering on his own hand as his fingers trailed invisible patterns across my chest.

I took the small moment in which his eyes weren’t on mine to drink in his features, feeling my heart pump a little faster. The sex had been amazing and there was no denying that, but these moments afterwards were what I had craved most. This level of comfort and familiarity made me realize exactly what I wanted to have with him. Not a fling or a relationship that would pass in time, but a life. I wanted him, day in and day out. I wanted to be his support and I wanted him to be mine. He was the life that I wanted, and the life I was determined to have.

If only we were able to get to that point. We barely knew each other and in the short time that we had grown close we fought almost nonstop. Twice now we had come to the point where it seemed like we would never speak again, and if I hadn’t chased him down both times we probably wouldn’t have. I felt like I was the only one fighting for us, but as frustrating as that was I was willing to do it for him. I didn’t know his past or the struggles he’d gone through, and maybe he was used to giving up but I wasn’t.

“I’m going to get a shower,” his voice drew me out of my thoughts and as I felt his warmth leave my body, I reached out to hold him in place. He stared at me with confusion and annoyance in his steel blue eyes. “What the hell? Do I seem like the cuddly type, kid? Let me up. I smell like fucking Axe now, thanks to you. I’m going to have to scrub off three layers of skin and that’s going to take a while.”

“Wait.” My voice was desperate and I wasn’t sure why it was suddenly so important for him to stay where he was, but I knew he had to. “Just wait. Please.”
“Why?”

“Because this is the second time now!” I snapped out the words and realization dawned in my mind. “You’ve run away from me twice and the only thing we’ve done to fix things is to… to…”

“Have me shove a crop up your ass? Fuck like rabbits?”

“Don’t joke.”

“I’m not,” he said simply and then shrugged, his expression growing serious, “I’m not the talking type, Eren. Sex is a pretty good way to repair things.”

“Not for me.” My grip tightened on his wrist. I was suddenly worried he would pull away again. “I don’t just want to have sex every time we fight. I don’t want that to be the solution. If we do that, nothing is ever going to get better between us.”

“And what exactly do you think is between us?” He cut me off, his voice suddenly hard. We were crossing into a topic he didn’t want to discuss. “What relationship do we have to worry about?”

“Maybe we don’t have a relationship,” I admitted. Perhaps there was nothing between us besides sex, but that didn’t mean I wasn’t going to try for more. I wanted him too badly to give up when he showed the slightest form of resistance. “But we never will if this is how we solve our problems. And maybe you don’t want anything more between us but damn it, Levi, I do. I want you. I want to fight for you. I want to talk about all of the shit that goes wrong so I can have the chance to make it right.”

Levi fell silent as he stared at me, his body settling back against mine to the point that I felt secure enough to release his wrist. I didn’t dare look away from his eyes, holding onto that steely blue gaze as if my beating heart needed it to survive. I had revealed much more than I wanted to, but I was certain that he already knew most of it. I had been blunt about my feelings before and if my words surprised him now, clearly I had done something wrong.

“You really have no idea how wrong I am for you.”

He spoke the words as if they were an undeniable truth and I felt surprise widen my eyes. I had expected rejection in some form, but I hadn’t anticipated a response like that. Wrong for me? Who was he to decide if he was wrong for me? He wasn’t some drug that was corrupting my system, even if he was as addicting as one. And even though he’d both hurt and manipulated me, every choice I made concerning him had been my own.

“Why?” I asked and then hurried to answer the question myself. I knew exactly why. “Because you asked me to publicly humiliate myself for you? Because you asked me to destroy a man and a family I don’t know? Because you jerk me around like I’m some fucking wind up toy that can change direction every time you change your mind?”

“Do you expect me to add to that?” Levi raised one eyebrow. The coldness in his voice wasn’t enough to disguise the pain that was hiding in the depths of his eyes. I’d seen it there before and I knew it instantly now. “Or is that enough to convince you to leave?”

“Nothing you could do would convince me to stay away.” The way he rolled his eyes told me he thought otherwise, but I let it go and continued on. “Do you know what I was like before I met you? You have made me feel more alive in the past week than I’ve felt in months! Do you think I want you because you’re perfect? You’re as broken as I am, Levi. I don’t want someone who’s always happy. I want ups and downs. I want to fight with you so we can make up after. I want to work on
us. I want there to be an us.”

“Then why didn’t you just ask for that when I promised you something?” he snapped, his tone bordering on offended.

I blinked slowly, staring at him with confusion written across my features. It wasn’t as if the idea hadn’t occurred to me. Back when he had offered me anything in exchange for my help with Erwin, the thought had crossed my mind. I couldn’t lie that he was the thing I wanted most, but I didn’t want him that way. I would fight tooth and nail to have him, but I wouldn’t have a relationship with him simply because I won it in a bet. Nothing about that would have been real.

“Because if you’re with me it has to be because it’s what you want.” There was no other way to say it. At the core of it all, regardless what we did in the bedroom or at The Wall, I wanted our relationship to be mutual.

“And what about what you want?” Levi kept the biting tone in his voice, but I could tell by his expression that my response had rattled his nerves. He wasn’t expecting me to be so blunt, but where had the lies gotten us?

“You know exactly what I want.”

“Yea, I think I do. And I think you’re a fucking shithead for wanting it.” Levi’s eyes narrowed slightly as he scrutinized my expression. “What if I told you I don’t want you? What if you’re just wasting your time here?”

“You’d be lying.” The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them and his eyebrows shot up in surprise. I hadn’t realized the thought was so powerful in my mind, but now that the words had come out I knew I believed them. He wanted me. Everything he had done yesterday had assured me of that fact.

“Maybe I would be,” he mused as his expression returned to its normal state of impassiveness. My heart seized at the words and I was desperate to hear more, but the tone of his voice made it clear that the subject had changed, “So what do I have to say to get off this floor?”

“Why did you want me to stay?” I launched into the question before my mind could linger on his previous statement. “Why did you ask me not to go?”

“Because maybe the idea of his hands on you makes my skin crawl,” he murmured. His interests had returned to his fingers, which were once again trailing lazily across my chest.

“Yea, I kind of got that feeling when you killed the coffee cup yesterday,” I spoke as I watched his expression. What was the point of all this if Erwin couldn’t even put his hands on me? It was hard to seduce and incriminate a man you couldn’t even touch. “Do you still want me to do this for you?”

“I don’t know what the fuck I want.” The snappish tone had returned to his voice and his hand stilled on his chest as he stared up at me. “Before you, getting revenge on him was the most important thing to me. And honestly, it’s still pretty fucking important but if it means losing you, I don’t know if I want it anymore.”

I had heard those words in a dream earlier today, and the ending of that conversation had ripped my heart out. “I already told you that you’re not going to lose me.”

“You’re saying that now, but he can be pretty damn convincing when he needs to be.” Levi’s voice had grown cold, and there was an edge to it that made my heart sink. “It’s hard not to fall for him. Trust me, I speak from personal experience. It might be just a game to you now, but eventually
“You’re going to fall for—”

“You!” I cut him off, refusing to let him finish the thought, “I’ve fallen for you! Isn’t that obvious? What the hell do I have to do, carve it into your wall?”

“How did he taste?” Levi deadpanned, his eyes as icy as his tone. He had asked me that yesterday and it had all blown up from there. “Did you like it? When he kissed you, did you like it?”

“It wouldn’t even matter if I did,” I snapped, “His lips aren’t yours.”

“So it meant nothing?”

“Nothing.” I repeated the word for him, holding his stare. I hadn’t expected Levi to show the jealousy or insecurity, and the fact that he was actually opening up made me want to reassure him in every way I could. “I don’t want to do any of this, Levi. I’m not interested in him. He could kiss me every day for the rest of my life and it wouldn’t make a difference. I’m doing this for you. That is the only reason I’m doing any of it.”

“It’ll never work that way,” Levi said simply, tilting his head as he stared down at me, “Erwin will figure out what you’re doing if you don’t let him get close.”

I wasn’t going to mention that he already had. Now didn’t seem like the right time, and I still wasn’t sure how quickly things could fall apart. I was closer with Levi now than I had been, but that didn’t mean things wouldn’t crumble once he had no use for me. Although I knew Levi cared for me in some way, I didn’t know how deep his emotions ran or how long they would last.

“I was convincing enough to get him to kiss me.”

Levi’s expression darkened, “Yes, you were.”

“If you don’t want me to continue this, then say so.” I knew I shouldn’t push, but I couldn’t help the thoughts that were running through my mind, “I don’t think he knows how much he hurt you. Maybe if you talked to him about it…”

“Don’t you think I’ve tried that?” he cut in, “I didn’t turn on him right away, if that’s what you’re thinking. I didn’t want to believe that he’d purposely hurt me, but that’s what happened. If he told you otherwise, then you’re just letting him manipulate you. Trust me, he’s a master at it. It’s hard to see through his lies.”

If everything Erwin had said the day before was nothing more than a lie, it truly was a convincing one.

“Then I don’t know what you want. Every time I actually make a move on him, you flip out. How am I supposed to do anything if you get angry at me for it?”

“I’ll learn to control myself.” Levi held my gaze and a small smirk curved his lips. He was trying to make light of the situation and hide his emotions in doing so. “I just don’t like knowing that my pet might decide to stay in the neighbor’s yard.”

“Then I’ll come home.” I searched his eyes as I said the words. He was trying to hide behind the wall he had put up between us, but there were cracks in it now. I was gradually starting to see the man inside. “If that’s what you’re worried about, then I’ll come back to you every time. Hell, you can put a collar on me for all I care if it helps you know I’m yours.”

“That you’re mine, huh?”
I felt my cheeks heat up as blood rushed into them, staining them somewhere along the lines of a fully embarrassed crimson. I hadn’t meant to say it quite like that, but since I was already being so candid with him it wasn’t truly a mistake. It certainly wasn’t far from the truth. “Well, I am your pet, right?”

“Yea, you are,” he said through a small smirk, and this time it was genuine. I didn’t stop him when he stood up, taking a moment to admire his body as he held his arms above his head and arched his back in an elegant stretch. He turned his gaze back to me, the small curve still on his lips, “I might take you up on that collar offer.”

I sat up and then pushed up off of the floor. I hadn’t noticed how uncomfortable the hard marble was until I was free of it. “So we’re going to continue this then?”

He paused, staring off in the direction of a closed door towards the back corner of the room. “I think we’re in too deep to stop now.”

As much as I hated to admit it, I knew he was right. “Well, in that case, I know what it is I want.”

“Oh yea?” He snatched up his shirt and pants and then returned his gaze to mine. “And what’s that, kid?”

“I want you to open up to me.”

“I let you fuck me up the ass,” he gestured at the floor, “I’d say that was opening up enough.”

“I’m serious,” I continued, not about to be thrown off the topic by his humor. I’d never noticed it before, but he was good at using jokes to disguise real emotions or to avoid difficult subjects. “I’m not going to ask you to be with me, because that’s something I want you to decide on your own. But if you’re going to owe me anything, then that’s what I want. I want you to open up. I want you to tell me what you’re feeling and why. That’s all I want.”

Levi stared at me for a long moment, regarding my expression before he let out a rough sigh. He held up one finger and then suddenly turned and walked into his bedroom. I stood there awkwardly, moving just enough to step onto the carpet of the living room. The chill of the marble had finally leaked into my skin and driven all the heat away. I was considering stealing the blue blanket on the back of his grey couch when he came walking back into the room. He came to a stop in front of me and held out an elegant brass key.

“Here.”

“What is this for?” I took the key from him, turning it around in my hand. It had a small diamond shaped handle with rounded edges. I half expected him to tell me this was the key to my brand new collar, but what he said confused me even more.

“A room,” he angled his head towards the door he had stared at before, “No one’s ever been in there except for me. Not even Erwin.”

I stared at the key, confusion furrowing my brow. “Why are you giving me this?”

“Because you want me to let you in.” Levi stared at the key for a moment before folding the clothes over his arm, “I’m gonna get a shower now. Take your time looking around, since I’ll probably be rubbing this shitty cologne off my skin for the next two hours.”

I watched him disappear into the bathroom, waiting for the door to close before I turned to pick my pants up off the floor. I pulled them on and reached for my shirt, pausing when I realized that it was a
few sizes too small. I stared at the black fabric and glanced in the direction of the bathroom, feeling my cheeks heat. Levi had grabbed my shirt by accident, and if he came out wearing it I wasn’t sure I would be able to handle the sight. At the very least, I would die happy.

After I set his shirt on the back of his couch, I took as much time as I could and walked around the other rooms of the house despite the fact that I had seen most of them two days before. Every inch of me was screaming to go into the locked room, but at the same time I didn’t want to seem too eager. Well, that was part of the reason. Another part of me was worried to see what I would find once I was in there. What was in that room waiting for me? My wandering mind teased me with everything from a kinky sex room to a bizarre collection of spoons.

“Damn it,” I muttered under my breath, pushing the key into the lock and turned it until I heard a soft click. I opened the door and stepped inside before I could convince myself otherwise, and all the breath rushed out of my lungs.

The room was more alive than his entire apartment, and it was painted in the same warm shades that I had found back in Erwin’s home. The walls were a warm golden hue and filled me with warmth despite the cold December chill outside. Two of the walls were made almost entirely of glass and lead out to two separate balconies that had ivy wrapped around their white metal bars. Long, flowing drapes outlined the balconies in a color that was too bright to be red and yet too dark to be pink. That same shade was reflected in all the accents of the room, including a velvet table runner that was spread across a white grand piano.

There were potted flowers on the floor and across the tables, boasting an array of colors from soft yellows to sharp pinks. Amidst all the tables and plants, there was a white chaise with a gold blanket draped casually over the top. The walls were lined with paintings and each one had the same subject: his mother. Her vivacious expression filled the room with more life than all the other items combined, until her smile was the only thing that I could see. It was exactly like his smile, in the brief moments that I had truly seen it.

I couldn’t breathe. I hadn’t taken a breath since entering the room and now I was almost positive I wouldn’t ever be able to again. The emotions were coursing through me so strongly that I couldn’t do anything other than stand in place and tremble. I had asked him to open up to me and while I had hoped that he would try to on some level, I had never expected this. He had just willingly given me the key to the most important part of his life, something that he had kept secret from everyone else. I had asked him to let me in, but he had done so much more than that. What would I even be able to say after this?

I stepped up to the largest portrait, staring up at the woman that Levi had lost at such a young age. She was wearing a beautiful cream-colored scarf, the one she had on in every photo and painting I had seen her in. Her eyes were like Levi’s, but unguarded and filled with more joy than I had ever seen in his. I put a hand over my mouth to suppress the sound that wanted to come out, feeling a pain tightening in my chest. The room was so well kept that it was obvious he came in here often. He was still hurting so deeply over her loss, even to this day.

“I grabbed the wrong shirt.”

I spun around to find Levi leaning against the doorframe, wearing his black slacks and my shirt. The buttons had been ripped off before, so it hung open now and revealed the perfect muscles of his chest and abdomen. He hadn’t bothered to push up the sleeves, so the fabric hung loose past his fingertips and hid his hands entirely. I would have had no hope of forming words regardless, but after seeing this room and being swept up in the emotions of what he had given me, I was hopeless. I was torn somewhere between agony and hardcore arousal, and my body wasn’t sure which it wanted to
express.

“Are you crying?” Levi’s brow suddenly furrowed and he glanced down at himself. “Well, I didn’t think it looked that bad, but maybe you’re right.”

“No! No, you look… amazing,” I breathed the last word in a huskier voice than I intended and had to clear my throat before continuing. “I didn’t realize I was crying. I just…”

I stopped myself and looked around the room, trying to find a way to express how I was feeling. “Thank you.”

Levi opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Finally he just shook his head and shrugged. “You asked me to let you in. And honestly, kid, I’m not good with words. It’s not like I was the one with the share bear expressing all his fucking feelings in morning circle. If you want to get to know me, this is the way to do it. I was only ever myself around her, and it was so long ago that I’m pretty damn sure that person went when she did.”

I was positive that person was still very much alive and talking to me right now, but I didn’t want to throw him off by saying that. Instead I turned my attention back to the room, “The colors don’t seem like you.”

“They’re not,” Levi’s voice had a lilt of amusement to it. He walked over to stand beside me, looking around the space as well. “They were all her favorite colors. Actually, this room is exactly like the day room she had in our old home.”

“You had a piano?”

“A white one just like it,” he replied as he ran his finger along the glossy surface. “She loved to play, and she taught me how to as well. Every night she would play the same song and ask me to sing with her. I guess it was a lullaby of sorts.”

I watched him touch the keys, and a distant look entered his eyes and broke my heart. I looked back up at the portrait that hung over the piano, and realized it looked as though she were standing right beside him.

“She really loved that scarf.”

Levi’s expression darkened slightly and he nodded once, stepping away from the piano. “It was a gift from her first love. He died before they could get married and she met my father shortly after, but I don’t think her heart ever moved on. My father hated that scarf. It’s probably one of the reasons he burnt it after she died.”

It was hard to ignore the venom in his words, although his malice was completely justified. It had been such an important item from her life, and an even more important keepsake for Levi after she had passed.

“I know you want to get revenge for him,” I turned my gaze to Levi, “But your dad was a complete asshole for doing that to you.”

“The revenge isn’t for him,” Levi said simply and then paused, his brow furrowing. He dug his phone out of his pocket, tapped the screen and held it to his ear. “Hanji? What do you mean you’re coming up? Now? I have company. Oh, bite me, glasses! Yes, I have company. What? Tch… fine, fine. Okay. Yea, I’ll make sure you can get up.”

Levi hit the end button on his screen and pointed at the door. “Out and lock up.”
I walked out of the room and turned the key to slide the lock back in place as I glanced over at him, “Hanji’s here?”

“And Petra. We’re having Chinese, apparently.”

As much as I wanted to stay, it was probably better for me to find a change of clothes before I had to get Armin from work. I still had his car and I knew he wouldn’t appreciate walking. I followed Levi to the elevator and watched him tap a few buttons that must have been some type of security code.

“Can I see you later?”

“Later?” Levi turned to me and cocked one eyebrow, “I’m sorry, clearly we’ve had a miscommunication. When I said we’re having Chinese food, I meant you and me.” You and me.

There went my heart, beating away like the happy drummer boy.

I still had some time before I would officially have to pick up Armin, and suddenly I didn’t care if I had to do so shirtless.

“Okay,” I tried not to stammer, but I was certain I failed.

“Go get out some plates,” Levi hid a smirk as he gestured to the cabinets, “Otherwise Hanji will be spilling food all over my couch and carpet.”

I crossed the room to the kitchen, chewing my lower lip as I pulled open a few doors in search of the plates. I almost wondered why he didn’t just do it himself, but there was something about being able to move around his kitchen like I belonged there that thrilled me. It was like I was discovering the nooks and crannies of a new home and finding my place. Maybe he was purposely having me familiarize myself with his home. Maybe he wanted me to belong there, too.

“Levi! Here we are to cheer you up!” The sing-song voice rang through the calm air of the apartment, shattering the comfortable silence. Hanji was bounding into the foyer, her arms filled with a big brown bag of food. “And we’ve got comfort food! Now you can stop moping over that pretty boy!”

“Hanji,” Petra eyed me as she stepped out of the elevator, placing her hand on the other woman’s shoulder to draw her attention. “I actually don’t think that’s going to be necessary.”

Hanji blinked, looking at Petra and then following her gaze to me. Her entire expression lit up like the sun, and she shoved the food into Levi’s arms before bounding in my direction, “Eren! I thought Levi was kidding when he said he had company! You’re really—”

She jerked to a stop and pointed at my chest, “Why are you shirtless?”

“Uhm…” I glanced over her shoulder at Levi, wondering how much I should say. He shrugged his response, either not willing to help me or not caring what I said.

Hanji read the clues a little too quickly and gasped, hands over her mouth for a moment before she squealed. “Did you do the do?”

“Do the… what?” Levi’s voice had a hint of annoyance as he pushed the brown bag onto the kitchen island. “Sometimes I don’t even think you hear yourself speak. Who the hell says things like that?”

“Today’s youth!” Hanji said with a wide grin, “And you should know the phrases if you’re going to
fool around with one of them.”

Levi rolled his eyes and busied himself with helping Petra remove the contents from the paper bag. Petra had a small smile on her face, clearly enjoying the little back and forth that was going on. Although she had already seemed reserved in the club, she was even softer outside of it. She had her blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail and she was wearing a blue and white plaid shirt with jeans. It was amazing how casual and comfortable she looked, and it was almost hard to recall what she had looked like in the tight corset.

Hanji, on the other hand, had such a bold personality in and out of the club that I couldn’t even be shocked with her change in appearance. She had on a black tank top and a forest green jacket that came down to mid thigh, fur decorating the collar. It was casual for her, and her glasses had changed to regular black frames to match the look.

“So, did you bust a nut in Jaeger’s butt?”

I almost dropped the plates on the floor, stumbling and just barely managing to place them on the counter.

“Kind of the other way around, actually,” Levi replied simply, opening one of the containers. He snatched a plate from me and flashed me a small, amused smirk. He had noticed my fumble.

“Oh ho!” Hanji’s elbow nudged into my side as she wagged her eyebrows at me, “Didn’t know you had it in you, kid.”

I don’t think I could have blushed a deeper shade of red if I tried. I groaned and rested my head in my hands, my elbows propped up on the counter. I hadn’t planned to discuss my first time so soon, and definitely not with two girls I barely knew. I was having a hard enough time deciding how I was going to bring it up with Armin.

“Don’t be embarrassed,” Petra smiled as she placed a plate of food in front of me. Then she looked to Hanji, a chiding tone in her voice. “You shouldn’t tease him like that after his first time. I’m sure he doesn’t want to talk about it right now. At least not with us.”

“See, this is why you make such a good teacher,” Levi noted, winding a few noodles around his fork, “You’ve got the whole lecturing thing down.”

Hanji let out a sigh and leaned against the kitchen island, “She’s always lecturing me. You’d think she’s the mistress.”

“Only sometimes,” Petra replied with a small smile, pouring herself a glass of water before taking a sip.

I paused between bites, glancing back and forth from Petra to Hanji. “Are you… are you two…”

Hanji barked out a laugh, hitting me on the back and making me grateful I had just swallowed. “Oh, Eren, you crack me up!”

“So,” Petra took a seat at one of the stools and turned her attention to Levi, “Your birthday’s this month.”

“And that’s supposed to be exciting because?” Levi raised one eyebrow before popping some noodles into his mouth.

“Because you were born!” Hanji grinned, plopping down on the stool between Levi and Petra. “And
we want to celebrate that in style. You’re turning twenty-five this year! And you were born on the twenty-fifth! It’s a special day.”

Levi rolled his eyes as he took a sip of water. After he set his glass down, he waved his hand dismissively, “Do whatever you want. The two of you always do, anyway. Just nothing too flashy.”

“We’ll keep it all within your tastes,” Hanji smiled at him, and I had to admire how easily the two of them fit together. Even when she was bouncing around, she showed an air of respect and kindness towards him. She knew his boundaries and even though it might not look like it, she was careful not to go outside of his comfort zone.

“So, Eren, are you busy?” Petra glanced in my direction. “I know you have off for Christmas, but sometimes we celebrate his birthday on a different day.”

I opened my mouth to say that I might have work, but then I realized that I no longer had the internship to go to. Not after today. “Well, considering I was just fired, my schedule is pretty free.”

Levi’s fork clattered onto his plate and his eyes snapped to mine. “You were what?”

“Mike fired me before work started today,” I muttered, suddenly feeling a little embarrassed. I had ignored the little detail up until now, but it hadn’t been on purpose.

“And why the hell would he do that? What the fuck did you do, brat?”

Clearly it was no question of whether or not it had been my fault. I might have even felt a little offended by that if it weren’t actually my fault. Of course, I wasn’t known for keeping my temper in check, so I couldn’t blame Levi for assuming I was in the wrong.

“I kind of punched Jean in the parking lot,” I shrugged and looked, suddenly very interested in wrapping the noodles around my fork. “And I might have also screamed at Erwin that I didn’t care about the fucking internship.”

Levi groaned and set his head in his hands, “What the hell am I going to with you?”

“Why did you punch someone?” Hanji asked, her eyes far more curious than concerned.

“Because he cheated on Armin.” I only realized after that she had no idea who that was. “My best friend.”

“Oh, so you were defending his honor!”

“I… uh, yea? I guess it was something like that.” I shrugged and then glanced over to Levi, who had lowered his hands back to the counter and was now staring at me.

“And let me guess, Erwin swooped in and carried the boy off to his office?”

My face paled and I jumped up from my seat. How had I forgotten that happened? In the midst of all the anger, sex, and emotions, I had completely forgotten Armin was in Erwin’s office, alone.

“Shit!” I cursed and moved away from the counter to grab my shoes, “Shit, I have to go!”

Levi regarded me from the kitchen, watching me jump around on one foot as I pulled on my shoes. “And do what? Harass the guard until he lets you in?”

“Yes!” I stumbled but quickly righted myself to put on the other shoe, “No! I don’t know!”
“Well, aren’t you a big bundle of indecision,” Levi sighed and pushed away from the kitchen counter, pulling off my shirt as he walked over to the couch to retrieve his. “Hanji, I’ll be back whenever this gets sorted out. Feel free to stay if you want to wait.”

“Right-o, chief!” Hanji gave a little salute and then crunched into her egg roll.

“Come on,” Levi said to me as he pushed the button for the elevator. He took a moment to glance at my shirtless chest and a small smirk twitched on his lips, “We’ll stop at your floor so you can at least get a shirt on. It won’t be easy convincing Mike that you’re getting your job back if you walk in half naked.”

“I’m getting my job back?” I asked, surprise in my voice.

“I’m the son of the owner and vice president of the company,” Levi rolled his eyes and stepped into the elevator, “If I can’t at least get your job back, then what power do I have?”

It was a fair point.

We rode the elevator down in the most comfortable silence I had ever been in, despite the fact I was fidgeting the entire time. He waited outside of my apartment as I snuck in to change into a brown button down. My mom was either out or fast asleep, because she didn’t so much as poke her head out of her room. When I stepped out of the apartment, Levi looked me over with an appreciative stare.

“That’s a nice color on you, actually. Maybe there’s hope for you yet.”

I returned to fidgeting as soon as we were back in the elevator, staring at the floor number and urging it to go faster. I could only imagine what might have happened in Erwin’s office, and every image my mind conjured left me either sick or reeling with anger.

“Calm down.” Levi glanced over at me, eyeing my hands as my fingers drummed together. “Trust me, Erwin’s not going to pound your friend into his desk on the first day. He might be incredibly interested in Armin, but he’s not about to terrify the kid by whipping his dick out as soon as he has him alone. He might be a fucking pervert, but he still has some degree of class.”

I chewed my lower lip and continued to stare at the numbers, “What if Armin is different?”

“He’s not, don’t worry. Hey.” Levi pressed his thumb to my lower lip and freed it from my teeth. “Seriously, calm the fuck down. I don’t need you rushing into the office like some raging bull. That’s not going to solve anything. Use your brain and think a little, okay?”

I nodded stiffly and then sighed, relaxing. “I know. It’s just been a hard day for Armin and I know he doesn’t need anything else piled on him. I’m just worried.”

The elevators gave a happy ding and I moved out of them to walk across the foyer. Levi easily kept up as if I was moving at a snail’s pace, and we were both hopping into the car a moment later. He buckled in and glanced over at me, clearly searching my expression for any indication that I was about to snap. That probably would have been a valid concern if he hadn’t managed to calm me down before. I was still worried, of course, but his words had managed to clear my mind in a way that I wouldn’t have been able to alone.

“I’m fine,” I reassured him, slowly pulling off into traffic.

“Just don’t kill us on the way there,” he joked, but he was still eyeing my expression. “I’d like to get at least one chance at pounding your ass before I die.”
I managed to keep my hands steady on the wheel despite the shiver that pushed its way through my body. I cleared my throat and kept my eyes on the road. “Well, I wouldn’t have work to go to in the morning if you didn’t get me my job back.”

“As much as I would love to spend tonight in you, that’s not going to happen,” Levi spoke through a short laugh and leaned back in his seat, “Believe it or not, the internship does fucking matter, even though you think it doesn’t. You’re getting your job back.”

There was a finality in his voice that I couldn’t argue with. It was true that I didn’t think the internship mattered at all. I didn’t know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, but I was certain that this little gig wouldn’t help me get to where I wanted to be. Still, this place had more to offer me than whatever experience they claimed I was getting. It had Levi and Armin, and both of them were enough to make me come in the next day. Even if I wasn’t sure where I stood with Levi now, I looked forward to spending the day in the same building as him.

“So,” I hedged, chancing a glance in Levi’s direction. He had been staring out the window, but he looked at me now. “What are we?”

“Fuck if I know,” Levi shrugged, but there was a small smirk on his lips that made my heart skip, “But I hate the idea of not being around you, and I’ve never felt that way before. So you can decide what that means and take it from there.”

I felt my cheeks flush and fell silent. I was sure he wasn’t looking for an answer right now, even if I wanted to give it to him. Still, this wasn’t the place and we didn’t have the time now that I had pulled up to Survey Corporation. Levi opened his door and paused to look at me.

“You’ll have to wait here. I’ll explain everything to Mike and get Armin out early today,” Levi glanced around the car and then back at me with a playfulness in his eyes that I wasn’t used to. “Try not to punch anyone while I’m gone.”

I leaned back in my seat as I watched him walk away from the car, my heart still racing from his earlier comment. In his own way, Levi had told me that I could have a place in his life if I wanted it. It wasn’t even really a question of whether or not I wanted to be with him, but suddenly I felt the need to show him rather than simply blurt out the words. Of course, I had no idea how I would be able to manage something like that without messing it up, but I was going to try. If nothing else, I would have Armin to turn to. He always knew the best way to approach a situation, and I had been dying to talk to him about Levi.

The door opening beside me had me jumping out of my seat, and I turned to stare at Levi only to find that he was alone. Not only was he alone but he also looked wary, as if he were waiting for me to explode at any moment. “Where’s Armin?”

“You’re really not going to like this.” Levi paused and then sighed, glancing once in the direction of the building and then back to me. “Maybe I don’t know the asshole as well as I thought.”

“What do you mean?”

“He took Armin home with him.” Levi replied, watching my eyes widen. “They’ve been gone for an hour now.”
Armin's Aside

Chapter Notes

I'm not really counting this as Chapter 19, because it's entirely in Armin's POV and the main story is pretty much from Eren's POV (although Levi does get a few POVs as well). However, this piece ended up being much longer than I expected it to be, so I decided to include it as an actual update rather than just as a tumblr post or even as the start to Chapter 19.

So... yep, this chapter update is all about Armin and Erwin and what happens between Chapters 18 and 19. I know some of you aren't too keen on the whole Winmin ship, but that is one of the potential ships of this story so hopefully you'll still enjoy the update.

Oh! And just a quick mention... epicmonkeyturd on tumblr drew a picture of Eren in the Shopping Diva shirt and it is just... AMAZING! Actually, there's been a few awesome drawings added (all under the tag: Intern Art), so you should definitely check it out if you want to see!

Again, thank you all so much for your comments - you're all so amazing! Which is honestly part of the reason I wrote 4000+ words in Armin's POV when I should probably be studying! XD But I hope you all enjoy the surprise update - there will still be one on Thursday, too.

ENJOY!

Armin

The internship had been a constant thought in my mind for the past year, and more than once I had found myself going over all the possibilities that could open up to me. It wasn’t just a resume builder, although a recommendation from Survey Corp would go a long way in the fields I happened to be interested in. It was just so much more than that; it was a chance for me to do something other than intellectual work, which had always been my strong suit. Jean was interested sports, and Connie and Sasha had chorus and drama together. Mikasa was an incredible artist and head of the field hockey team, or at least she was when she was still attending school. With the exception of Eren, all of my friends were involved in activities outside of the academic field and I felt left out. I wanted to have an experience that I wasn’t getting from inside my books. I wanted to enter into something that I wasn’t entirely familiar with; something I could possibly fail at. Although, as arrogant as it might sound, I never actually expected to fail.

Of course, I also never expected to be invited to the president’s private apartment.

I stared around the immaculate space, feeling like an awkward smudge in an otherwise beautiful oil painting. It shouldn’t have mattered to me at all, but I was suddenly very aware that I was wearing an oversized, frumpy sweater. Of all days, I had to pick this one to dress down. I had been doing so well up until today; I had even surprised myself with the sense of fashion I seemed to have. Jean had said that I was a natural.

I rubbed at my chest as the name passed through my mind, my heart straining with a pain that had yet
to fade. Of course, I was sure it would be a long time until I felt no pain at all. I wasn’t even able to look at him without feeling my stomach twisting into uncomfortable knots.

Why had he done that to me? Why wasn’t I enough?

I shook my head and closed my eyes, willing the thoughts away. It was those same thoughts that had upset Eren so much earlier today. I knew beyond a doubt that my tears had been the catalyst in their fight, and I had already promised myself that I wouldn’t cry again. Eren might be out of the internship because of me and even if he didn’t care about that, I did.

Which was why I was here. Well, that and the fact that I couldn’t refuse the chance to go to the president’s apartment. When he had invited me for lunch, my mouth had answered for me and blurted out yes. I knew, of course, that his real reason for bringing me to his apartment was to talk about the fight. The only detail I’d given so far was that Jean had upset me that morning, and I was positive that Erwin didn’t believe it was as simple as that.

“So, what do we want?” Erwin spoke from his place in the kitchen. His large, muscular body was leaned casually over the marble countertop where he rested his forearms. His blue eyes were lingering on me in a way that made my body heat up, although I had no idea why. Even if I had been dressed well today, I was sure this powerful and intelligent man had better conquests to set his eyes on.

“I still don’t have much of an appetite,” I admitted, holding a hand against my stomach. All of the events had left me feeling sick, and I wasn’t sure I would be able to keep much down. “So whatever you-”

“How about soup?” Erwin smiled and turned towards the cabinets, popping one open and snatching a can from the top shelf. He didn’t even have to stretch to reach. “Something light. At least until you feel like you can handle more.”

“Are you sure that’ll be enough for you?”

“I had a big breakfast, and I happen to love tomato soup.”

He poured the contents of the can into a pot and set it on the stove. The smile was still on his face, infectious enough that I almost found myself doing the same. As stupid as it sounded, it felt as if he were actually happy to have me here. I was full of myself, of course. He was looking for information on two of his employees, and a comfortable lunch was an easy way to get someone to open up.

I sighed and turned towards the living room, taking a seat on the beautiful plush couch. His mantel was lined with the smiling faces of his family. I read about them before officially joining the internship, and I hadn’t been surprised to find that Erwin was a family man. He seemed like the type to have a perfect home life in addition to a successful and wealthy work life.

“You have a beautiful family.”

“Had.”

I turned towards him, my brow furrowed in confusion. He was staring at me with an expression that clearly said he hadn’t meant to reveal that little detail. His jaw tightened slightly and he looked down at the pot, stirring the contents.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to say that.” He kept his eyes from mine, his gaze still on the work at hand. “No one knows about the separation yet, and until things are settled I would appreciate it if-”
“I won’t tell anyone,” I cut in.

He glanced up and stared at me for a long moment before his expression suddenly smoothed back into its previous relaxed state. I had to wonder if the happiness he’d shown me up until now had actually been shield covering the man I had just been allowed to see. I almost wanted to bring it up and tell him there was no need or sense in hiding. Once I managed to figure someone out, I was usually able to predict what they were thinking and planning. I actually just preferred people to be honest with me, even if the truth hurt. It saved me the trouble of bringing up the obvious myself, because doing so had never earned me any friends. People hated it when you said the things they didn’t want anyone to know.

“You know what goes amazing with tomato soup?” Erwin broke the silence as he turned towards the cupboard and snatched up a loaf of bread. “Grilled cheese. Do you want some?”

My stomach decided that it was suddenly the perfect moment to let out a loud growl, and I knew by the amused look that crossed Erwin’s face that the sound had been loud enough to travel.

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

I felt the blood rush into my cheeks as mortification set in, and the embarrassment only continued to grow when Erwin started to chuckle. I fidgeted with my hands in my lap, determined to keep my attention directed anywhere but at him. I wanted to use this chance to impress him, but somehow I had managed to do nothing other than look like a child. I was in frumpy sweater with a growling stomach and tear stains on my cheeks. There was nothing impressive about me, and I was sure he could see that.

“So, how are you enjoying the internship?” His voice broke the silence once more as I heard the crackle of butter hitting the hot pan. The delicious smells of bread and cheese melting together filled the air moments after, and I dared my stomach to growl again.

“You already asked that,” I pointed out, still looking around the room. He had asked me in his office; back when his probing for information had turned into idle chitchat. I could only assume this meant that he was once again building up to the question about my relationship.

“Oh, I know I did.” The smile in his voice drew my gaze back to him and I found him staring at me, his blue eyes filled with a knowing intelligence. “But not everyone is willing to tell the truth in the president’s office.”

“And they’re more willing to do so in his apartment?”

His eyebrows rose slightly and a smile crossed his lips. “Touché. It’s just that most people seem to be more willing to open up when inside a private atmosphere.”

“I’m not most people,” I shrugged, although I could see his point. There was an expectation in the work place that faded when one stepped outside of company doors.

“I know you’re not,” Erwin murmured, and the deep rumble of his voice stirred an unfamiliar sensation in the lower half of my body that had me worrying that my stomach was about to growl again. But it wasn’t my stomach. For some reason he was able to light a fire in me with just his words, and he had been doing so all day. I was almost convinced he was aware of it by now.

I brushed off the feeling and tried to take in a deep breath without having it tremble on the way in. I nearly succeeded, too. “I don’t really like to lie unless it’s absolutely necessary. There’s a lot to be said for the truth.”
“But you think lying can be necessary?” His tone was bordering on amused as he flipped the sandwich in the pan and pressed it down with the spatula. “You think people need to lie?”

“In order to get what they want,” I shrugged, watching his expression carefully. “I think everyone lies. Sometimes we just have to sacrifice the truth in order to accomplish our goals.”

He stared at me with eyes so intense that I felt the heat rising in me once more. My cheeks heated as well and I looked away from him, determined to stare anywhere else. I wasn’t ready to face his eyes just yet. The powerful, intelligent blue gaze unnerved me in a way that no other’s ever had. He made my mind enter a hazy state that I wasn’t entirely comfortable with, and he did it so easily that it terrified me.

In my attempt to look at anything other than the man who was staring intently at me, my eyes stilled on a massive antique map and my breath caught in my throat. How had I not seen that before? I moved off of the couch, crossing the room towards it without bothering to think about how it must have been rude to walk so freely around such an unfamiliar place. But I couldn’t care about that right now. This had caught my attention to the point that I couldn’t stay away. Of course, maps and travel had always done that to me.

“This is beautiful,” I stared at the edges, finding them frayed with age. It was old. “Is this original?”

“Orbis Terrae Novissima Descriptio.” His tongue moved over the foreign language like it was an old friend, and he came to a stop at my side with a plate of the grilled cheese in his hand. “It was made by Jean Le Clerc. Back in the 1600s.”

I shook my head slowly, awe settling in as I leaned closer to drink in the details. This had probably cost him thousands, if not more. “It’s so old…”

“I didn’t know you had an interest in maps.”

“Maps… history… travel…” I turned to smile up at him. He had found a subject near and dear to my heart. “I love learning everything I can about the world. It’s my goal to see it all someday.”

“Then that’s one goal we share,” he smiled, and this time it looked real. He wasn’t hiding behind this one; he was truly as happy to talk about this as I was.

“It’s probably easier for you to accomplish,” I said as I looked back at the map. He had probably already seen so much of it, and I had barely traveled outside of the U.S. “You have a private jet, right? You could probably take a year off and see everything, if you really wanted to.”

“I wouldn’t want to see it alone.” Erwin glanced at me and then shrugged, walking towards the couch, “My wife never had an interest in traveling, and I was with her so long that I’ve barely had time to see the world.”

“Well, maybe now you can.”

“Maybe. After I find someone interested in joining me.” The words were so pointed that I had no hope of missing them, and the smile that crossed his lips made it obvious that he knew I understood. I had the feeling that I was quickly entering dangerous territory, but I couldn’t convince myself to turn away.

I picked up my sandwich as I took a seat beside him, breaking it in half and watching the cheese stretch apart. Once again my stomach let out a noisy rumble, and I bit into the sandwich with the hope of finally shutting it up. It was strange how quickly things had changed and how easily I had begun to relax. When had my appetite returned? When had I stopped worrying about everything else...
that had happened today?

Well, almost everything. Jean was still an annoying thought eating at the back of my mind, but it
wasn’t exactly for a logical reason. Sure, I was still angry that he had betrayed my trust and ruined
our relationship, but my real anger stemmed from the fact that he had cost Eren the internship. Even
if Eren wasn’t interested in the job itself, I knew there was a reason he was staying now and it wasn’t
for me. He wouldn’t fully admit it, but I knew he had fallen for Levi. Losing the internship wasn’t
going to help Eren get any closer to him.

“Are you going to fire Eren?” I kept my stare on the sandwich in my hands, breaking off a smaller
piece but not putting it in my mouth. Suddenly I was losing my appetite again.

“What?” Erwin swallowed a bite of his sandwich and then laughed, shaking his head and setting the
plate on the table. “No, I was never planning to. I probably should and I’m sure Mike is going to
push for it, but I’m not going to fire Eren.”

My brow furrowed with confusion and I turned my eyes up to him. He had every reason in the world
to fire Eren, and I had the distinct feeling that he wasn’t just letting him off the hook because he was
an understanding kind of guy. Erwin seemed like the type to remove people who caused problems,
and Eren certainly had.

“Why not?”

“Do you want me to?” Erwin asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“N-No!” I dropped my sandwich as I held up my hands, my eyes widening.

He blinked at me and then laughed, “You look like I just asked if you wanted him executed. Do you
really think he finds this internship that important?”

“Well,” I hedged. I didn’t want to give away too much, but at the same time I didn’t want to make it
sound like Eren didn’t care at all, “He does. Just not for the same reasons I do.”

“I see…” Erwin nodded and then relaxed against the couch, resting one arm along the back. “Well,
either way I’m not going to fire him. He may have a hot head on those shoulders of his, but he seems
like a good kid. Besides, he was defending you, wasn’t he?”

I should have known he was going to lead our conversation back there. I popped a piece of the
sandwich in my mouth, chewing carefully and taking my time to consider my answer. It was obvious
that Eren had been defending me, and Erwin was clearly determined to find out why. Of course, the
only reason I had been prepared to tell him was to ensure that Eren kept his job. Was there even a
point in saying anything more now that I knew Eren wasn’t at risk?

“He was,” I shrugged, deciding to leave it at that unless he pushed for more.

And he did. Of course he did.

“And why was he doing that? What did Jean do to upset you?” Erwin leaned forward now, his arm
sliding against the back of the couch until his hand was resting just behind my head. I could have
sworn I felt the heat of it there, even if I couldn’t see it. Suddenly there were chills running through
my body.

“He…” I trailed off, my mind screaming at me. There was no reason Erwin needed to know about
this, and more importantly no reason I should want to tell him. It was personal and we worked
together. He was my boss, not someone for me to confide in when I was in pain. And yet…
“He what?” Erwin pressed as he leaned closer. I could feel the heat of his chest near my shoulder, and suddenly I found it hard to breathe. What was he doing to me? How was I not able to think through the fog that was forming in my mind? Hadn’t I just been in control of myself?

I turned to stare at him, fully prepared to ask him to move away, but when his eyes met mine all intelligible speech went out the window. I wasn’t even sure I knew what English was anymore. The only thing coursing through my mind was the fact that his bright blue eyes were smoldering to the point that I could feel myself burning up inside. The only thing I could hear was the loud beat of my heart thumping away against my ribcage.

What the hell was happening to me?

“What did he do, Armin?” His lips massaged my name in a way that made the air rush out of my lungs. He was doing this on purpose, I knew that, and yet I couldn’t get away.

“He cheated on me.” The words just barely squeaked out of my throat, but I felt no pain when I said them. I knew I should have and I knew that I would later, but right now my mind couldn’t get past the man in front of me.

“Did he? I thought so…” Erwin continued, his voice a low rumble. My heart was beating so fast that I was certain he could hear it now, but he made no indication that he did. He stared into my eyes, his gaze molten when it should have been reassuring. What was happening? “When I saw him with you on the first day, I knew…”

Confusion knit my brow and I was all at once grateful and annoyed that my mind had gone somewhere other than the situation at hand. “You knew? That he would cheat on me?”

“No.” The word was a slow purr on his lips, and his mouth curved into a smile. He had anticipated the question. Hoped for it, even. He was planning five steps ahead of me and I had no idea how to keep up. I had never met anyone like this before. No one had ever been able to affect me this way, and yet he seemed to be a master at it. He leaned so close that I could smell the cologne on his body, the scents spicy and alluring. My mind hazed. “I knew that he didn’t deserve someone like you.”

My body moved before my mind had the chance to stop it, and my hands twisted into his hair, grabbing two fistfuls and pulling in order to bring his lips to mine. I heard a surprised sound escape his mouth just before our lips came together, but he made no move to stop me. Part of me wished that he would, although it was a very small part at the moment. I was desperate for someone to bring the situation back under control, back to something that made sense but I knew I had no hope of doing so myself. I shouldn’t have wanted any of this, and yet all I could focus on were how his lips felt against mine.

If I had any control over the situation before, he took it all away now. His hands found my hips and he hoisted me up as if I weighed nothing at all, pulling me into his lap so that my legs naturally straddled his hips. He pressed one hand firmly against the small of my back and held me in place, preventing any hope I would have of moving away if I actually wanted to. Every movement he made exuded a level of power that bordered on intimidating, and I felt myself lost to the command he had on me. And as captive as I felt, it was incredibly liberating to put myself into the hands of another and know that he would do as he wanted.

My hands slipped out of his hair to grip the front of his shirt, and his powerful hand wrapped around both of my thin wrists to hold me there. His tongue gave an insistent lick at my lips, probing for an entrance that I was only too eager to give. The warm wet of his tongue invaded my mouth with a flavor that had me abandoning any hope I had of coming to my senses. And what good was sense when his lips were on mine? I could be lost in this forever and never find my way out.
His grip tightened on my wrists, reminding me of its presence there with a firmness that made me feel willingly trapped. I lapped at his tongue as it greedily explored the small confines of my mouth, nestling its way into me as if it was as determined to memorize me as I was it. His taste was hopelessly erotic, intoxicating me in a way that had me both hyper aware and hazed out of my senses all at once. I felt like I would never get enough of this.

The hand resting on the small of my back pulled me forward to work me against him, and my breath caught in my throat when I felt the hard ridge of his arousal rub up against me. Despite the fact that I was trying to get a control on my mind, I couldn’t stop it from wandering to the throbbing girth I had just felt between my legs. He was massive and achingly ready to bring this further than I was sure I wanted to go.

His hand left my hips to slide its way to the back of my head, collecting a fistful of hair and giving a sharp tug that elicited a gasp from my lips. It wasn’t painful in the sense that it hurt, but it did cause sharp sparks of sensation to light up all over my body as though electricity had just been pumped through it. His mouth left mine and suddenly I felt heated kisses against my throat, starting at my jaw and working their way down to the raging pulse in my neck.

A ringing sound filled my ears and it was only after he let out an annoyed curse that I realized it was his cell phone. Still, his lips continued their attack on my throat, leaving wet trails in their wake and arousing a passion in me that had my hips moving forward on their own. Soon enough the ringing stopped, but it was only a moment later before it started up again. This time we both let out an audible groan.

“Who the hell?” Erwin grabbed the phone off the table and pressed it to his ear, “What is so important that you just have to—oh. Levi.”

My mind started to gather itself back together, the realization of where I was and what we had done sinking in and forcing a deep red into my cheeks. I scrambled out of his lap and he allowed me to, only glancing once in my direction as he continued the conversation. There was a regret in his eyes and I had to wonder if it was because he hadn’t wanted that. I was the one who had started the kiss, and although he’d responded to it, there was a chance that he was only being kind.

“Levi’s coming up,” Erwin informed me as he ended the call and set the phone back on the table. “And Eren’s with him. Apparently he’s your ride and he went looking for you.”

He was staring at me as if there were still something he wanted to say, but he didn’t continue. He turned to stare at the foyer, and I focused on trying to urge the blush to leave my face. I pressed my hands to my cheeks as if convinced the coolness would urge the heat away, but it only became worse when my fingers brushed against my swollen lips and brought up the memory of what had just happened.

“I’m sorry,” I muttered against my fingertips. He turned to meet my stare, his brow furrowed in confusion for a moment before his expression smoothed into one of understanding. He leaned forward and ran his thumb slowly along my lower lip, eyeing it with a stare that made me wonder if he was about to kiss me again.

“Don’t ever apologize for giving me what I want,” he stared at me with those intensely blue eyes, his voice huskier than I expected it to be, “I have been dying to do that since the day I saw you.”

I felt the air leave my lungs and my heart began to pound to the point that I worried it might actually be dangerous. None of this had made any sense at all. I was supposed to be with Jean yet I had just found myself in the arms of my superior; being kissed in a way that no one had ever touched me before. And despite the fact that Jean had already betrayed me, I couldn’t help but feel wrong for
attempting to hurt him back.

That was what I had been doing, after all. All of that was done with the purpose of hurting Jean. The kiss we had shared was just a means of getting back at my boyfriend for cheating on me with his best friend. It hadn’t meant anything. It wasn’t like I was actually interested in him. It wasn’t like I wanted him.

…right?
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Wow... just... WOW! All the reactions I received to the Armin chapter just made me so incredibly happy! I'm so glad that you all seemed to enjoy it! ^__^ I was a little nervous about how everyone would react to the Winmin piece, so all the positive comments really made me thrilled.

So, this chapter is long! XD But honestly, the next one it probably going to be on the longer side as well. There is also going to be a time skip in this chapter, but there is a reason for that. Levi's birthday is on Christmas after all... and we should celebrate that with a birthday chapter, right? ^_^

Hopefully you all enjoy this chapter. For once the drama seems to be centered outside of the boys' relationship. Although you know what they say about the calm before the storm... still, I really hope you enjoy the end of this chapter with the time skip.

Again, thank you all so much for the comments and the feedback both here and on tumblr! It's wonderful to hear what you all thought about the chapter. Some of you even put up responses on tumblr as you read the chapter and that is always great. XD I love to see the flow of reactions.

As always, feel free to comment and ask questions both here and on tumblr. If you'd like to follow me you can do so at lusty-levi or lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' on tumblr.

ENJOY!

"Eren, slow the fuck down."

Levi was following close behind me as I made my way to the elevator in a determined stride. It had been a short drive to Erwin’s apartment but it felt like hours had already passed. How long had Armin been stuck in that apartment and what was Erwin doing now that he had him to himself? Armin was obviously hurt and I was sure Erwin would be more than prepared to take advantage of his vulnerable state. The thought that he might be touching Armin at this very moment made my vision blur and darken around the edges. I would break his goddamn hands if he so much as poked Armin’s cheek.

“I have to get Armin out of there.” I shot a glance back at Levi as if the look on my face could somehow convey how desperate the situation was. The most I got back was an eye roll.

“Don’t you think you’re overreacting just a little bit?” Levi asked as he dug his phone out of his pocket.

“He’s probably fucking him right now!” I yelled the only thing that was buzzing through my mind. An elderly couple paused in their conversation as they walked past me, looking beyond affronted with their mouths open and their eyes judgmental. Unfortunately for them I really couldn’t give two shits right now, and I was pretty damn sure my expression said just that.
Levi held his phone to his ear, eyeing me with an expression that was almost amused. “You know Armin isn’t your kid, right?”

“I never said he was!”

“Well, then realize he’s old enough to make his own choices. Unless you’re about to lay claim to his ass, you really don’t have any say in what he does. And trust me, Erwin’s not about to rape him. If they’re fucking right now, it’s consensual.” Levi angled his head and his brow furrowed, “What the fuck, Erwin, pick up your goddamn phone.”

I rolled my eyes and turned away. Levi could talk on the phone all he wanted, but I was going to get my ass into that apartment now. Like hell was I about to waste time warning Erwin that we were on our way. As a matter of fact, I preferred it to be a surprise. At least then I would be able see Erwin’s true colors when he was in a room alone with someone he desired.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

The same man that had helped me up to Erwin’s room before stopped in front of me now, blocking my way to the elevator. Deciding that I really didn’t have time for this, I tried to cut around him only to be stopped again.

“Can I help you?”

“Yea, you can help me by moving,” I snapped, “I’m here to see Erwin.”

“He didn’t say he was expecting anyone,” Nile spoke in a pointed way that did absolutely nothing to help my nerves. “In fact, I’m certain he told me that he didn’t want to be disturbed for the next hour.”

Oh, he was going to be fucking disturbed.

“Get out of my way.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t let you up without his expressed permission.”

I wasn’t about to take orders from a man who looked like he was growing pubic hair on his chin. I had seen scruffer toddlers than this arrogant asshole, and I wasn’t going to let him keep me from getting into that elevator. I was about to shove past him, determined to get there before he could stop me, but Levi’s hand on my shoulder kept me in place.

“What do you think I was calling Erwin for? My own fucking amusement? Shit, brat, you really need to calm yourself down before we get up there.” Levi held the phone out to Nile, wiggling it between his thumb and forefinger, “It’s for you, asshole.”

At least Levi seemed to be about as fond of him as I was.

Nile held the phone to his ear, eyeing the both of us with a look of sincere distaste. “Hello? Oh, hello sir. Are you sure? Yes, of course. Yes, I’ll send them both up now.”

He ended the call and held the phone back to Levi, who snatched it away and dropped it back into his pocket. “Satisfied? Or are you gonna waste more of our time?”

“No, you can head right up. I’m sure you know the number, of course. One floor below your old one,” Nile said with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. I felt a sudden friction between the two of them that was so unnerving I almost forgot about Armin entirely.
“I haven’t forgotten,” Levi spoke with a snap in his tone, walking towards the elevator without waiting for me. I followed along behind him, bumping into him when he stopped abruptly at Nile’s next words.

“I’m sure you never will.”

Levi took a deep breath, his shoulders lifting and falling with the motion. Then he glanced over his shoulder, staring at me as if I were the only one in the entire lobby, “Hurry up, brat. We’re going to be late.”

I stepped into the small space with him, watching the doors slide shut to block our view of Nile’s sneering face. Levi punched the floor number with more force than anyone would ever need to apply, and then he leaned back and gripped the railing that lined three of the walls in the elevator. He was staring at the floor with his brow furrowed, his face screwed up like he was experiencing every form of emotion possible.

“Levi, what-”

I had completely forgotten about the elevator’s alarming speed and suddenly his hold on the railing made perfect sense. I launched forward as my legs gave up any hope they had on keeping me stable, but my knees didn’t hit the ground like I expected them to. Levi had caught me as if he had been waiting for me to fall, and put one arm tight around my waist as he yanked me against him, his other hand keeping a firm grip on the railing. He glanced at me and rolled his eyes.

“I knew you would forget that.”

I fought back any urge I had to blush as red as a tomato, but I knew some color made its way into my cheeks. As soon as the elevator was stationary, I pulled back and stumbled just slightly until I regained my balance. I could have a million years and never get used to this damn elevator. The doors slid open to reveal the foyer of Erwin’s apartment, and suddenly I remembered how to walk.

“Armin?”

“Eren!” Armin shot up off the couch and turned to face me. It took me no time at all to notice that he was out of breath and flushed, with Erwin sitting beside him on the couch in a position that was a little too close for comfort.

“What are you doing?” I snapped, although my anger was directed mostly towards Erwin. I probably should have been happy that they were both still clothed, but the fact that they might have done anything at all set me on edge.

“What do you mean?” Armin asked, and when his brow furrowed in genuine confusion I felt a stab of guilt. He didn’t need me yelling at or around him after the day he’d just had.

“I think the eloquent ass is trying to ask what you’re doing here,” Levi explained, waving a hand to indicate the apartment, “In Erwin’s apartment. It’s not exactly his office.”

“I invited him here,” Erwin pointed out, standing up from the couch as well. His muscular frame was intimidating next to Armin’s small figure. He eyed Levi and raised one eyebrow, “And although I invited you up, I’m not exactly sure why you came here in the first place. Care to explain?”

“This one had his panties in a twist over his friend,” Levi jabbed a thumb in my direction before he started walking across the foyer and towards the living room. His movements and voice were so smooth and casual that it was almost painfully obvious that he was comfortable in Erwin’s domain. I wasn’t sure I was okay with that. “Apparently he thought you two would be fucking like rabbits all
over your house by now.”

Armin made the most inhumane noise as he clapped both hands over his gaping mouth, his eyes widening. His gaze was snapping back and forth between the three of us, clearly trying to figure out if the comment had been some kind of sick joke. I was no help, of course. I was staring at Levi with the same shocked expression, feeling betrayed on so many levels. How was it okay for him to say that in front of the two of them?

“Is that so?” Erwin murmured, eyeing me.

“It is,” Levi glanced in my direction and I saw his lips curve in the smallest of smirks, “I told him to calm down, of course. You’re married with kids, after all. Devoted and all that shit.”

Levi paused to pick up one of the picture frames that displayed Erwin with his smiling children. I noticed a blank spot on the mantel, where Levi’s picture had been on my first visit. It was gone now, although it looked like it had just been moved. Nothing else around it had been disturbed or moved to replace the small gap that had been left there.

“Aren’t they adorable?” Levi was leaning against the couch, tilting the frame for Armin to see. “Such happy, beautiful kids. It’s so nice that they have a stable home with a loving father.”

I’m not sure Armin caught each pointed remark, but I knew Erwin did. He was staring at Levi as if he could force him into a permanent silence with his glare alone. Not that it seemed to do any good.

“Eren is silly for thinking you would ever do anything to destroy such a happy home,” he continued, keeping the picture tilted for Armin’s viewing pleasure.

Levi’s steel blue gaze turned briefly to meet mine and I felt a sudden wave of gratitude. He wasn’t doing any of this to hurt me. He was helping me by giving Armin more than a handful of reasons to turn Erwin down. Even if Armin had any interest in him at all, he wasn’t about to risk ruining a happy home just to get what he wanted. Levi had just set up a better line of defense than I could ever hope to.

“Where are they, anyway?” Levi directed his attention to Erwin, seemingly unaware of the other man’s angry glare. “Usually your wife’s here for lunch. I’m surprised you brought anyone over.”

“They’re visiting her family for the week,” Erwin responded, his words clipped and his voice cold. Levi had definitely pissed him off.

“That’s a shame,” Levi sighed as he set the frame back on the mantel. It didn’t sound like he thought it was a shame at all. “I would have loved to see her. It’s been so long.”

“We’ll have to set something up when she gets back,” Erwin continued in the same icy tone. “Now, why are you here, Levi?”

“Well, Eren’s here to take Armin home. He’s going to have the rest of the day off,” Levi said with a quick glance in Armin’s direction. “And you and I need to discuss Eren’s termination. I already talked to Mike, but he has a stick up his ass today. You need to make sure the paperwork doesn’t go through.”

“You were fired?” Armin blurted out, staring at me like my hair was suddenly on fire.

“Uhm, yea. Kinda.” I muttered, scratching the back of my head. Leave it to Armin to be far more upset than I was.
“We’ll take care of it,” Erwin reassured Armin. His voice had gone from arctic cold to warm and caring in a split second. “Levi and I will get it sorted out now. You two go ahead and take the rest of the day off. We’ll see you first thing tomorrow morning.”

I suddenly began to realize that Levi would be staying here, and I felt a knot of jealousy twist in my stomach. Even if they had just snapped at each other, I wasn’t comfortable with the thought of them in this apartment alone. I wouldn’t put it past Levi to have angry sex. Hell, that was essentially what we had done back on the floor of his apartment. What was going to stop them from doing the same once I was downstairs and out of the way?

“Levi came here with me.” I decided this was the best shot I had at getting him out of the apartment. “He didn’t bring his car.”

“That’s fine,” Erwin smiled at me in a way that made my skin want to crawl right off my body. He was toying with me. I knew it. “I’ll give him a ride.”

The way he said those words made it a little too clear that we were not talking about automobiles. My hands fisted at my sides as I fought back the overwhelming wave of jealousy that wanted to consume me. Levi was mine. I still had the scent of him all over my body, even if he had washed mine off of his. I had the sudden urge to put it back. I wanted to mark him in some way, shape, or form, but I knew kissing him in front of Erwin and Armin was not the wisest idea.

“Eren, are you coming?” Armin was standing next to the elevator, the little button lit up and the doors wide open.

I didn’t want to go inside. Not without him. But what choice did I really have in the matter? He wasn’t mine and even if he were, I wouldn’t be the type of person to drag around my partner and restrict him from doing what he wanted. As much as I hated to leave him here, it was his choice.

“I got it. I won’t get locked out.”

“Good,” Levi looked over his nails, his expression feigning disinterest. “You should stop for Chinese before you go home for the night. You look like you’re starving, brat.”

Armin and I stepped into the small space and we braced ourselves against the railing once the elevator doors had swung shut. He stared at me with a bemused expression, shaking his head slowly.

“Chinese sounds great.”

I couldn’t help but smirk at his hidden invitation. “I feel like I’m missing something,” Armin frowned and glanced at the closed doors. “There’s a lot
going on between you, isn’t there?”

I felt the sharp tug on my body as the elevator sped us back down towards Earth. “I think ‘a lot’ might be an understatement at this point.”

“Are you two… together?” Armin was watching my expression closely for some conformation, and I knew the answer was written on my features. It was too obvious how I felt about Levi. There was really no hiding it, especially from Armin. Besides, I was dying to confide in someone and I could think of no one better to open up to.

The doors swung open to reveal Nile standing in the lobby, and any response I would have given went straight out of my mind. Not that I was going to tell Armin anything about Levi in front of that man, of course. I had no idea what their exchange had been about, but the way Levi had reacted to Nile’s words set me on edge now. I felt the sudden need to defend him, but Levi wasn’t for me to do so and even if he were he was more than capable of handling things himself.

Armin watched me with curious eyes as we walked across the lobby and towards the glass doors. I knew he was probably wondering what had put the sour expression on my face, but I was too focused on giving Nile the evil eye to notice. Nile stared back at me and I felt a brief moment of satisfaction when his brow knit together in confusion. I would have preferred fear, of course, but it was a start.

“What was that about?” Armin asked the moment we were outside.

I shrugged, digging the keys out of my pocket and holding them out to him, “He said something to Levi that pissed me off.”

“Oh, so you were defending your boyfriend.”

“We’re not!” I blurted out, color rushing into my cheeks. Armin was grinning like a fool as he snatched the keys from my hand.

“Oh really? It doesn’t seem that way. You two were exchanging a lot of looks up there.” Armin was still smiling as he walked around towards the driver’s side of the car. Damn, it was good to see him smiling again.

I got into the passenger’s seat and buckled up, glancing to him as he started the car and pulled out into traffic. I was waiting for him to push for more information, but he seemed content in giving me knowing grins. He was giving me the chance to confess, but I really wasn’t sure what I could say. Levi and I weren’t official, after all. I wasn’t even sure Levi would want to bring it past anything other than sex, although I really wanted him to. While the sex had been mind numbingly good, it didn’t compare to all the moments when we were together. When it was natural and comfortable, as if I were sitting in the room with the other half of my soul. That was what I really wanted.

“I don’t know what we are,” I finally admitted, leaning back in my seat and angling my head into the headrest. “I want to be with him. I know that. And I also know he’s at least a little interested in me.”

“It seems like he’s very interested in you.”

“He might only be interested in me physically. We did just have sex.”

A car blared its horn as Armin swerved on the road before he managed to gain control of the steering wheel once more. He looked between me and the road, his eyes wide as he spluttered, “You what? You had sex? When?”
I didn’t realize Armin’s voice could hit such a high pitch. I wasn’t sure if he was squealing in excitement or if his mind was in such a state of shock that his voice box had opted for a gender change.

“Today.” I couldn’t keep the grin off my face.

“How was it?” Armin blurted out before his face went the color of a tomato, “I mean, you don’t have to share! Or if you wanna share, you don’t have to be graphic. I’d prefer you not be graphic.”

“Armin-”

“I mean, you could say like… it was good. Or bad. Was it bad? It couldn’t be bad. He looks like he knows what he’s doing.”

My smile grew. Levi knew exactly what he was doing. “Well…”

“Not that I’ve been looking at him!” Armin cut me off once more. He couldn’t be more flustered if he tried, but his enthusiasm was actually building my own excitement. I didn’t realize how much I needed to talk to him about this until now.

Armin pulled into the space in front of my apartment and let out a long sigh before looking at me. “I’m sorry. I just wasn’t expecting… well, to hear that you… you know…”

“It’s not like I really planned it myself. It just kind of happened.” I admitted with a small shrug.

“Well, it didn’t just… happen, right?” Armin hedged and then continued at my sudden look of confusion. “I mean it was your first time. You were prepared, weren’t you?”

Oh.

“I didn’t…” I paused, not sure how to say it. “I mean, I was… on top. I mean I wasn’t riding him! I was… uhm…”

Now it was my turn to blush.

“You mean you were…” Armin was watching my expression as realization lit up his own and his eyes widened, “Oh. Oh!”

Armin sat there in silence and stared at me, blinking slowly before suddenly hiding his face in his hands, the tips of his ears now a bright red. I was pretty damn sure the car was about to explode with the force of our combined embarrassment. Granted, I wanted to talk about this, but I had no idea how awkward it was going to be.

“Armin?”

He made a soft squeak in reply but didn’t move his hands. Despite the fact that I was still heavily embarrassed as well, I had to smile at him. Honestly, he was downright adorable. I leaned forward and poked his hand to get his attention.

“Armiin?”

He spread his fingers just enough so that I could see the blue eyes and muttered something into his hands that I couldn’t quite catch.

“Huh?”
Armin let out a hard, fast sigh and then dropped his hands to his lap, holding them there in little fists as he stared down. He was silent for a long moment before shutting his eyes and blurting out, “I said I always saw you as a top! Just… not with him. He seems like someone who would take control.”

“Who did you see me as a top with?” I asked, my brow furrowing.

Armin stared at me before groaning, flopping back in his seat and throwing his arms over his face. The sleeves of his sweater were just baggy enough to cover most of his blush. “Oh my god, this is not happening to me!”

“What do you mean…” I trailed off and stopped. I could practically hear Levi’s voice of reason in my head.

Read the situation, Jaeger.

“Oh,” I deadpanned and Armin moved one arm to chance a glance in my direction. I’m not sure what my face must have looked like at the moment, although I could venture that it was probably something between amusement and confusion. “Us?”

He groaned again and moved his arm back to hide his face, speaking muffled words into the fabric, “It was a dream! It’s not my fault!”

“You dreamt about us?” I had no hope of keeping the amused tone from my voice.

“I want to crawl into a hole and die…” Armin muttered his response, which only made my smile grow.

“Hey, Armin,” I reached out and gently tugged his arm down to reveal his face. He let me but he still didn’t meet my gaze, so I continued in a soft voice. “Armin, look at me…”

He sighed and then reluctantly met my gaze. I kept my expression sincere and caring for a moment longer, but it didn’t last.

“Was I good?” I wagged my eyebrows playfully and his eyes went wide as the color rushed back into his cheeks.

“Eren! Oh my god!”

“That’s what you said.”

“Eren!” He whacked me with both sleeves of his sweater before slumping back in his seat, trying to form a frown but failing when a smile twitched on the corners of his mouth.

“I’m glad to see you’re feeling better,” I said with a small laugh, settling back into my own seat.

“Erwin helped,” he said with a small shrug, his fingers absentmindedly brushing across his lower lip as he stared out the windshield.

“Armin.” The warning note in my voice drew his attention immediately and he dropped his hand from his mouth. “Did you do something with him?

“We… well, we,” Armin paused, watching my expression with a sudden wariness, “You can’t tell anyone, Eren. I don’t want him to get into trouble.”

“I won’t,” I said reflexively. It was probably a lie, but I was willing to say whatever he needed to hear to find out what happened. “Tell me.”
“We kissed,” he murmured, and his fingers were back on his lips as he looked away. “That’s all, just a kiss. Right before you and Levi walked in.”

“Armin, he’s married!” I snapped, hiding my real anger behind the excuse. At least that would be enough to make him reconsider going any further than he already had. I made a mental note to go back to the apartment and skin Erwin.

“No, he’s not!” Armin blurted before clapping a hand over his mouth, his eyes widening. He stared at me, blinking, his mind probably working over any possible way to cover up what he had just said. Finally he dropped his hand from his mouth and sighed, “Eren, you can’t tell anyone. Not even Levi. Erwin’s not ready for people to find out about that yet.”

So Armin didn’t know that I already knew plenty about Erwin’s relationships. Unfortunately, despite Levi’s help, Armin now knew that Erwin was single and definitely interested in him. Of course, Levi didn’t know that Erwin was separated, and I wasn’t going to bring it up until I knew how I was going to handle this whole fucked up situation. Which made it easy to promise to Armin, but it didn’t help me in the least. How was I going to get him to stay away from Erwin now?

“What about Jean?”

It was a low blow considering everything that happened today, but it was the only shot I had. I hated Jean with a passion, but at least I was pretty sure what was going on inside his head. Which was very little.

“I don’t know,” Armin muttered and stared down at his lap. I felt a pang of guilt for bringing the subject up at all. He sighed and spoke again, “I really don’t know, Eren. But honestly, when I was in Erwin’s apartment, I didn’t care. I forgot about everything that happened with Jean. I felt so comfortable with him. It was nice to be able to sit there and talk about things that no one else talks to me about. He’s really smart, and kind… and…”

“I don’t trust him.”

Armin frowned, looking up at me, “I had a feeling you were going to say that.”

“He’s too old for you, Armin.”

“And what about Levi? He not our age either.”

“Yea, but it’s not like he’s farting dust,” I shrugged.

“Eren, he’s not that old!” Armin scolded, but a smile tugged at his lips. He shook his head and then sighed. “Listen, I’m not about to hop into bed with him or anything, so you don’t need to worry. I just really needed to get my mind off of things today and he helped.”

“Just be careful, okay?” I paused, realizing there was one thing I could say that would keep Armin from going any further. “You could get him into a lot of trouble. You’re not exactly legal for him.”

Armin opened his mouth to speak and then stopped, closing it and frowning. “I guess that’s true.”

Armin turned his gaze out the window and I watched his brow furrow in thought. I could practically hear him counting off the months until he would turn eighteen and realized this conversation was far from over. But if nothing else, Armin would drop it long enough to give Jean a chance to work his way back in. Not that I was thrilled with that either, but it was the lesser of two evils.

“Do you wanna come upstairs?” I asked, opening the door. Levi had hinted at Chinese, so I knew he
wanted me to go back to his apartment, but he wouldn’t be back for a while yet.

“No,” Armin was still looking out the window and it took him a moment to turn his attention back to
me, “I actually want to go back to work.”

“But he gave us the day off,” I frowned, “And Jean’s there.”

“I know,” Armin nodded and then gave me a very small, but reassuring smile, “But I’ll be okay.
Really, I want to catch up on what I missed. I don’t want to get behind on anything.”

I rolled my eyes, “You would say something like that. But if things get too difficult with Jean,
promise me you’ll leave.”

“I promise.”

“Good. And I’m here, okay? Even if it’s three in the morning, I’ll be there if you need me.” I still
wasn’t entirely sure he would be able to handle the rest of the day with Jean alone, and I was worried
he would try to cope with the pain by himself. I shut the door and turned to walk into Trost, pausing
when I heard his window rolling down.

“Eren!”

I turned to face him, raising one eyebrow. Maybe he was actually going to skip out on the rest of the
workday after all.

“I, uhm… I love you,” Armin said the words with a small, nervous smile. I was pretty sure he was
expecting me to take it the wrong way, but that was the beauty of our relationship. He was my best
friend, and we both knew how the other felt. I knew exactly what he meant when he said it, even
though he didn’t need to say it at all.

Of course, he still felt the need to clarify.

“You know, in a best friend kind of way.”

“Just as a friend, huh? And here I got my hopes up when you kissed me,” I grinned when his cheeks
reddened back to a tomato shade and he hid his face in his hands. I would never get tired of being
able to play with him this way. “I love you, too. Drive safe, and remember to call me.”

His hands were still hiding his face as I walked back into Trost, and it was a minute or so later before
he finally pulled away from the curb. I waited, just in case he decided he actually wasn’t ready to
face Jean alone. I wasn’t thrilled that he had to, but I knew I wouldn’t be allowed back into Survey
Corp. until Levi got the whole situation straightened out.

As I walked across the lobby, I felt my phone buzz in my pocket and pulled it out to see the
unknown number flash across the screen. I hit the button and held it to my ear, nearing the elevator,
“Hello?”

“Hey, brat,” Levi’s voice came through the other end, and even over the line I could hear the smirk
in his voice, “I’m almost done here. Petra and Hanji already went home, but I already informed the
concierge to give you access to my floor. I expect to find your ass in my bed when I get there. I feel
like having something to come home to.”

He didn’t wait for my response before hanging up, but I was pretty sure he knew it was a resounding
yes. I slipped the phone back into my pocket and leaned up against the wall by the elevator, touching
my cheeks and feeling the heat that was rising in them.
I was something to come home to.

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I had forgotten how quickly time could pass by when life was easy and I was happy. Of course, it had been so long since I had been happy that I’d almost forgotten what the emotion was. Since the day Mikasa ran, and even a while beforehand, I had felt lost and out of place. The days dragged by and everything in my life had seemed like an inescapable prison. It was like being surrounded by insurmountable walls on all sides and being unable to see a future outside of the hell I was in. I don’t think I truly realized how miserable I was until Levi showed me what it was like to be happy again.

And somehow I knew I was showing him what it was like to be happy, too.

A little over two weeks had passed since that day in his apartment, and I had only spent a handful of those nights in my own bed. I still wasn’t entirely sure what was happening between us or if Levi even considered us as anything past physical, but I couldn’t bring myself to care enough to find out the answer. I didn’t want to disturb the calm that had settled between us; afraid that trying to define our relationship would ruin what little we had. All I knew was that I went to sleep in his arms and woke up in the same place, and somehow that was more than enough for me.

“Remind me not to exhaust you before bed,” Levi murmured, drawing my attention to him. His naked body was pressed against my own, his head resting on my chest as he lazily dragged two long, elegant fingers up and down the length of my arm.

“Why not?” I frowned, angling my head to stare down at him. His hair was disheveled in the places where I had pulled it the night before, and he had been too exhausted afterwards to fix it.

“Because it makes you snore like a fucking bear looking for a mate,” he rolled his eyes and then looked up at me, a very small smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“I don’t snore.”

“The hell you don’t,” he said with a short laugh, “I’ll record you next time if I have to. I may as well, since you kept me awake all night. Thank your lucky fucking stars that it’s Saturday and I have nothing to do.”

I smiled and rolled my eyes, my arm tightening around his waist to drag him closer. “It’s not my fault you made me do all the work.”

“All the work?” Levi’s voice was bordering on amusement, but there was a dangerous edge to it as he slipped his hand down to grip my member. “Maybe you should remind yourself that you’re in a compromising position before you start accusing me of laziness.”

His nails just barely grazed me as he drew his hand away, sending a shock of electricity bolting through my length and drawing a hiss from my teeth. I heard his low chuckle as his hand settled back on my arm.

“After breakfast. I need some kind of food in me before I have enough energy to make you pay for that comment.” Levi turned his head, his lips brushing over the skin of my chest. My heart began to race and by the smirk that crossed his lips I knew he could hear it. It was moments like this, when he showed soft affection, that I didn’t know where our relationship stood.
“I don’t mind doing all the work again,” I offered, although it was mostly a joke. We had skipped dinner somewhere between the couch and the bedroom, and I was bordering on ravenous at this point.

“Keep it up and you won’t be going anywhere near my ass,” Levi smirked, his fingers continuing to trail lazy patterns against my skin.

I was about to comment that he was more than welcome to go near mine, but I kept my mouth shut. Although we had spent a fair amount of time in his bed, he had yet to take me the way I’d taken him. Of course, that had nothing to do with him being disinterested and everything to do with me not being ready. To be honest, I was more than a little hesitant to feel the pain that I knew was involved.

I had mentioned it once, over two weeks ago now, on the same day that he had asked me to wait for him in his apartment. I knew that it was exactly what he wanted; Levi was a dominant personality both inside the bedroom and out. Still, when he opened the bottle of lube and told me to spread my legs, I hesitated. I couldn’t even lie when he asked me what was wrong, and I blurted out that I wasn’t ready. Which I suppose was true at the time.

I had honestly expected him to ask me to get out, but he didn’t even argue. He just tossed the bottle over to me, and he hadn’t brought it up since. Looking back on the past two weeks, he was probably just waiting for me to tell him that I was ready. And I was now. Even if it was bound to be painful, I knew I would hate myself forever if my first time was with anyone other than him.

I took a deep breath and opened my mouth to speak, but my stomach beat me to it. A loud, rumbling growl broke the silence and I felt blood rush to my cheeks as Levi rolled off of me, laughing.

“Good to know I’m not the only one starving my ass off,” Levi said with something that bordered on an actual smile. He got out of bed and stretched his arms above his head, and even through my embarrassment I was able to admire the perfect definition of his muscles. “Come on. It’s time for breakfast.”

He snatched my black button up off the floor and slipped it on, buttoning only the bottom three into place. I groaned and ran a hand down my face, hearing his low chuckle in response. I knew at this point that he wore my shirts to fuck with me. My body made it a little too obvious how much I enjoyed the sight of my shirt hanging loose on his perfect body.

I dragged myself out of bed and tugged on the pajama pants I had brought along with me. I knew better than to go bare-assed into Levi’s kitchen after the first time I tried it. He wasn’t exactly thrilled when I sat on one of his chairs with nothing between the seat and my balls.

I followed him into the kitchen and took a seat on one of the stools, leaning against the marble counter as I watched him prepare the meal. He didn’t trust me enough yet to let me near the stove, although I wasn’t entirely sure I trusted myself either. We had a mutual agreement that I would most likely bum whatever it was I tried to cook, and I was perfectly content just watching the way my shirt lifted up to show the crease of his perfectly formed ass when he was trying to get anything from the top shelf.

“Hanji’s been complaining that she hasn’t been able to get a hold of you to plan my birthday,” Levi spoke from the stove as he cracked eggs into the pan. “Not that I’m complaining, of course. I would prefer we do nothing, but I know that’s not going to happen with her.”

“Well, I’m busy tonight, but if she’s not busy on Sunday…” I trailed off and shrugged. She had mentioned Levi’s birthday on multiple occasions over the past two weeks, but I had always been around him and I knew that she was hoping to plan in secret. “Or I can give her my number.”
“That would probably be a mistake unless you want 2 a.m. texts with images that’ll make your eyes bleed,” he paused and glanced over at me, “What are you doing tonight?”

“Armin’s coming over,” I said, suddenly unable to meet Levi’s eyes. I stared down at the counter and chewed at my lower lip, trying to decide how I would broach the subject.

The entire situation with Erwin had become the most horribly fucked up game of my existence. Although Levi and I avoided the topic like the plague, I was gradually doing my best to do what Levi had asked. Of course, Erwin was in on the entire thing, which essentially made it pointless. Still, despite the fact that we had progressed to a level of comfort I had never expected, I was terrified that Levi would end things once the goal was accomplished. I hated the thoughts that crept into my mind, but part of me worried that he was only entertaining me to ultimately have what he wanted.

I honestly had no other explanation as to why he would let me continue in my attempts to seduce Erwin. Even if what we had become important to him, it might not be enough for him to give up on his revenge plot. I didn’t even know how to tell him that it wouldn’t work out in the end. Of course, if Erwin participated in the way he had promised, I wouldn’t have to. That was the main reason I hadn’t come clean with Levi about Erwin’s marriage status. If he would let Levi destroy him just as he had said, then Levi would have the peace of mind that he wanted. He never had to know about the rest. I just had to hold out and continue this lie until we got to that point.

“For the night?” Levi returned to scrambling the eggs, “Like a sleep over?”

I was pretty sure he was trying to gauge whether or not I would be spending the night with him. “Gonna miss me?”

“Maybe just a little,” he shrugged, scooping the eggs onto two plates before setting one in front of me. “So, why is he coming over? Anything special?”

“Well…” I pushed the eggs around on my plate with my fork, taking a deep breath. “That’s something I need to talk to you about, actually.”

Levi paused with his forkful of eggs halfway to his mouth and set it down without taking a bite. “I’m listening.”

“Erwin’s been calling Armin to his office a lot,” I started, still staring down at my plate. “Every single day. And yesterday he was in there four times.”

“They’re not doing anything, if that’s what you’re worried about.” Levi said, finally taking a bite now that he had decided it wasn’t anything to fret over. I should have known he had been watching the tapes for Erwin’s office. I had been going in there, too, after all.

“I know they’re not doing anything yet, but I know what they’ve been talking about.”

Armin was very skilled when he had to be, but he had never been good at hiding his emotions where a relationship was concerned. He had been too giddy lately, and I knew that had nothing to do with Jean. Although Jean had been groveling day in and day out, Armin hadn’t forgiven him yet. Not that I blamed him, of course, but I knew the real reason behind his reluctance. Every time he talked about Erwin his entire expression lit up, and even though they had been sticking to innocent topics like interests and daily events, I knew Erwin wouldn’t keep things that way. At least not for long.

I’d been trying to think of ways to separate the two of them, but short of barging into his office every time they were alone, I hadn’t been able to come up with much. Until recently, that is. I had been dying to talk to Armin about the entire situation with Levi and Erwin, if for no other reason than to
vent about the stress that was gradually overwhelming me. It would be an added bonus that he would have a reason to stay away from Erwin. I would need him to do so in order to finish this whole game, and I knew that he would be willing to do that for me if I managed to be convincing enough.

I just had to convince Levi to let me tell him.

“So what are you asking?” Levi stated the question so directly that I was certain he could read my mind.

“I want to get him to stay away from Erwin,” I hedged, still pretending to be very interested in making patterns with my eggs. I was worried about what I would see in his eyes if I managed to ask this without chickening out. “And I know that he would do so as a favor to me if I… well…”

“Eren.”

I looked up at the sound of his voice and was surprised to see that his expression was both amused and a little critical, but without the anger I had expected to find there.

“You want to know if you can tell him everything, right?” Levi leaned back in his seat when I nodded and eyed me for a moment before shrugging. “This is as much my business as it is yours. I’m not going to dictate what you can and can’t say to your friend. If you trust him enough to know that he won’t run to Erwin with the information, then fine. But if he does, then it’s on you.”

“So I can tell him?”

“You can tell him,” Levi shrugged once more. Then he paused, watching my expression carefully. “But I think you’re making a mistake.”

“Why?” I asked, my brow furrowing.

“Because Armin’s a big boy and he can decide for himself. Besides, if he wants to get it on with Erwin, then you won’t have to. There’s no reason to get your hands dirty when the work’s already been done for you.”

I paled at the thought, shaking my head quickly. “No. I couldn’t do that to Armin. I couldn’t use him like that. You said this will go public, and while I don’t really care about my reputation I know that his means everything to him. I would never hurt him that way.”

Levi held up his hands and raised one eyebrow. Clearly my reaction was a little harsher than I had meant for it to be. “I’m not asking you to. Honestly, I didn’t really expect you to agree to it. I just figured I would put it out there in case the two of you decided it was an option. I know how much he means to you. I wouldn’t expect you to jeopardize your friend.”

I relaxed into my seat, only now realizing how tense I had been. “I’m only going to tell him as much as I need to…”

“Tell him everything, if you want,” Levi shrugged, pausing between bites to speak. His steel blue eyes held mine, and a smirk curved his lips. “Believe it or not, I trust you, Eren.”

My heart began to race again, as it always did when he looked at me like that. It had to be illegal for someone to be so attractive. Sometimes I wondered how I even managed words around him at all. Most of the time I was sure I had no hope of affecting him the same way, but there were rare moments when he stared at me like I was the only thing he could see. Moments when I knew he was happy that I was there in his life. Moments where I knew I was what he wanted to come home to.
“Hurry up and finish your eggs, brat,” Levi gestured at my full plate, the smirk still on his lips, “If I have to give up a night with you, then I’m going to make up for it before you leave.”
“I think you’re developing an unhealthy obsession with that phone of yours.”

My finger stilled on the screen when it reached the end of the missed calls list. The only other unknown caller on there belonged to Levi, and he had since given me the numbers to both his cell and work phones. Mikasa hadn’t called me since the day I yelled at her and practically destroyed my phone, and I was beginning to worry she was never going to. I hadn’t ignored a single call since then, but she was never on the other end. I was starting to lose hope that I would ever hear her voice again. It was possible that I had pushed her too far when she was trying to reach out to me. Looking back on it now, I had been more than just harsh; I had been completely hostile and unwilling to listen. I had pushed her away.

“She hasn’t called me back,” I muttered the words he was already expecting to hear, and turned off the screen. There was no point in staring at it like it would suddenly light up if I paid enough attention.

Levi made a soft noise and I glanced down at him. I was sitting on the edge of the bed and he was sprawled out across the width of it. He had his arms wrapped loosely around my hips and his head was resting comfortably against his shoulder as he stared up at me. His hair was a tousled mess and his eyes were the relaxed blue I had come to appreciate after I had managed to truly exhaust him. It still amazed me how comfortable we had become in the few short weeks after I had cornered him in the elevator. That wasn’t to say that our relationship wasn’t a constant struggle to maintain, but I knew he was taking great strains to open up to me in ways outside of the physical aspect.

“She didn’t call for three months before that.” Levi trailed a lazy finger down the length of my arm and paused to take the phone from my hands, setting it on the nightstand. “It’s possible she can’t call that often. Give her some time before you start hitting the panic button.”

I didn’t bother to point out that I had been panicking about her whereabouts since the second she went out that window. Of course, there had been a brief point in which the stress of everything else
had put her to the back of my mind, but now that I had reached a semi-comfortable state with Levi everything seemed to be surfacing again. She had once more become a constant worry for me, and I knew I had no hope of escaping the nagging feeling residing in the back of my mind.

“What if she never calls?”

“Don’t waste your time thinking about ‘what ifs.’ They’ll drive you insane. The future’s not something any of us can predict. The most you can do is make the choices you think you won’t regret later. When she calls… hey, look at me, kid.” Levi paused until I met his eyes, and his steel blue gaze held me in place when I did. “When she calls, and she will, you apologize your fucking ass off, you understand? Let her talk, even if you don’t like what she says. Give her the chance to explain.”

“She wants me to leave,” I frowned, glancing over at my phone. It had set me off the first time she mentioned that. How would I react now that I had so much to stay for? Could I really just pack up and leave everything behind?

“Then it looks like you’ll have a choice to make.” Levi pressed his lips to the side of my waist and then released me, rolling out of bed and standing. He swayed slightly in place and paused to fix me with a glare. “You can be fucking rough when you want to be, you know that?”

“You said you wanted to make up for tonight,” I said with a sheepish grin. Although it’d taken some trial and error, I had definitely started to improve in the bedroom. It had become my new personal goal to do everything possible to make Levi scream, and this afternoon had been satisfying to say the least. I could still hear the strained sounds of him echoing in my ears as he came down from the brink of ecstasy. I was pretty sure I wouldn’t get the images out of my head for the rest of the night, which was going to make the separation even more difficult.

“I also wanted to be able to walk after,” Levi rolled his eyes as he headed towards the bathroom. “You better bet your fucking ass that I’m going to make you pay for this when you’re finally ready.”

“And what if I am ready?”

Levi paused in the doorframe and glanced over his shoulder in my direction, regarding me for a long moment before he smirked. “Then you better start working for it. I’m going to have you on your knees and begging for my cock before I finally give it to you.”

I felt the blood rush to my cheeks and other parts of my body as I squirmed a little on the bed. Of course he was going to make me beg. If what we had done at The Wall had been any indication, Levi wasn’t the type to just give what was asked for. He had been kind enough to let me take my time up until now, but I knew the real games would begin once I decided I was ready to bend over.

“Again?” Levi fixed his gaze on the growing member between my legs and a wry smile crossed his lips. “You’ve got some stamina, kid. Come on; get your ass in the shower.”

I frowned and glanced over at the clock. As tempting as that was, I knew I was on a time crunch. “Armin’s waiting for me.”

“Well, he can wait a little longer.” Levi leaned against the frame of the door and folded his arms, regarding me with half lidded eyes and a smoldering blue stare. If he was attempting to seduce me, it was working all too well. It had to be a criminal offense to look that good. “Call him up and tell him to be here in forty-five minutes. I’m taking you both to lunch.”

“Lunch?”
“Yea, you know. That weird thing people do when they eat in the middle of the day.” Levi smirked as he watched my perplexed expression. He seemed to be enjoying my confusion.

“You want to go to lunch with Armin?” I almost felt stupid repeating essentially the same question, but I just didn’t understand why Levi would want to do anything with Armin.

“Am I speaking French? Yes, I want to go to lunch with him. Is there a problem with that?”

“No, I just…” I shook my head, still at a loss. “Why?”

“Because he’s your best friend and maybe I don’t like the fact that I’ve only talked to him at the office.” Levi shrugged but his expression remained amused. “Call me crazy, but I actually want to get to know the people that matter to you.”

I knew my blush was deepening when I heard him chuckle, and I pressed my hands against the heat I found there. It was like he had just asked to meet my family, which was essentially what Armin was. I knew that Levi had been making a conscious effort to include me in his life, but it still surprised me each time he let me in. I was gradually beginning to realize that I might actually mean something to him, although I was constantly waiting for it to all fall apart.

“Are you sure?” I was already reaching for my phone when I asked this, but it came out of my mouth from habit. I was still convinced he wasn’t entirely aware of what he was doing when he made gestures like these.

“I’m going to spell it out in a fucking second here. Yes, I’m sure.” Levi rolled his eyes and snapped his fingers twice, giving a little circular gesture with his index finger. I was still getting used to the amount of sass he was able to exhibit, even when naked. “Hurry up and call him. Don’t keep me waiting, Jaeger.”

The command in his tone was diminished only by the smirk that crossed his lips as he walked into the bathroom and shut the door. I felt butterflies stirring up in my stomach as I realized he was expecting me to join him in there. It was an alluring idea, of course, but we had never done anything in the shower and I couldn’t help worrying about the lack of traction. I had improved over the weeks, but my muscles were still getting used to the efforts of holding his body up for long periods of time. What if I dropped him?

I shook the worries from my mind, knowing they wouldn’t be able to help the situation, and hit the call button on my phone. It only took one ring for Armin to pick up.

“Eren? I was just about to leave.” I could hear the jingle of keys as he grabbed them from the table. “Am I late?”

“It’s not like you have to be here at a certain time.” I smiled. Armin hated being late, even when there was no strict time set in place. “I was actually calling to ask if you could wait for forty-five minutes before coming over.”

“Oh.” He sounded surprised, but not upset. That was a good sign at least. “Yea, sure, that’s fine. Any reason why?”

“Levi wants to take us to lunch.” I managed to say it as if it were the most casual, obvious thing. Silence fell on the other end and after a moment I started to wonder if the call had dropped, “Armin?”

“I’m still here. I just…” Armin trailed off and I could practically see him shaking his head in the same confusion I had felt. “Why?”
“He said he wants to get to know the people that matter to me.” I shrugged and tried to ignore how the thought made my heart skip once again.

“Things are really getting serious between you two, aren’t they?”

I stared off at the bathroom door, my heart picking up its pace, “I hope so.”

“Well then, yea. Lunch sounds great,” Armin paused for a moment, hedging, “No where expensive though, okay?”

“I’m pretty sure he’s going to pay, if you’re worried about money.”

“It’s not that. I would just feel weird having him take us somewhere expensive.”

“Why don’t we just hit up Colossal’s then?” It had honestly been a while since we had stopped at the burger joint and I had to admit that I was intrigued by the idea of seeing Levi in something as everyday ordinary as a fast food place.

“If he’s alright with going there. It doesn’t really seem like his type of place.”

Colossal’s would probably never be Levi’s first choice, but that didn’t mean he would turn his nose up at it either. To be honest, I often forgot how wealthy he really was. Aside from the designer labels he wore, Levi rarely showed off the fact that he made more in a year than most people could hope to make in five lifetimes.

“I don’t think he’ll have a problem with it,” I shrugged, eyeing the bathroom door. I couldn’t help but wonder how impatient he must be getting. “So we’ll meet you in the lobby in forty-five?”

“Forty-five minutes seems like a long time to get ready,” Armin’s voice was just sly enough to let me know that he knew exactly what we’d be doing. “I’ll see you then.”

The line went dead and I tossed my phone onto the bed, making my way to the bathroom. Our earlier activities saved me the trouble of stripping now, which was a good thing considering I’d already wasted enough time.

“I was about to go out and drag you in here myself,” Levi snapped as I entered the bathroom and shut the door. Steam was billowing out of the shower and misting the glass pane, hiding all but the outline of his body.

“Sorry,” I walked over to the shower door, the nervousness building in me once again, “We were trying to figure out where we wanted to eat.”

Levi pulled the door aside and cocked one eyebrow. “Kid, you could decide to eat on the fucking moon and I wouldn’t care. Get in.”

I couldn’t stop my eyes from taking a full trip up and down his form, captivated by the way the long streams of water outlined the perfect musculature of his body. He had slicked his wet hair off of his forehead, although a couple of strands had managed to pull free to drape in front of his eyes. The sight of him was enough to have me aching and squirming in place, and the teasing smirk that crossed his lips made it obvious that he knew.

“You’re too easy,” he chuckled as he grabbed me by the shoulder and yanked me inside, sliding the shower door shut behind us. “If I actually tried, I might be able to get you to explode.”

I was pretty sure he had already managed that a number of times. As it was, he made it difficult to
form coherent speech around him, especially when he had me as aroused as he did now. I wasn’t even sure if he was purposely trying to stir me up, but I knew that he was going to make me pay for making him wait.

“Hand me the body wash behind you,” he said with a nod in my direction. When I handed it to him, a smirk curved on his lips and I felt heat begin to rise in me once more. “So, what did you two decide on?”

I watched him squirt a generous amount into the loofa and work it into a thick lather of soapy suds. A moment later he had the spongy material pressed against my chest and was moving it in skillful circles down towards my abdomen. It actually took me a moment to realize he had asked me anything at all and was still waiting for a response.

“Uhm… Colossal’s.”

“Big spenders.”

Levi smirked and his hand stilled with the loofa pressed against my hip. He stared down between us for a moment and I flushed as I realized he could see my growing arousal. Despite the fact that I had tried to control myself, there was little I could do when confronted with a naked, wet sex god. Luckily the sight of me seemed to have the same effect on him. He bit his lower lip before he turned his gaze up to meet mine, fixing me with a molten stare as his hand drifted lower.

“Turn around.” Levi’s voice was suddenly rough and had a commanding edge that made me ache. The orders he had given me since that first night at The Wall were few and far in between, although I knew it was only because he was still giving me time to adjust. However, every time he actually gave me an order, I was quick to obey. Although I didn’t admit it at the time, I had enjoyed the dominance he showed over me that night and I had found myself craving it since.

The instant I turned around, he pressed me up against the shower wall and a sharp shock of pained pleasure exploded through every nerve in my hips as my aching arousal met the cold smoothness of the tile. A strangled sound somewhere between a cry and a moan twisted in my throat and my hands slid down the slick surface until my nails could take purchase of the cracks between the tiles. I heard his low, breathy chuckle near my ear and felt his hand slide down the length of my spine and towards my ass.

“Corporal,” I managed to gasp the word as I felt one slick fingertip probing against my entrance. I hadn’t expected him to move so quickly, but I couldn’t bring myself to protest. Suddenly I realized that this was exactly what I wanted and exactly what I had been craving. I needed to be filled by him.

“Such a good boy, Eren,” he murmured as he leaned up my body and tugged my earlobe between his teeth. I angled my head back to offer him easier access and he rewarded me by giving a sharp tug on my hip before pushing the full length of his index finger into my body.

I went rigid at the sudden invasion, finding it both familiar and foreign in the same instant. He had teased me with his fingers since that night, but it hadn’t been in preparation for something else. Suddenly the intrusion meant much more now that I knew what it was leading up to. I had wrapped my lips around him more than once at this point and I knew firsthand that Levi was not a slight man in length or girth. I had good reason to be intimidated, but I wasn’t about to stop now.

“Is this what you want?” Levi’s voice was gruff next to my ear as he slid a second finger into the tight heat of my body and started to pump them together as one. The mist billowing around us made me all at once grateful for the cool tile, which was the only release I had from the heat building in
and around me. I wasn’t sure how he expected me to answer when I could barely manage my way through a single thought, let alone form words.

“I asked you a question, Jaeger.”

“Y-Yes.” The word was breathless and mostly just a sound, but it seemed to be enough to satisfy him because he started to work his fingers in a delicious beckoning motion that had my hips bucking and my knees giving out. I probably would have fallen if it weren’t for the firm grip put around my waist.

“Good. That’s very good.” Levi’s voice was husky; the sound a low rumble in his chest. It was enough to have me reaching for my own aching member, but he smacked my hand away from its goal. “Did I say you could touch yourself?”

My head was spinning. Was he serious? “No, b-but…”

“You’ll come when I tell you to,” he cut me off, his teeth grazing against my shoulder before he paused to bite at the soft flesh near the crook of my neck. I tried to fight back my whine of protest, but it came out that much louder and he laughed in response. “That’s enough for now.”

He withdrew his fingers from my body and I had no hope of stopping my cry of protest, “Levi!”

He cocked one eyebrow and a smirk curved on his lips as he worked the loofa against his hands, “I already warned you that I was going to make you beg.”

“Fine, I’ll beg!” I was honestly prepared to do anything he wanted in that moment if it would give me the release I needed. “What do you want me to say? What do you want me to do? Do you want me on my knees?”

“Oh, I’m going to have you in every position possible when I finally take you,” Levi chuckled, washing the suds from his body, “When, that is. I’m going to make you work for it and it’s not going to be easy.”

“Can’t I just work for it later and have it now?”

“This is why you’re showing no progress in the internship,” Levi chided me, although there was still a playful gleam in his eyes. He was having too much fun fucking with me this way.

“It’s just sorting mail! How the hell is that important? How am I supposed to move up?”

“It’s not my fault you can’t see past the mailroom. Maybe if you took some initiative and stopped trying to fuck your boss all the time, you’d get somewhere.”

“I figured sleeping with the boss would be the best way to get promoted.”

He smirked and grabbed my shoulders, turning and pushing me under the spray of the showerhead. “Keep it up, brat, and it’ll be weeks before you’re fucking me again.”

I groaned and tilted my head back, getting hit with a hot stream of water in my face. “You’re fucking with me.”

“You bet your tight ass I am,” Levi reached up and I felt his fingers in my hair as soapy bubbles started dripping down the sides of my face. He was washing my hair. “This is your own fault, brat. You’re the one who said you weren’t ready, so I’m going to make sure you are so fucking ready that you’re crawling for it before I finally take you.”
“But I am ready!” I didn’t want to sound like I was whining, but it was kind of hard not to with a raging erection still throbbing between my legs. “You want me to crawl? I’ll crawl now. All over the apartment.”

“Just like that, huh?”

“I have no shame.”

He gave my ass a hard smack and then turned off the showerhead. “You also have no time. We need to get our asses dried and dressed before your little blonde friend shows up.”

“I’ll call him,” I offered quickly, determined to change his mind. “He probably hasn’t even left his apartment yet. He won’t mind waiting.”

“The only one that’s going to be waiting is you,” Levi tossed a towel at me as he wrapped one around his own waist. “Oh, and this probably goes without saying, but you’re not allowed to touch yourself.”

“Not allowed?” I looked down at my pulsing member and then back at him, raising one eyebrow. “Are you kidding?”

“Do I look like I’m kidding?” He mimicked my expression and raised an eyebrow in return as he rubbed a towel over his head to dry his hair, “No. If you want to come, then you’re going to do so with me and you’re going to wait until I say so.”

I was pretty damn sure that was going to be physically impossible, but if it meant getting him back into bed or against the shower wall then I was willing to work my ass off trying. “Fine.”

“Don’t sulk, brat.” A smirk crossed his lips as he draped the towel over his shoulders. “It’s not like I’m going to make you wait forever. Just long enough for you to feel it.”

I was about to mention that I was feeling it plenty already, but I knew that wouldn’t make a difference right now. Once Levi made up his mind on an issue it was nearly impossible to change it back, and I wasn’t going to start a struggle over something so small. If I made a big deal out of it he would only end up making me wait longer as some sick form of punishment. I would just have to suck it up and bear with it for now.

I followed him back into the bedroom, towel drying my own hair along the way. “You know, I’m going to have a hard time fitting into my pants.”

“You expect me to believe you’ve never popped a hard on in the middle of the day?” Levi rolled his eyes and walked into the closet, leaving the door open as he changed. “I’m going to go ahead and guess that we’re walking to Colossal’s, and I heard it’s cold as balls outside today.”

I didn’t know balls could be cold, although mine were definitely blue. “Uh… yea, sure.”
He slipped on a black scarf and then snatched a beige one off the shelf and walked over to me. I tried not to think about the fact that he was leaning up on his toes as he wrapped the scarf around my neck, but it was impossible to ignore. I knew I was beaming as I wrapped my arms around his waist and pulled him up against my chest. An annoyed look crossed his expression and he scowled as he eyed my smile.

“I think you get a little too much enjoyment out of my size.”

“Not really. I just like holding you.” It was a half-truth, of course. I had started to appreciate his smaller size since the day he let me touch him in a way that was purely intimate. The way his body fit into mine sent a thrill through my body every time he was in my arms. He belonged there.

“Shit, that’s sappy,” he muttered, but he stayed there for a moment longer before finally pulling away. I don’t think he would ever admit that he enjoyed it just as much as I did, but he didn’t have to. He wasn’t especially vocal when it came to his feelings, and most of the things I knew about Levi I had learned through reading his actions.

“So, Colossal’s, huh?”

I followed after him as he walked towards the foyer, “Too cheap?”

“Is that a real question?” Levi slid on his grey coat as he eyed me with an expression that bordered on amused. “It’s fast food. Of course it’s cheap.”

“That was kind of the point.” I shrugged, pulling on my coat. He had given me my own peg to hang it up about a week ago and the thought still made my heart skip. “Armin said he’d feel weird going anywhere expensive.”

“He knows I crap money, right?” Levi rolled his eyes and hit the button for the elevator. “It’s not like I’m going to break the bank by shopping off the dollar menu.”

I bit back a laugh as I joined him on the elevator, beginning our slow descent down to the lobby. “I told him you wouldn’t care.”

“I really don’t care where we eat.” Levi leaned casually in the same corner of the elevator he always occupied, folding his arms. “It’s been a while since I last ate there anyway. It might not be so bad.”

“You’ve been there?” I asked the question with a bit more surprise then I intended and the look that crossed his face was mildly insulted.

“Believe it or not, I eat fast food like any other human. Just because I have the funds to eat better doesn’t mean I do. Sometimes it’s convenient just to grab a burger.” He paused and rolled his eyes, shaking his head. “That and Hanji seems to have a thing for their food. She’s obsessed with the fact that they call them titans.”

The fact that Hanji had been the one to drag him there made Levi eating fast food a bit more believable. Somehow I just couldn’t see him going there on his own. Of course, we had never gone out publicly so I had no idea what his normal restaurants were. We had mostly stuck to his kitchen and the occasional take out whenever I ate with him.

The doors to the elevator spread open just as Armin walked in through the entrance, and a large smile spread across his face as his eyes met mine. I honestly hadn’t realized how much I’d missed seeing him like this until just now, and I felt a sudden wave of excitement that I would be spending the entire night with him. I had been driving to and from Trost with Levi over the past week, and the only time Armin and I had together was in the mailroom where we were usually busy with whatever
work we were given that day.

It was probably our lack of time together that made me pull him into my arms now, and I held him there until he made an awkward sound, “Uhm… Eren…”

He was glancing over my shoulder at Levi who, despite Armin’s concern, seemed fully uninterested in the fact that I was latched onto another man. I knew he wouldn’t care, of course. Although Levi had shown plenty of jealousy towards every other man, he had never so much as batted an eye at the way I was around Armin. Either he didn’t see Armin as a threat or he had accepted our close relationship from the start.

“Don’t break apart on my account.” Levi’s lips twitched with a smirk as he watched Armin extract himself from my arms. “I think I’m going to have to stop driving you in, Eren. Clearly you two aren’t getting enough time together.”

“Oh, no! No, we’re fine!” Armin sputtered and I had to hide my smile. I knew Levi enough to catch when he was joking now, but Armin had no idea.

“Oh, I’m sure you’re fine. You two seemed pretty damn cozy just now. I might have to be-” Levi paused midsentence and stepped forward to touch the side of Armin’s face, leaning close to stare at his ear, “What’s this?”

“Oh, uhm…” Armin glanced over at me with a sheepish expression as my eyes widened. I hadn’t noticed the piercing until Levi pointed them out, but the three silver hoops running along his upper right ear were hard to miss now.

“When did you do that?” I rubbed my own ear as I eyed the handiwork. They looked like they had been done recently, although not so recent as today.

“Last night,” Armin muttered and then put his hand over his ear, a flush starting to color his cheeks. “Does it look that bad?”

“I wouldn’t say that, kid,” Levi commented as he drew his hand back, “I can think of one guy in particular that’ll love it.”

Armin’s blush deepened and I suddenly felt like hitting Levi in the back of the head. We all knew exactly who he was referring to and the fact that Armin was reacting that way did not help with the conversation we would be having tonight. My goal was to get Armin to stay away from Erwin and Levi had just made my job harder.

“Come on, let’s go. I’m hungry.” My words were probably more snappish than they needed to be, but I wasn’t about to correct myself. I was annoyed now and the fact that I hadn’t eaten much today wasn’t exactly helping.

I walked in a stony silence in the direction of Colossal’s, paying just enough attention to know that they were both following behind me. It wasn’t until we were halfway there that my temper started to cool and I realized I was being more than a little unfair. They had nothing to talk about without me playing the middleman, and I knew that Levi wasn’t a natural chatterbox and Armin wasn’t about to force a conversation.

I slowed my pace until I was walking beside Levi, glancing over at Armin and actually taking a moment to admire the way the piercings went with the new look he had been trying to achieve. It was obvious that he was trying to reinvent himself after his break up with Jean. The two of them had barely talked in the past two weeks, but it wasn’t because Jean hadn’t been making a constant effort.
The way he groveled around Armin almost made me feel sorry for him. That was, of course, until I reminded myself he had cheated on him and made my best friend cry.

“Did it hurt?”

Armin’s hand went instinctively to his ear and he angled his head to look at me. “A little, but not as much as I thought it would.”

He still looked a little self-conscious, and I couldn’t help the reassuring smile that naturally took over my lips. “It’s a really good look for you. I like it a lot.”

“Almost getting jealous here, Eren.” Levi spoke up from beside me, but there was a teasing edge in his voice. I had a feeling he was making the comment just to get a reaction from Armin, and it worked.

We walked into Colossal’s to find it busier than usual, but there were still a few tables to spare and not enough people in line to fill them before we got there. Plenty of employees were cleaning off the tables and prepping the food, all of them hard to miss in the obnoxiously bright red shirts and matching caps. Each shirt and hat had the customary Colossal’s logo of what I assumed was supposed to be a cute skinless titan biting into a hamburger. I could see Reiner and Bertholdt working in the back, and Annie was at the register with her usual expression of ‘I want you all to die.’

However, her expression changed when Levi walked up to the counter, “Didn’t you eat enough the last time you were here?”

“You’d think so,” he replied, his eyes focused on the menu, “I’m not really here by choice, though.”

“You know each other?” I couldn’t stop the question from coming out of my mouth. I wasn’t sure if I was jealous or curious, but the fact that Annie knew him by sight alone didn’t exactly thrill me.

“Not really,” Annie shrugged, glancing in my direction. “He was here a few weeks ago. He’s one of the only people to take down the Colossal Titan challenge.”

“You ate that much food?” Armin blurted out before I had the chance, staring at Levi as if he had literally just consumed a full sized horse in front of him. “How? You’re so small!”

“Liking you less and less right now, Arlert.” Levi glanced over at Armin and scowled, “You should know that most competitive eaters are actually on the smaller side.”

Armin flushed with chagrin and looked back and forth between the menu that boasted the challenge and Levi. “It’s just… it’s… and you…”

“It is a lot of food,” I pointed out, reading back through the description. Even I couldn’t believe he was able to fit it all in.

“I like a challenge.”

“Hey!” Reiner’s voice cut in as he hopped up to the counter and smacked Annie on the back, receiving a deadly glare in return. “Levi! Come to take down the Colossal Titan again?”

“I think once was more than enough.” Levi rolled his eyes, his expression growing increasingly impatient. It was obvious he didn’t like any of the attention and just wanted to order his food.

“That’s a shame. It’d be a nice break to watch you do it again.” Reiner grinned as he leaned against
the counter. Annie looked like she was doing her best not to put Reiner on the floor, but I wasn’t sure how much longer she’d last.

“Can we order?” I interjected, both for Levi’s sake and everyone else’s.

“Please god, yes,” Annie snapped, shrugging Reiner off when he leaned into her and poked at one of the keys.

“Give them an extra drink. I’m going to join them. I need a break.”

She waved him off and looked back to us with an impatient scowl. “Well?”

Armin gave her an apologetic smile as we each placed our orders. He was probably the only one in the entire restaurant that she was willing to tolerate. We leaned against the counter as we waited for our food, and when the trays finally arrived we snagged the first open table we could find. A moment later Reiner pulled up a seat to join us, either not noticing Levi’s glare or not caring enough to leave.

“So, how’s the internship going?” Reiner asked with a look in my direction, “It’s been pretty boring without you in class. It’s gotta be nice having a break from all the school work, though.”

“They don’t get a break,” Levi replied, setting down his drink, “They’re expected to complete the same amount of school work, in addition to what they do for us. If their grades drop below average, they’re removed from the internship.”

It was definitely one part of the internship that I hadn’t been prepared for. I had assumed we would be given a free pass from everything at school, but it all ended up being twice as much work. Thankfully Armin and Levi had both been willing to explain the things that I didn’t understand outside of the classroom, so my grades hadn’t suffered yet.

“Really? Kind of glad I didn’t sign up for it, then.” Reiner took a sip from his drink before glancing over at Armin, “I heard you and Jean split up. He was in here a few days ago. Seemed really down.”

Armin fidgeted slightly in his seat, looking more than a little uncomfortable with the sudden turn in the conversation, “Yea, things weren’t really working out.”

“Why not? What happened?”

“Did we order a side of Dr. Phil with our food?” Levi cut in, his expression growing increasingly more annoyed, “We didn’t come here for sharing circle, we came here to eat. And I may not be Mr. Emotions, but even I can tell the little mushroom doesn’t want to talk about it.”

Reiner sat there blinking at Levi, clearly not used to hearing him speak like that. Of course, the most Reiner had ever seen of Levi had been when he was stuffing his face with meat. He probably wasn’t aware that Levi’s personality ran a little closer to Annie’s level of ‘shut the fuck up and piss off.’

“Mushroom?” Armin spoke up from beside me and broke the tension at the table.

“Your hair,” Levi shrugged, pointing at his own head before popping a fry into his mouth, “Or what used to be your haircut. I guess it doesn’t really fit as much now, but you get to live with the nickname.”

How the hell was it that I got stuck with brat and kid, and Armin got something that was almost endearing? Well, once you got past the fact that it was technically a fungus. Mushrooms did have the ability to look cute.
Armin tugged lightly at a strand of his hair and a smirk crossed Levi’s lips. Although they barely had the chance to talk, I was happy that they were at least getting along in a comfortable silence. Even if they didn’t end up being friends, I appreciated the effort Levi was making to get to know him.

“Yo, Reiner! We need you off break!”

“Slave drivers here, seriously,” Reiner rolled his eyes and stood up, smacking the table. “We need to hang out sometime. Let me know when you have some time off.”

“Will do,” I tipped my cup in his direction and then took another sip as he walked away. Levi stared after him with the same scowl he had worn through most of our lunch. I frowned, staring at him until he finally picked up on it and looked my way. “Do you not like him or something?”

“I get a weird vibe from him,” Levi shrugged, folding his arms and leaning back in his seat. “I didn’t like him back when I did the challenge here either.”

“I still can’t believe you were able to eat that much,” Armin spoke up, shaking his head.

“I seem to have a talent for fitting abnormally large things into my body,” Levi smirked, glancing in my direction. Armin’s eyes widened as he quickly put down his soda cup, doing his best not to choke on the sip he had just taken.

I tried to keep the color from rising in my cheeks as I cleared my throat, “Well, I’m full.”

We cleaned up our trays and headed out of Colossal’s after a quick wave to Annie, Reiner, and Bertholdt. On our way back towards Trost, I reached into my pocket to check my phone for any recent calls and realized it wasn’t there.

“Shit.”

“What is it?” Levi asked, looking over at me as I checked my other pocket.

“I must have left my phone in your apartment.” I turned my pocket inside out. No luck. “I think it’s on your bed.”

“Do you want to go up and get it?” Armin asked. I was pretty sure he was trying to sound as casual as possible despite the fact that his mind was probably lingering on the fact that I had spent the night in Levi’s bed.

“I can run it down to you,” Levi interjected, “I’m heading to The Wall after I change anyway. I’ll stop at your room before I leave.”

The thought of Armin’s reaction to Levi in his club clothes was far too tempting to pass up, so I didn’t protest. “Thanks.”

We rode the elevator up to my floor in what I could only assume was a comfortable silence. Levi seemed content not saying a word, but he also didn’t withdraw himself by escaping to his usual corner of the elevator. Instead he leaned against me with one arm snaked around my waist and his hand tucked into my pocket. If Armin noticed the open affection he didn’t show it.

“I’ll be down in a little bit with your phone,” Levi informed me, and he leaned back into the corner of the elevator as we stepped off. As I turned, his eyes met mine and a smirk crossed his lips, “Good luck, kid.”

“Good luck?” Armin turned to me after the doors had closed, his brow furrowed in confusion.
“Good luck with what?”

I let the air rush out of my lungs, momentarily cursing Levi for bringing up the conversation so soon. It was unavoidable now. “I need to talk to you.”

I hated the worried look that filled his eyes. “About what?”

I dug the keys out of my pocket and opened the door to the dark apartment. My mom was gone for the next two days visiting her sister a few states over, so we had the apartment free to ourselves. Part of the reason I picked today to have this conversation was because no one would be around to eavesdrop on sensitive information. Not that I was ready to talk about any of it, but I knew I had to act before Erwin got his claws too deep into Armin.

“About Levi,” I muttered, trying to focus on turning on the lights. I didn’t want to meet his eyes just yet. “And Erwin.”

“But I’m not going to get Erwin in trouble,” Armin cut in as he turned on the light in the living room. “We haven’t done anything like that yet.”

I groaned and ran a hand down my face. The way he had just phrased that made my stomach twist uncomfortably. By ‘that’ I knew he meant sex, and the fact that he had to be specific meant they had done other things. Clearly I was already too late to stop them from doing anything at all. Warning Armin about the age difference hadn’t been enough to keep them apart over the past two weeks, and I knew it would be even more difficult to convince Armin to back off entirely now.

Unless he thought that he was doing it as a favor to me, of course.

That was really the only thing I had left to hang onto, but it wasn’t exactly something that was easy to phrase. I couldn’t just ask him to back off of Erwin so that I could ruin the man’s life. I knew Armin well enough to know that he wouldn’t let me do something like that so easily, and I couldn’t risk him blowing the lid off of everything. I had to be careful with my choice of words and how much information I was willing to let him have. Even if I wanted to say everything, I would have to play this game with half-truths.

How had I ever managed to get myself in this deep?

I took a seat on the couch and rested my head in my hands, mostly to compose my thoughts but partly because I knew the defeated look would help my case. I let a sigh rush out of my lungs and gave a slow shake of my head. I probably looked pathetic, but it worked. It barely took him a moment to join me on the couch and his arms wrapped around me as he spoke in a voice filled with concern, “Eren, what is it?”

“I don’t want to lose Levi.” I said the one truth that I knew for certain because it was a constant worry in my life now.

“What makes you think you’re going to?”

I took a slow breath and then lowered my hands to meet his eyes. He was closer than I expected him to be, but I was too comfortable with him to care. “I need to tell you something, and you have to promise me that you won’t tell anyone.”

“Eren, what-”

“Promise me.”
He frowned, regarding my expression for a moment before finally nodding. “I promise.”

“Levi thinks that Erwin is the reason that his father killed himself,” I spoke in a rush and continued before he could cut in, “And he’s hated him for years because of it. He got close to me because he wants me to ruin Erwin’s marriage.”

“But Erwin isn’t—”

“I know he’s not married anymore, but Levi has no idea,” I shook my head and shut my eyes. All of the stress I had felt these past two weeks was starting to crack me, and finally speaking these words was a release I didn’t know I needed. “I already talked to Erwin about all of this. He knows what Levi wants to do.”

Armin opened his mouth and then shut it, repeating the motion twice more before shaking his head. I had never seen him so lost. “I don’t understand.”

“Erwin and Levi were together years ago, and when Erwin told Levi’s father about their relationship he… well, he killed himself. Levi thinks that Erwin did it on purpose to get control of the company.”

“Erwin wouldn’t do that,” Armin responded so quickly that it made me worry he had already taken sides. Maybe this wouldn’t be easy at all.

“I’m not saying that he did. I just don’t know what to believe anymore. All I know is that Erwin cares enough about Levi to let him get his revenge.” That much was true at least. Actually, nearly everything I had told Armin had been true so far.

Armin’s expression grew speculative as he leaned back and pulled his legs up onto the couch, sitting with them crossed. He regarded me quietly before a frown tugged at his lips. “I’m not saying that Erwin is a bad guy, but I don’t know if he’s the type to lose his job and get himself thrown in jail just so Levi can feel better about himself.”

It felt like someone had shocked me with electricity and I tried desperately to keep my expression under control as Armin’s words started to sink in. Was he right? Had Erwin twisted this game around and tricked me into believing it was all for Levi’s own good? Or was it actually possible that Erwin was willing to sacrifice a large part of his life for someone he cared about?

Either way, the situation had just become far worse than I could have imagined. I couldn’t tell Levi everything I knew at this point. It had been weeks since I learned everything about Erwin, and admitting that I had been lying to Levi this whole time would surely bring an end to our relationship. And if Erwin was lying to me, I had no idea where this would be going or what his end game was. At this point the only option left to me was sticking to Levi’s original plan and ruining Erwin regardless of whether he allowed it or not.

Which meant doing a lot of things I didn’t want to do.

“I don’t know what to do.” My voice cracked as the emotions started to build up in me. My hands were shaking and I couldn’t seem to get a control on my body. I had fucked everything up. I had let myself be twisted around into a situation I could no longer escape from. I couldn’t see an ending that didn’t involve me losing Levi entirely, and it was my fault. “I’m going to lose him. I’m going to lose him and I don’t know how to…”

My voice cracked again and this time it broke off entirely. My shoulders started shaking so hard that I was certain they would never stop. I clenched my teeth and my fists as I tried to will away the tears that were building up and burning in my eyes. This hadn’t been how I wanted things to go. This
wasn’t the conversation I was supposed to have. Things weren’t supposed to just go to shit this way.

“You’re not going to lose him, Eren,” Armin had his arms back around me, but I was yearning for a different set right now. “Just talk to him.”

“It’s not that easy!” The words were a watery mess and I had given up any hope of holding back my tears. “None of this has been easy! He was only with me in the first place to get me to do this for him. He’s going to leave me if I can’t!”

“He cares about you more than that.”

I met Armin’s eyes, knowing my own were filled with every kind of pain that I was feeling. “Only because I’m useful.”

“I think you’re misreading things, Eren,” Armin frowned, his eyes scanning my expression, “Don’t you see the way he looks at you?”

“He doesn’t look at me any differently than he does anyone else.”

Armin laughed and then clapped a hand over his mouth, shaking his head, “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be laughing when you’re crying. But Eren, are you blind? He looks at you like you’re the only person in the room. It’s even noticeable at work. The second you two are in the same room, his eyes are on you. It’s like he can’t see anything else.”

“He’s not going to look at me that way anymore,” I shook my head, wiping angrily at my eyes. The realization that none of this would last was starting to eat at me. “Not after he finds out I lied to him about Erwin.”

“How did you lie?”

“I know Erwin’s not in a relationship and we’ve been working together behind Levi’s back,” I sighed and shut my eyes, “Even if it’s not a direct lie, he’s going to hate me for it.”

Armin paused for a long moment before speaking in a soft voice. “Does he have to find out?”

My eyes snapped up to meet his, searching his expression. “No. Not if I can manage to do everything with Erwin.”

“Then do it,” Armin shrugged, holding my gaze, “Do what you need to do in order to keep what you want.”

“But I can’t do that when Erwin’s focused on you.” I spoke in a rush before my mind caught up to what I was saying. “He won’t give me the time of day. I haven’t been able to do anything.”

“Then I’ll stay away from him.”

I let the air out of my lungs, staring at Armin with an expression caught somewhere between shock and extreme gratitude. How did he make this so simple? I had been terrified to tell him anything, and yet he was willing to let go of what he wanted for me. I would be able to keep Armin away from Erwin, although suddenly it was for a different reason.

“You’ll do that?”

“Eren, you’re my best friend,” Armin cupped my face in his hands and held my stare, taking a deep breath before continuing. “And I don’t agree with any of this, I really don’t, but I’m going to stick by
you. Even if I think this is stupid. I can’t sit here and watch you cry like this and not try to help you when I can. I know how much he means to you and I can tell you mean a lot to him, too.”

“But don’t you like him?” We both knew whom I was talking about.

“A lot, actually.” Armin’s gaze lowered away from mine, “But not enough to let you get hurt. Don’t get me wrong, Eren, I’m not going to let you ruin his life. I don’t think that’s something you want to do either.”

He wasn’t wrong when he said that. As much as I didn’t trust Erwin, I really had no interest in destroying his life just because Levi wanted me to. The only reason I agreed to it in the first place was because it meant being in Levi’s life.

“I’m going to help you figure this out. I’m not saying either of them are bad, but they’re both very smart men and they’re using you to get what they want.” Armin reached down and held my hands in his. “But you don’t have to be in this alone anymore. We’ll find a way for this to work without you losing him.”

I could finally feel my body beginning to relax as a calm settled over me. I was lost in this by myself, but if Armin was there to make sense of it all then I knew I stood a chance of coming out of this without having my heart stomped on. Of course, that wasn’t my only concern, “What about you and Erwin?”

“That’s nothing we have to worry about until after we figure this out,” he said with a small shrug, “But I’m not going to let him get hurt, and I’m not going to lie to you, Eren… I am interested in him.”

As much as that made me want to skin Erwin alive, I knew it was the best I could hope for right now. If nothing else, it bought me time until I could figure out another way to keep Armin away from him.

“Armin, I…” I paused and squeezed his hands. Tonight’s discussion had gone nothing like I’d planned, but I couldn’t see that as a bad thing. I had felt so alone in this mess and suddenly there was a light in my tunnel, walking beside me and guiding me away from all the jagged rocks that had planned to trip me. “Thank you.”

Armin smiled and opened his mouth to speak, but the knock at the door drew our attention away. I had almost forgotten that Levi would be coming back with my phone, and I scrambled to get off of the couch to answer. I paused briefly in front of the hallway mirror, wiping away any signs that I had been crying and hoping my expression was composed enough that he wouldn’t notice.

Armin was at my side when I opened the door, and I heard his breath catch when his eyes fell on Levi.

“Oh, wow,” Armin breathed and I had to bite back a laugh.

Levi was wearing his usual shoulder-length black wig and his eyes were sharper than ever with the black eyeliner that surrounded them. He had all of his piercings in, with three in his upper right ear and two on either lobe. Tonight he wore a long black trench coat that opened just above his navel and revealed the black leather of his tight, belted pants. He had on heeled boots that almost brought him at eye level with me, making Armin the shortest one in the room.

“Here,” he held out my phone to me, an odd expression crossing his face. His brow was furrowed as his sharp blue eyes analyzed my expression. I was almost positive he could see the tearstains, but he
didn’t make a comment on them.

I took the phone from him with my left hand and grabbed the front of his trench with my right, pulling him forward to claim his lips with my own. He stumbled into me and I felt his lips curve into a smirk against mine. “Careful brat, or I’ll be dragging you and the little mushroom along with me.”

Somehow I knew that Armin wouldn’t be comfortable with that.

I released his jacket and pocketed my phone, “I’ll call you?”

“You better.” Levi glanced over at Armin, his smirk remaining in place. “Have fun, you two.”

Armin made a soft squeaking sound, clearly catching the playful edge to Levi’s words and drawing the exact conclusion he intended. I rolled my eyes after I closed the door, ruffling Armin’s hair, “He’s kidding. Don’t worry.”

“Sometimes I wonder,” Armin frowned, still staring at the door.

“Sometimes I do, too.” I admitted.

Armin and I spent the remainder of the night in my bedroom, watching movies and playing the videogames we had been neglecting. Somewhere in the early hours of the morning we had fallen asleep against each other, the controllers still in our hands and static on the screen. I must have been exhausted because I didn’t even hear the front door open.

It wasn’t until Hanji was standing over our bed that I finally opened my eyes and let out a surprised yelp, scrambling away. “What the hell?”

Armin shot up out of bed with a surprised cry, stumbling over the mess on my floor and toppling into my pile of laundry. He was babbling incoherently, caught between ‘what’ and ‘who’ as his mind tried to catch up with the situation. Having Hanji stand cackling like a hyena certainly didn’t help matters.

I pressed a hand to my chest, feeling my heart race as I narrowed my eyes at Hanji. “How did you even get in?”

“On the hopes and dreams of children!” Hanji grinned widely, still laughing.

“No, really, how did you get in?”

“I whipped the doorman into submission?” She tried again, raising one eyebrow. That one was actually a bit more believable, but I was more willing to bet that she stole the key from Levi.

“Fine, whatever,” I took a deep breath, still holding my hand against my chest. “Why are you here?”

“Oh!” She actually sounded like she had just been reminded, although considering our reactions she might have actually forgotten. “I figured out what we’re going to do for Levi’s birthday!”

I didn’t see why this couldn’t have been a phone conversation, but at least she had finally settled on something. She had been going at it for two weeks now and hadn’t been satisfied with any idea.

“What are we going to do?”

“Well, it’s more like what are you going to do?”

I frowned, not exactly liking the sound of that. I already had something personal planned for Levi,
and I was positive that it wasn’t the same thing Hanji had in mind. “What am I going to do?”

“You’re going to give him a striptease!”

My eyes widened and my mouth dropped open. I couldn’t even attempt to control the volume of my voice as I cried out.

“What?”
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Here it is! ^_^ I have really been looking forward to this chapter. I hope everyone is having a great Christmas / holiday so far! <3 Thank you so much to all of you who have sent me Christmas messages on tumblr - you're all so sweet! <3

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, LEVI! ^__^ And yes, Intern!Levi’s birthday is also on December 25th. They will exchange gifts in this chapter, too. ^_^

Oh! If any of you are on tumblr, check out mindxcrash! An amazing Levi cosplayer who did an altered reading of Chapter 17. It is... wow. XD Hilarious and very much worth checking out!

Thank you all so much for all the comments on the last chapter! I'm glad you're all excited about the Eren striptease. It was very... interesting to write. XD Hopefully you all enjoy it.

As always, please feel free to comment here or on tumblr! I'm looking forward to hearing what you all think about the gift exchange, so please let me know! ^_^ I'm also tracking the tag ‘fic: the intern’ on tumblr.

ENJOY!

“Please tell me that this is all some kind of joke I don’t understand.”

The cold air swirled around us as I stumbled along behind Hanji, propelled forward only by the unrelenting grip she had on my wrist. Armin was following at my side with a worried look on his face; clearly unsure of whether or not he should rescue me from the situation. He had tried when we were still upstairs, but Hanji hadn’t even noticed his presence when he attempted to convince her that breaking and entering was not the best form of introduction. She had been far too caught up in the plan to drag me to The Wall for some kind of early morning striptease practice, and it was clear to me now that nothing was about to change her mind.

“It’ll be fun!” Hanji flashed me a grin from over her shoulder, not once breaking her stride.

“I’m pretty sure you and I don’t share the same definition of fun…” I muttered, glancing back at the glass doors leading into Trost. Even if it wasn’t too late to turn back now, I knew she wouldn’t let me. I had already run over every possible way to get out of this and I was coming up empty.

“Oh, but we’re going to, sugar cakes.” She continued, practically bouncing along on the sidewalk now that The Wall’s entrance was in view. “Trust me, you’re gonna love shaking that tight booty!”

“I don’t need to shake it.” I tried my best to keep my voice stable, but the thought of me shaking anything in front of anyone, especially Levi, had me blushing to my ears. “It’s not even that tight anymore. I just had fries. It’ll probably jiggle!”

“Well, honey, that’s what butts do. It’s not like they’re supposed to be immovable landmasses.” Hanji laughed as she dragged me up the steps to the entrance. “A little bit of jiggle in your wiggle is
a good thing!"

“I can’t believe this is happening to me,” I groaned, glancing over at Armin. The most he could do was offer me an apologetic smile. There was really no way out of this and even he could see that.

“It’s just a little dance, right?” Even Armin sounded unsure of himself as he tried to offer this small morsel of reassurance.

Hanji barked out a laughed as she grabbed the handle to the door, “A little dance? Hell no, you butterscotch crumpet! This is going to be huge! There’s going to be a pole, a stage, lights, music, and a crowd… Eren? Hey, Eren!”

I was trying to tug myself loose as I backed towards the nearest step, my whole body deciding to give a resounding ‘nope’ to the entire scenario she had concocted. No way in hell was I going to shake my ass in front of a crowd of strangers. I wasn’t even sure I could properly shake my ass without falling down on it, and I had no plans to find out any time soon. They could figure out something else for Levi’s birthday, so long as it had nothing to do with me making a fool out of myself in the middle of his club. Not that I hadn’t done that before, but I wasn’t about to add to it.

“Come on, Eren,” Hanji gave another tug as I tried to pull in the opposite direction. She could keep my damn arm if it came off. “Don’t make me get the bouncers.”

I would have little to no hope at all if she did that, but I was willing to bet that they weren’t inside at this time of day. If it had been closer to the evening I would have had a reason to fear her threat, but right now Muscles One and Two were probably fast asleep. It was obvious that she was bluffing, and I was about to call her on it when the doors to The Wall opened up.

“Hanji, what are you doing?” Petra frowned as she folded her arms across her chest. She was dressed in comfortable clothing, despite the place she had just walked out of. Clearly The Wall was not open for business during the day, because I couldn’t imagine jeans and flannel shirts were on Levi’s approved clothing list. “You look like you’re going to pull his arm right out of the socket.”

Hanji released my wrist almost immediately, causing me to lose my balance and stumble back. I probably would have toppled down the stairs if it weren’t for the set of arms that wrapped around me. I tilted my head back against the solid chest and stared up at Armin, blinking once before clearing my throat and hurrying to find my feet. For someone who looked so small and gentle, his body was surprisingly toned.

“He was trying to get away,” Hanji explained, giving a small shrug, “He can’t practice if he’s not here.”

“You probably said something to scare him off.” Petra sighed and shook her head, turning her attention on me, “What did she say?”

“That I have to dance in front of everyone,” I replied, rubbing my wrist and trying to decide how fast I would have to run in order to get back to Trost before they could catch me. “With a pole. I don’t even think I can dance without one of those. And even if I could, I don’t want to do it in front of strangers!”

“You don’t have to,” Petra smiled reassuringly, giving a quick nudge of her elbow into Hanji’s side when she opened her mouth to object. “We just wanted you to give Levi a little show. It can be personal. No one else has to be there.”

I stood there for a moment, still rubbing my wrist as I considered the idea of actually doing
something so embarrassing in front of Levi. I would be completely exposed and out of my comfort zone, and although I had gotten to the point that I trusted him I wasn’t sure I could be so vulnerable in front of him just yet. I wouldn’t know what to do if he started laughing at me. But at the same time, there would be so many possibilities if he actually enjoyed it. It would be like I was trying to seduce him, and there was something attractive about that idea. Maybe I could make him squirm.

“No one else has to be there?” I hedged, looking back and forth between Hanji and Petra. I could feel Armin’s gaze on me from the side, but I couldn’t risk looking in his direction and losing my nerve. I knew the speculative stare that I would find if I looked his way.

Petra glanced over at Hanji, who met her stare and then sighed, “No one else has to be there. It doesn’t have to be a big show.”

A smile crossed Petra’s lips and she leaned into Hanji, taking her hand as she turned her gaze back to me, “It doesn’t even have to be here, if you don’t want it to be. Although we do have a nice pole.”

“I wouldn’t know what to do with it,” I shrugged. Well, that wasn’t entirely true. I was pretty damn sure I would be a natural at falling on my ass or landing head first on the floor.

“You don’t have to do anything complicated to make it look good,” Petra held the door open, “Come on, we’ll teach you a few moves on it. We have to help you put together a dance anyway. If you’re still not comfortable with the pole after trying it out, then you don’t have to use it at all.”

I followed Petra and Hanji into The Wall, a little surprised to find the inside lit up like an average room. It looked almost normal without the red lights, pulsing music, and writhing bodies. Of course, there were still cages and other choice pieces of BDSM equipment that provided good reminders as to what this place was like at night. I shouldn’t have even been surprised when I heard Armin gasp behind me when he entered the club.

“What kind of…” Armin trailed off as he stared around the room. He shook his head slowly, his mouth working without sound as he started to realize what kind of club The Wall was. Not that it was hard to figure out. “Eren… I… I didn’t know… that you… you… wow…”

My eyes widened as his words caught up to me, “No! No, no, no. I’m not into this stuff. No. Not at all. No.”

“Oh really?” Hanji grinned like the Cheshire cat as she wagged her eyebrows at me, “It didn’t seem that way when you and Levi put on the little show in the dungeon.”

Armin turned quickly to stare at me with a shocked expression, and I felt my entire face flood red with embarrassment. I was going to have to kill Hanji for bringing this up.

“Show?” Armin asked, even though his expression told me he wasn’t sure he wanted to know, “What kind of show?”

“Oh, nothing too major,” Hanji said as she waved her hand dismissively, “Levi just shoved a crop up.”

I clamped my hands over Hanji’s mouth before she could finish the sentence, and she blinked at me with a surprised expression. I held her gaze with as stern a stare as I could manage and gave a quick shake of my head. No way in hell was Armin allowed to hear that I had a crop shoved up my ass in a room full of strangers. That was one piece of information he never needed to know.

“So,” Petra clapped her hands together to draw our attention, and I felt a wave of gratefulness wash over me. “Let’s get to work, shall we?”
I removed my hands from Hanji’s mouth, glancing over to meet Armin’s curious stare and giving a small shake of my head. Thankfully Armin let the subject drop, although I was sure he wanted to learn more. He would probably try to bring it up again later, but for now I was free from the embarrassing conversation.

“First thing’s first,” Hanji grinned, walking over to the computer and tapping the mouse. “We need to pick a song for you to dance to.”

I had a good feeling that I would be no help there. Most of the songs that I enjoyed were nothing that anyone would ever want to strip to. “What kind of choices do we have?”

“Well, we already have a few in mind,” Petra replied, leaning against the desk and looking over Hanji’s shoulder. She paused and glanced up at me, smiling. “We figured you might not know what kind of song you should pick.”

“I don’t really spend my nights stripping.” I shrugged and looked over in Armin’s direction. He was still trying to take in the full sight of the club, his brow furrowed with whatever thought he was focused on. I wondered briefly if he felt as if I had lied to him by not telling him about The Wall.

“We narrowed it down to three,” Petra continued, tapping the mouse twice. Suddenly the room filled with a beat I was pretty sure I had heard at least once before, “This one might be more familiar. It’s Lady Gaga, which isn’t exactly Levi’s favorite but he does like this song.”

Even if I hadn’t heard this particular song, I had heard Lady Gaga’s voice before and I appreciated the familiarity. She started singing about teeth, and the edginess of the song made it easy to guess why Levi enjoyed it. It suited him on some level, although I wasn’t sure my body would be able to keep up with the beat.

“It’s a little fast.”

“Fast?” Hanji scoffed, “That one’s not even that fast!”

“Well, I guess it would be for a beginner,” Petra shrugged and tapped the mouse again, “This one’s much slower.”

The next song that filled the room was definitely slower. The beat, although simple, was something I could see my body moving to in a way that might almost pass for sensual. When Madonna’s voice started to speak in hushed whispers, I could feel my cheeks heat and my heart race as arousal curled in my core. It was like sex was dripping out of the song, and I almost felt embarrassed to be listening to it in a room with other people. I couldn’t just see myself dancing to this song; I could see myself wrapped around Levi as our naked bodies moved together with the slow, intoxicating beat.

I glanced over to Armin to see if I was the only one reacting to this song, and was surprised to see his cheeks were as flushed as mine. He had one hand pressed to his cheek and his lips were parted as his chest moved. He was panting, and suddenly I felt like I was invading on his privacy by staring at him this way. I quickly turned my attention to Petra and Hanji, clearing my throat.

“I like that one.”

“I had a feeling you might,” Petra grinned, tapping the button to stop the song. ”Is that the one you want then?”

“It’s slow enough to dance to,” I offered as if that were the actual reason. In all honesty it was just hot as hell, “What’s it called?”
“Justify My Love,” Petra replied; still staring at the screen, “It’s by Madonna.”

That much I knew. My mother was a huge fan of Madonna and had played her music almost constantly when I was younger. Of course, I had never heard that song and it was obvious as to why she had never played it when I was at home.

“Great, so now we can practice!” Hanji practically bounded over to me and stopped only to give a critical look at my outfit, “Should we dress up, Petra?”

“Not for his first time,” Petra was leaning against the desk as she eyed my outfit, “Besides, he might decide to do this in Levi’s apartment, and it’s not like he’ll be dressed up then either.”

“If you do it in Levi’s apartment, you have to tell him it’s a gift from us,” Hanji wagged her finger at me and I frowned.

“Won’t that ruin the moment?”

“You can tell him after,” Hanji shrugged and then grinned, “Besides, you have to take him to The Wall when you’re done. We always have cake for his birthday. It’s tradition.”

She clapped me on the back, obviously not interested in an answer. She had already made the decision for me. “Let’s get started!”

I stumbled up the steps behind Hanji as she bounced up onto the stage, her excitement palpable. Armin stood amongst the tables as he watched us, looking more than a little out of place. I almost felt bad for dragging him here, but it wasn’t like I had been given much of a choice when Hanji had pulled me out of bed. Of course Armin was going to follow after me.

“Hey,” Petra spoke up, staring in Armin’s direction. When he glanced over at her she offered the most welcoming smile, and I could once again see why Levi was so close to her. “I’m sorry, we’ve been really rude. What’s your name?”

“Armin.”

“I’m Petra,” she smiled and then nodded to the tables, “If you want to watch him, you can sit anywhere. It would probably make him feel more comfortable.”

I was pretty damn sure that was going to make me feel the opposite of comfortable, but I wasn’t about to usher Armin out the door if he wanted to stay. It wasn’t like I was going to be able to pull off seductive dance anyway, so it didn’t really matter if he watched me or not. If nothing else, I would be able to give him a good laugh and I was sure that was something Armin needed more of.

Armin took a seat at one of the table and looked around as if expecting to see someone else there. I had to admit that the entire situation had to be more than a little awkward for him. He had come over for the night expecting to hang out and sleep in the next day, and instead he had been pulled into some kinky club to watch his friend perform a striptease. I’m sure it wasn’t exactly what he had planned, but at the same time he wasn’t about to ditch me.

I heard the click of a button and all of a sudden the sensual beat started to fill the room once more. I took a slow breath that shook on the way in and glanced over at Hanji for some form of direction. All I got back was a wide grin and the most obvious command, “Dance.”

With another deep breath, I tried to calm my nerves and focus on something that should have been simple but seemed like the most complicated thing in the world. I closed my eyes and started swaying back and forth; lightly bouncing from one foot to the other and trying to match the beat I
feel thrumming through my body. I was almost convinced I was actually doing a halfway decent job when I heard Hanji’s muffled laughter to my right.

“Don’t laugh,” I just barely heard Petra’s whisper over the music.

“I can’t help it,” Hanji’s voice wasn’t as soft and it was obvious she was struggling to contain her laughter, “He’s doing the pee-pee dance!”

I opened my eyes and stopped dancing immediately, blushing furiously. “Well how the hell am I supposed to do it?”

“Not like that,” Hanji said, pointing at my legs, “That just made it look like you really had to pee.”

“I don’t know how to dance. I’ve never danced like this before and this is just…” I trailed off, glancing over at Armin who was watching me with concerned eyes. “This is just embarrassing.”

“It always is at first,” Petra spoke up as she stopped the song, “It’s hard to find your comfort zone right away. It wasn’t easy for me either.”

I had a feeling that it had all come naturally to Hanji, and that was part of the reason I was struggling. I couldn’t expect her to understand my embarrassment and she was so familiar with this kind of scenario that she didn’t know how to direct me through it. At least not in a way that I was comfortable with. I wasn’t going to be able to get through this dance with her laughing whenever I messed up, even if she meant no harm. I needed someone understanding like Petra, but I wasn’t comfortable enough with Hanji to ask her to leave the room.

“Hanji,” Armin spoke up as he stood from the table, “Can you show me around the club a little? I’ve never been here before and I’d like to see…”

“Yes!” Hanji clapped her hands together, a grin spreading across her face.

I stared at Armin in surprise, realizing he had done that to distract her. Sometimes I was certain he was able to read my mind, although it was possible I just had an expressive face.

Armin glanced over at me and gave a small wink before turning his attention back to Hanji, “Can we go now?”

“Absolutely, honey bun!” Hanji hopped off the stage and started walking over to him, “Oh! And we can dress you up, too!”

Armin’s expression fell into one of pure terror, but he wasn’t about to back out now. “Uhm… yea. Sure. That’d be… great.”

He didn’t sound like he thought it would be great at all, but he let Hanji cart him off towards the hallway regardless. I gave him an apologetic look before he disappeared from sight, and then I slumped up against the metal pole in the center of the stage and sighed. This had been far too eventful a day and it was barely even noon.

“You have a good friend,” Petra drew my attention as she walked up the steps to join me on stage. “He’s a clever guy for being able to get her out of here so quickly.”

I let the air rush out of my lungs and glanced over at her. I couldn’t understand why, but I felt the sudden need to explain. “It’s not that I think I can’t learn a lot from her…”

“Oh, I know,” Petra interjected, “She just gets excited. She’s a very passionate person and sometimes
I think she forgets that most people aren’t as excited about things as she is.”

I was willing to bet that was true.

“So,” Petra drawled, glancing over her shoulder at the room behind us. “Why don’t we sit down and talk a little? When you’re comfortable we can try again, and this time I’ll help you. I may not know as much as Hanji, but I’m pretty sure I’ll be a decent teacher.”

I took a seat at the nearest table, letting my eyes roam around the room, “Was it hard getting into all of this for him?”

“It wasn’t just for him,” Petra shrugged, taking a seat across from me, “That was how I got started, though. But the deeper I got the more I realized how much I actually enjoy it on a personal level.”

“Were you actually one of the dancers here?” I couldn’t keep my eyes off of the cages when I asked the question.

“No,” Petra laughed, shaking her head, “No, but I probably could be if I really wanted to. I just decided to learn because I was curious and there were plenty of people willing to teach me.”

“Who taught you?”

“Levi.” Petra said his name slowly, watching my expression and smiling when she saw my eyes widen. “Yea, I know. It’s surprising, isn’t it? He’s a very good dancer. Very sensual. Actually, he might pay you back for dancing for him.”

Suddenly I was more than eager to learn. “Really?”

“I’m pretty sure all you would have to do is ask.” Petra said, watching me with amused eyes, “He’s very taken with you, Eren. I’ve never seen him like this with anyone.”

I felt my cheeks heat, but I tried to remain as casual as possible, “You think so?”

“Oh, I know so.” Petra paused and then reached out to touch my hand, drawing my attention to her eyes. “You don’t need to be embarrassed about the dance. You don’t have to be that way around him. Levi’s not the type to laugh at you, even if you mess up. He’s going to realize that you worked hard to do this for him. Even if it’s the worst dance in the world, he’s going to love it because it’s you.”

I took a deep breath and decided to let a little of my insecurity show. “I just want it to be good.”

“I know,” she smiled reassuringly, “And we have a whole week to make sure it will be.”

“Then let’s get to work.” I pushed up from the table, deciding it was now or never. At least I wouldn’t be embarrassed in front of Petra. “If I’m going to do this for him, then I want it to be something worth watching. I don’t want to half-ass it.”

“You really care about him, don’t you?”

I faltered, catching the top of the chair to keep myself steady. That came out of nowhere. “Uhm… yea, I do.”

Petra looked up at me and smiled, “You’re in love with him, aren’t you?”

“I haven’t said that to him yet.” I avoided the answer completely because I wasn’t sure I was ready to admit it to myself. “And even if I was it’s too soon, isn’t it?”
“Who says?” Petra stood up from the table and folded her arms. “Whoever said there was some amount of time we had to know someone before falling in love? What does it matter if we’ve known them for a year or a day? When the heart knows, it knows. No one should be able to tell it otherwise.”

“No one should be able to tell who otherwise?” Hanji spoke up as she walked into the room, a grin plastered across her face. Armin was nowhere to be seen.

“Dressed him up already?” Petra asked, raising an eyebrow.

“He didn’t put up much of a struggle. Doesn’t he look-” Hanji paused, glancing behind herself and frowning, “Hey, don’t hide. Let them see how cute you look!”

“I really don’t think this is something I should be wearing…” Armin mumbled, staying hidden somewhere behind Hanji.

“With those sexy new piercings, that is exactly what you should be wearing,” Hanji countered, snapping her fingers, “Now come on. Show Eren your fine ass so he can get on with shaking his.”

Armin gave a muffled groan before shuffling out from behind Hanji, his face covered by his hands to hide what I could only assume was the world’s brightest blush. He was wearing a black and white striped tank top that held tight enough to his body to remind me just how toned he really was. He wore a three-quarter sleeved black leather lattice jacket that showed just enough of his wrists to reveal the black cuffs he wore there. His pants were made of black leather and paired with matching ankle boots to complete the look.

“Armin, you look… wow.” I had to admit that Hanji knew exactly what she was doing when she dressed him, and I was almost tempted to ask her to work her magic on me.

“Is it really okay?”

Armin lowered his hands from his face and I immediately caught sight of the lip ring, my eyes widening. I crossed the room to him in an instant and cupped his chin without thinking, leaning close as my thumb brushed against his lower lip. I heard his sharp intake of breath and mistook it for pain, moving my thumb and fixing Hanji with an accusing stare.

“You pierced him?”

“What? No! It’s fake.” Hanji tapped her own lip, despite the fact that she had no piercing there. “It’s just a clip. It comes right off.”

I stared at the lip ring, still unconvinced but willing to believe Hanji rather than manhandle Armin’s lip. Although I silently admitted that it was an attractive look, I wasn’t going to let him know that. He had surprised me enough with the piercings in his ear and I didn’t want to give him any more reason to put additional holes in his head.

“I don’t know how I feel about the piercing,” I started, trying my best not to admire the shy blush he still had in his cheeks, “But the rest of it looks really good on you.”

“I guess,” Armin mumbled, looking down at the cuffs on his wrists and fidgeting with them, “It just feels a little weird. This whole place… I didn’t expect you to be into this stuff.”

“I’m not really sure I am,” I admitted with a shrug, “But Levi is.”

“Doesn’t that mean you have to be?” Armin asked, his brow furrowing with confusion as he met my
eyes.

“No.” It was an automatic answer and I was a little surprised that it came so naturally. “No, he doesn’t force any of it on me. It’s what he likes, but that doesn’t mean I have to like it, too.”

“You know, one day soon you’re going to have to sit down and really tell me about him.”

It almost felt like a lecture. “I know. And I will. I actually didn’t mean to skip this part, it’s just…”

“No part of his life that you’re in.”

The comment stung worse than I could have anticipated, even if Armin hadn’t meant it that way. But it was true. Save for the brief introduction I had on that first night at The Wall, we hadn’t touched on that part of Levi’s lifestyle at all. I couldn’t help but wonder if it was something he was missing. An even worse thought was that he might be getting his fix from somewhere or someone else. The idea of that made my skin crawl, but I knew I couldn’t focus on it now.

“Alright, boys.” Hanji clapped her hands and rubbed them together, “Let’s get back to work!”

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I never expected the practice to be easy, but it ended up being far more difficult than I could have imagined. I had never been to any of my school dances and dancing wasn’t something I did even on an irregular basis, so any skill I had was limited to what I was born with and that happened to be little to none. It had taken Petra a solid day to work me out of the little sway that Hanji had so lovingly dubbed “the pee-pee dance” and it took another day after that for me to manage anything resembling rhythm.

Armin had been surprisingly supportive and he joined me every day after work; first just to watch but eventually he joined in as well. I was pretty sure he was trying his best to keep me from becoming an embarrassed mess, and I had to admit that watching him crawl around on the floor was enough to keep my mind off my own attempts at sexiness. We were both pitiful at what we were doing, but it was a relief not to be alone. At this point even if I did make a fool of myself in front of Levi, I could say that I had the time of my life doing it.

Hanji had to shoo Levi away on more than one occasion throughout the week, and he had been making it his personal goal to work any information he could out of me. I actually wasn’t sure how I had managed to keep the secret for this long, but he definitely didn’t make it easy for me. Every time he had me alone he worked me into a state of sexual arousal that had my mind so hazed that I was almost willing to answer any question he asked. It was only through a herculean effort that I managed to deny him the one bit of information that he wanted, and he had continued to deny me any form of release as a result.

At this point, I was pretty sure I was one good breeze away from creaming my pants.

Still, I had managed to keep Petra and Hanji’s surprise a secret and after a week of torturous dance routines, the day had finally come. It was Christmas day and our winter break had started a few days earlier. Despite the fact that we were participating in an internship, we were allowed our usual vacation time and it had been three days since Armin or I had stepped foot inside the office. Although I spent the days with Hanji and Petra, I spent every remaining moment inside Levi’s apartment.
The most I had seen of my own home had been to snag a change of clothes. My mom had decided to extend her vacation and wouldn’t be returning until after the holidays, and my dad hadn’t contacted me since the morning he left. I probably would have felt incredibly lonely in the empty apartment if I had bothered to spend any time there, but there was no reason to. I had somewhere to be. Somewhere I was wanted.

“I’m surprised,” Levi murmured from over the rim of his cup of cocoa. He was sitting on the couch in my frumpy green sweater and I was sprawled out on the floor with my head resting back against his legs. I was fully clothed, but there was a good reason for that.

“Surprised?” I angled my head back to stare up at him, “Why?”

“You didn’t run off to see the girls today,” he paused to take a sip, eyeing me as he did so. He licked the bit of whipped cream off his lips before continuing; “I think that’s the first time all week.”

“Yea, I guess it is,” I shrugged, turning my cup slowly in my hand.

“So does that mean you’ve all finished whatever it is you three shits have been scheming behind my back?”

“You could say that…” I smiled, taking a sip of my cocoa. I had decided on doing the little show in his apartment, where I felt more comfortable.

“And do I get to know what it is?”

“Maybe,” I rolled my shoulders casually, trying to seem as indifferent as possible when in truth there were nervous butterflies swarming around in my stomach. I only had until we finished our drinks to settle my nerves, and I wasn’t sure I was going to be able to manage that.

“Well, whatever it is has better be good,” Levi set his cup down on the table beside him and leaned forward to run his fingers through my hair, “You’ve been driving me nuts all week with this. It’s bad enough that they’ve been taking up all of your time.”

“I’ve been spending time with Armin, too,” I countered, although it wasn’t the best argument.

“I’m not complaining about him,” Levi gave a small tug on my hair to angle my head back, bending down to claim my lips in a short kiss. “Although I get the feeling he’s in on the secret, too.”

“Not willingly.”

“I’m not going to ask what that means,” he murmured, kissing me again before leaning back and lifting up his cup once more. “Hurry up and finish your drink. We’ve got somewhere to go.”

“What?” I spluttered, turning around a little too quickly and just barely managing to keep my cocoa from spilling all over his floor.

He eyed the cup warily. “Don’t get chocolate on my carpet, Jaeger.”

I set the cup down on the table and stood up, swaying slightly as the nervousness started to build. I had no idea we were pressed for time. “Where do we have to go?”

“I can’t tell you that,” Levi shrugged, a smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. “It’s a surprise.”

“Oh, come on,” I groaned, “That’s not fair.”

Levi raised one eyebrow; fixing me with a pointed stare, “Don’t even get me started on that one.”
I opened my mouth to speak but snapped it shut a moment later. I really had no comeback for that one, considering I had made him wait an entire week for his surprise. A surprise that I would have to give him now, it seemed. I ran a hand through my hair and glanced in the direction of his bedroom. I had already set up the stereo with the song when he was in the other room making our drinks. Could I actually do this?

“You need to change, right?” I asked, stating the obvious.

“No, I was planning on going out in this big ass sweater of yours,” he joked, rolling his eyes as he stood up from the couch. My sweater came down to mid-thigh on him. “I figured I’d pair it with a red belt and wear it as a festive sweater dress.”

“Really?” The question was out of my mouth before I could stop it and I had to bite my lip to keep from laughing at the incredulous look that crossed his face.

“Keep it up, brat, and it’ll be the last time I wear your clothes,” he warned, although I knew it was an empty threat. I had caught on to the fact that he actually enjoyed lounging around in my shirts after I’d worn them. I’d even caught him asleep with his arms near his head and his nose pressed against the fabric of my shirt. The sight of it made my heart race every time.

Levi walked into his bedroom and I followed closely behind him, waiting until he was in his closet before I moved over to the stereo I had placed there earlier. My hands were shaking as I adjusted the volume to what I assumed would be an appropriate level. My heart felt like it was going to break out of my chest at any second. I stared at the play button and wondered if I would actually be able to go through with this at all. It would be silly not to, of course, after all the work I had put in over the past week. I shut my eyes tightly and pressed my finger against the button, letting the sensual beat fill the air.

As expected, Levi came walking out of the closet with his shirt half-buttoned, a confused look in his eyes, “Eren, what are you…”

I took a slow, shaky breath and leaned against one of the posts of his bed frame, angling my head so that I had to stare at him through my eyelashes. I tried to keep my voice steady and deep, wanting desperately for it to sound husky, “You wanted to know what the surprise was, right?”

My hips were moving slowly to the beat, my hands sliding over them before traveling up the line of buttons to the collar of my shirt. Levi followed the path of my fingers and his stare turned molten as he swallowed.

“So this is what you’ve been doing.”

I was so nervous that I could feel my lips trembling and I bit the lower one to keep it in place, nodding slowly as I held his stare. I watched as a smirk curved the corner of his mouth and he grabbed the chair by his desk, pulling it over and taking a seat in front of me. He leaned back and folded his arms, regarding me with an expression that was both amused and intrigued.

“Then give me a show, Jaeger.”

I held his stare for a moment longer before deciding that I absolutely wouldn’t be able to do this with our eyes connected. I took a deep breath and shut my eyes; something Petra had suggested when I had been too nervous to dance in front of anyone else. I imagined that it was just me in the room, practicing the moves so that I would know them well enough for him.

I raised one arm above my head, my hand gripping the post behind me as I slid down until my legs
were bent, spreading them slightly as I did a small turn before sliding back up again. My free hand started working its way down the buttons of my shirt, popping them open one at a time until I neared the bottom. My hips continued to roll with the sensual beat of the song, although they moved easier and more suggestively now that I had some confidence. I might actually be able to do this if I could keep my eyes closed.

“Look at me, Eren.”

Shit.

“Eren,” Levi pressed again and then waited until my eyes were on his. I could feel the rhythm I had created starting to break under his stare as the butterflies swarmed in my stomach once more. “If you’re going to dance, I want it to be for me. I want you to look at me.”

“I don’t think I can do both,” I admitted, my fingers fumbling on the last button.

“What do you have to be nervous about? It’s me. You know me. I’m not going to make fun of you, no matter how badly you mess up. So keep your eyes on me.” Levi’s voice suddenly dropped an octave, to a commanding tone that I had only heard from him at The Wall. “That’s an order.”

The thrill that ran through my body was just enough to keep away the nervousness that wanted to take over. Suddenly I was determined to hold his stare, unwilling to look anywhere else no matter how much I wanted to. I wasn’t even aware when my hips had picked up their rhythm again, but I found myself moving to the beat of the song as I freed the last button on my shirt.

I turned so that my back was facing him and stared at him from over my shoulder with hooded eyes as I slowly slid the shirt down my arms. The fabric grazed against my skin as it left my body and fluttered to the floor. With my chest bare, I reached up with both arms and gripped the post once again, sliding down slowly and this time staying on the floor. Even with all the practice on the pole, I wasn’t confident I could pull off even a fraction of what Petra had shown me.

I crawled slowly on all four towards Levi, mouthing a few passing lyrics of the song as I tried to keep my mind off of the fact that I probably looked ridiculous. Although even if I did, he was doing an amazing job of hiding it with the look of arousal he was sporting right now. The heated stare he kept on me made my chest swell with confidence and had me believing that I actually looked sexy. It had been nerve wracking at first, but the more I stared into those bright blue eyes the more I realized I could do this.

I rolled onto my back and kept my eyes on him as I pumped my hips, the movements slow and suggestive. The belt buckle clinked as I removed it, sliding the length of the belt through the hoops before grabbing either end and biting the middle with my teeth. He had done the same with his crop back at The Wall and the image had stuck in my mind. By the way his eyes fixated on the strap of leather clenched between my teeth now, I knew he would remember the sight of me like this.

I tossed the belt aside and slid my hands back down to my gyrating hips, popping the button loose and rolling the zipper down. Removing my pants had always been the part that I messed up on with Petra, but I managed to slide them down with a sensual roll of my hips, keeping it in time with the beat of the song. I had luckily removed my shoes and socks prior to entering the room, and within the next beat I was stripped down to my black boxer briefs.

I crawled back towards him, this time sliding my hands up his legs and over his hips as I moved into his lap. My nails grazed against the skin that was showing through his half-buttoned shirt before I slid my hands up into his hair and gave a small tug. I stared down at him as my hips went from a slow and sensual sway into a full on grind, pushing our bodies together until we were both gasping
along with the song.

“Pretty damn sure this doesn’t count as a striptease…” he gasped, his hands grabbing a hold of my hips.

“Pretty damn sure I don’t care,” I murmured against his neck. As far as I was concerned, I had managed to get my clothes off in the span of the song and that was mission accomplished for me. I wanted my reward now.

“Well, you’re going to have to care,” he said as he gave my ass a quick smack. “Because we’re going to be late.”

“Does it matter if we’re late?”

“Normally I would say no,” Levi cupped my face in his hands to draw my attention to him. He watched me as he ran his thumb over my lower lip. “Trust me, I would love to be late if we could. But we really can’t and we just don’t have enough time to get through all the things I want to do to you right now.”

“I want you to fuck me.” I breathed the words before I even realized they were coming out of my mouth, and once they had I knew it was exactly what I wanted. “I’m ready for you to fuck me, Levi… I need to feel you…”

“Oh, fuck me… damn it, you little shit…” Levi groaned and pushed me out of his lap, standing quickly and running both hands through his hair. He took a deep breath and fixed me with an agitated stare, “That was really unfair. I’m going to pound your ass raw for that.”

“Now?”

“No, not now,” Levi’s voice was deep with lust and I felt need burn inside me at the sound of it. He wanted me just as badly, so it was obvious that whatever this surprise was had to be important to him.

“What is it? What are we going to be late for?”

“Your Christmas gift,” Levi muttered, his focus on his hands as he tried to fasten the remaining buttons.

I hadn’t expected him to give me my gift first, although I wasn’t sure I had been expecting anything from him at all. Still, I had wanted to give him his gift since the second it arrived at my house and the thought of waiting a few more hours to see his reaction was something I couldn’t stand.

I pulled my clothes back on as I glanced over at the clock. “How much time do we have?”

“Twenty minutes,” he paused, glancing at the clock as well, “But it’s a ten minute walk, so hurry your ass up.”

“Can I give you your gift first?”

“Isn’t that what the dance was?”

“No,” I paused and then bent down to reach under the bed. I hid his gift there when I set up the stereo. “That was from Hanji and Petra. This is from me.”

I stood up and held out a rectangular box that was wrapped in shiny green paper with red holly
designs. He stared down at it, his brow furrowing as he took the box from me, “Did you get me a shirt or something?”

“Not exactly,” I shrugged, watching him remove the paper with a careful finesse that had me certain he was going to save the wrapping. I could feel my heart racing as he lifted the cover, and I jumped in surprise when he suddenly dropped the box to the floor.

“Eren.”

My name was a breathless whisper on his lips as he held the scarf with trembling hands. He unfolded it slowly, taking in every detail from the cream color to the diamond knit design. His fingers shook as they brushed over the small silver beads that dangled at the end of every tassel, admiring each one as if it couldn’t possibly be real. Finally he gripped it in his hands and held it to his face, his eyes shutting tightly as he stood there, silent and unmoving.

Part of me was worried that I had gotten something wrong, but I knew the scarf was exactly like the one she had. I had gathered all the images I could and gone to Armin with the information. It had taken us a solid day of searching, but we had managed to find the original designer. Having another one made and delivered in time hadn’t come cheap at all, although I told Armin that it did. I didn’t want to know what he would say if he knew I had pushed a large chunk of my savings in a direction that wasn’t college.

“Do you like it?”

It almost felt wrong to break the silence, but I was beginning to worry that I had made a mistake. I wasn’t sure what kind of reaction I had expected, but the silence left me uneasy. Even after I spoke, he didn’t move or answer me. I didn’t know what he was thinking.

“Levi?”

His shoulders started to shake and he took a trembling breath before lifting his gaze to me. The blue of his eyes was brighter than I had ever seen it before and I noticed tears at the corners of his eyes. He opened his mouth to speak and then shut it, swallowing convulsively as he shook his head.

“Do you,” his voice broke off and he shut his eyes, looking a little frustrated with the fact that he was having difficulty speaking. He shook his head once more and returned his gaze to me, “Do you have any idea what this means to me?”

“Well, I know that-“

“No,” he cut me off, his voice still shaking, “Eren, you honestly have no idea how much this means… how much I…”

His voice broke once again and he shut his eyes as the rest of the words spilled out, “I don’t even know how to tell you what this means to me because no one has ever done anything like this for me before. No one has ever cared enough to…”

He paused, gripping the scarf tighter as he swallowed once more, his jaw hard as he attempted to keep his emotions in check.

“Eren, I can’t…” He fell silent before lifting his gaze to mine, staring at me with an unfathomable expression. “I can’t believe that you gave this to me.”

I watched as his shoulders started to tremble once again and I moved forward as if instinct drove me to do so, taking him into my arms and holding him there. He leaned into my body, but his grip stayed
on the scarf in his hands as he rested his forehead against my chest. He was silent for a long moment, his breath shaking on the way in until he started to calm.

“Thank you. I know that sounds so fucking lame compared to what you’ve given me, but thank you.”

He spoke the words in a whisper against my shirt and I tightened my arms around him as my response, pressing my forehead to the top of his head and letting my lips brush against his hair. We stood there, letting more than the ten minutes pass as we refused to move from our spot. I didn’t care if my present had to wait if it meant staying here like this.

“We’re going to be late,” he murmured at last, and finally we were forced to move. He stared down at the scarf in his hands and shook his head yet again, as if still at a loss for words. “I never thought I’d see this again. How did you find it?”

“Armin helped me find the designer who made it.”

“Eren, I…” Levi broke his gaze from the scarf to stare at me. “You’re not at all who I thought you would be.”

I felt my brow furrow in confusion, unsure of whether or not I should be insulted by that. “What do you mean?”

“I knew you’d get me something, but I figured it would just be something simple. Something from a store.” Levi’s fingers brushed over the tassels as he spoke. “I never expected you to put so much thought into me.”

“How couldn’t I put thought into you when you’re all I think about?” I took the scarf from him, surprised when he let me. I wrapped the soft material slowly around his neck, letting the tassels drape down on either side. “I don’t think I’ve had a single thought without you since I met you.”

“You damn brat,” he muttered, staring down and pressing his hand against mine. “You’re going to make me say things before I’m ready.”

My heart began to race as my mind ran over the possibilities of what he meant by that, but it was obvious that the conversation was over. He shook his head and let out a sigh, walking towards the elevator, “Come on, we have to be quick.”

I followed along behind him, tugging on a pair of gloves in preparation for the cold that I knew would be waiting for us outside. He fidgeted with his own gloves as the elevator carried us down to the main lobby. The trips that had once seemed so long were easy now that we had reached such a comfortable level. I could enjoy the silence in this small space as long as it was spent with him.

We stepped out of Trost and into the biting cold wind of the city, the chill instantly sinking into my bones. I instinctively leaned into Levi and snaked an arm around his waist, and he leaned all too willingly into me. This had become our normal routine for combating the winter chill.

“Where are we going?”

“To the coffee shop around the corner,” he spoke over the wind. He didn’t need to give more of a description because we had both gone there a number of times now. It was apparently his favorite place for a caffeine fix.

“You got me coffee for Christmas?” I frowned, unable to keep the confusion out of my voice, “Could we have coffee at home? Where it’s warm?”
“I didn’t get you coffee,” Levi rolled his eyes, “I just have something there for you.”

“Oh.” I shook my head, still confused, “But aren’t they closed? It’s Christmas day.”

“Technically, yes,” Levi shrugged, “But I got them to open for thirty minutes for this. Which is why we can’t be late.”

I tugged my jacket up around my face in an attempt to keep the cold from eating my nose. Levi paused to stare up at me with amused eyes, and then stopped completely. The bottom half of his face was hidden in the fuzzy warmth of his scarf, and I watched as he unraveled one layer of it to wind some of it around me. I held him a little closer as we turned the corner, leaning my head close to his so that the scarf wouldn’t have to strain to cover us both.

As we approached the coffee shop, I noticed that the lights were on even though the open sign was turned off. I slowly extracted myself from Levi’s scarf and he paused with his hand on the doorknob, staring up at me.

“We can’t stay very long, so make sure you get what we came for so we can go.”

I felt like he was speaking in riddles. “And what did we come for?”

“You’re about to find out.”

Yep. Definitely riddles.

He pulled open the door for me and I walked past him, overwhelmingly grateful for the warm air that surrounded me once I was inside. The smells of coffee still lingered in the air, although none had been brewing in the pots today. There wasn’t even anyone waiting behind the counter. I looked around the room, and I was completely unsure as to why he brought me here until my eyes landed on the exact reason.

The exact person.

Her.

He had found her.

“Mikasa.”
Chapter Notes

I'm so glad you all enjoyed the last chapter so much! ^_^ I was really looking forward to that one. I know a lot of you were wondering how Levi got her there, and this chapter will hopefully answer that! ^_^

This chapter will be in Levi's POV and actually takes place before the Christmas chapter.

Thank you again for all of your comments! Oh, and a special thank you to epicmonkeyturd and aaapple-jax on tumblr who both drew beautiful pieces of art! Thank you so much! <3 ^__^ The art and comments made my day / Christmas.

As always, feel free to comment here or on tumblr. If you would like to follow me on tumblr you can do so at lusty-levi or lootibles.

ENJOY!

Levi

“Good luck, kid.”

I watched as confusion spread across Armin’s features and then the doors to the elevator slid shut. Part of me wanted to stay around for their conversation, but I knew that wouldn’t be the best idea. There was no way in hell that Eren would be able to have that talk with me in the room, and even if he could somehow manage it I had no idea how Armin would react. Even if I wasn’t there, I was pretty damn sure he wasn’t going to take the news well. Armin had gotten close to Erwin in the past two weeks, closer than I was going to admit to Eren. The kid was already stressed out enough over his friend and if he knew half the things they were doing, his head might actually explode.

I could only hope that Eren knew what he was doing by placing his faith in the little mushroom. They seemed to be very close. Actually, they were probably a little too close for being only friends, but I knew there was nothing there. At least not on Eren’s end. I had a sneaking suspicion that it wasn’t quite friendship that Armin felt for my little brat, but I wasn’t about to compromise my relationship or theirs with some pointless display of jealousy. Especially not when things were going so well with Eren.

I still couldn’t believe it myself. I was in the first real relationship of my life and I wasn’t running from it. I didn’t even want to run, and part of that terrified me because I had never been so close to anyone before. He was able to hurt me now, and no one had been able to do that since I had let Erwin in. I still wasn’t sure what compelled me to show him that room, but I didn’t know how else to tell him that I actually wanted him in my life. It was by some miracle that he actually realized how much the gesture meant for me. No one else had ever set foot in that room, but having him there hadn’t felt invasive at all. Somehow I knew he belonged there. In that room, and in my life.

It had been over two weeks since that day, and our relationship had become second nature. I went to sleep wrapped around his body and woke up the same way every morning. We showered, dressed,
and ate breakfast together as if we had done it for years. As if it was no big deal for either us, when 
really we were both waiting for everything to unravel. To be honest, I was surprised it hadn’t at this 
point. For some reason the game was still going, but neither of us were willing participants. I didn’t 
know how to tell him to stop and he never asked to call it off. Somehow we were locked in this 
mess, I was starting to worry it had become an integral cog in our relationship. Pulling it out could 
make the well-oiled machine fall to pieces, and I wasn’t willing to have that happen.

When the elevator arrived at my floor, I passed through the foyer and headed straight for my room. It 
was hard to explain, but I was actually eager to get to The Wall tonight. It had been a few days since 
I had made an appearance and although I wasn’t going to complain about the reason for my absence, 
I had to admit that I missed the place I’d grown to call home.

I’d toyed with the idea of bringing Eren along with me, and Hanji begged me to on a regular basis. It 
wasn’t exactly the fact that he wasn’t a legal age. To be honest, he was passable and most people 
were willing to live under the belief that he had been properly carded at the door. I knew there 
wouldn’t be any question of whether or not he belonged there, and I honestly couldn’t care less if 
anyone asked. My real concern was that he didn’t want to be there. I was still mentally kicking 
myself for putting him in the position he had been in on his first trip to The Wall, and I didn’t know 
how to bring up the subject with him. I wanted him to be there with me, but I didn’t want to force it 
on him either.

Although it had been a while since I’d gone all out with dressing up for The Wall, the entire process 
happened as naturally as it always did. I wasn’t even sure I consciously selected my outfits or if it 
was just a gift I was born with, but I always wound up in front of the mirror wearing exactly what I 
wanted. Part of that was due to the fact that I had enough money to afford all of the clothing I could 
ever want, but I had seen millionaires dress themselves like they had done so in the dark, so money 
wasn’t everything. Although I was sure many of them would look at me in the get-up I was in now 
and think I had lost my damn mind. Not that their opinions mattered, of course.

I was applying the last of my eyeliner when I heard the faint buzzing on my bed. It was so soft that I 
probably wouldn’t have noticed it at all if I hadn’t just been thinking about the fact that I still had to 
run Eren’s phone down to him. I snatched the vibrating device up from the sheets and stared at the 
words ‘Unknown Number’ that were lit up across the screen. It was probably wrong to answer 
someone else’s phone, but I didn’t really give a shit about that right now.

“Hello?”

“You’re not Eren.” The accusative voice was female and filled with suspicion. There was no doubt 
in my mind that it was his sister.

“No, I’m not,” I started as I took a seat on the bed. “But that doesn’t matter because I need to talk to 
you anyway.”

“Who are you?” She cut me off, her voice snapping like a whip. “Where’s Eren? What did you do to 
him? Why do you have his phone?”

She definitely couldn’t be thrown off of a topic. Eren had told me that she was strong, but she 
seemed downright vicious now. It was almost amusing how intimidating she was able to be over a 
phone. Anyone else besides me might have actually felt threatened if they were on the other end right 
now, but I was just having difficulty keeping the annoyance from my voice.

“Eren’s fine, Mikasa.” I heard her breath catch at the sound of her name, but I didn’t give her time to 
respond. “He’s with Armin right now having some kind of play date. I only have his phone because 
he left it here by accident.”
“And where is here?”

“My apartment.” I couldn’t help but smile at the silence that followed. I knew my response was a little less than helpful.

“And where the hell is your apartment?”

“Why?” I leaned back against my headboard, deciding this might take a while. “Do you wanna track me down?”

“I might,” she snapped, her annoyance unmistakable. “It depends on your relationship with Eren.”

“We’re close.”

She paused, and I could practically feel her eyes narrowing, “How close?”

I smirked. “Very close.”

“Well, I don’t know what kind close relationship you’re talking about, because Eren’s not gay.” She sounded like she was some kind of detective who was certain she’d just solved a mystery, “So either you are the most man-ish sounding girl I have ever heard, or you’re lying. Which is it?”

“Right. Because it’s not possible that you’re wrong and your brother is actually into guys.” I probably should have felt bad for outing Eren to his sister before he had the chance, but there was really no getting around it now.

“He’s not.”

“Oh, I’m pretty damn sure he is, honey.”

“I’ve seen the way he looks at girls.” Even she didn’t sound sure of herself now.

“And I’ve had my fingers up his ass,” I countered, inwardly cursing myself. This conversation was not going as planned.

“No, you haven’t!” She shouted. “This isn’t funny anymore. Just put Eren on the phone. I need to talk to him.”

“Well, that’s too damn bad because he’s not here.” I paused and then decided it was worth another shot, “And like I said, I need to talk to you.”

“About what? What could you possibly have to say to me? You don’t even know me.”

“I’ve watched him cry over you for the past two weeks,” I snapped, “So don’t fucking tell me I don’t know you. I know plenty about you.”

She was silent for a long moment before finally speaking in a voice that was considerably softer. “Is he really…”

“Yes, he is,” I cut her off. She didn’t have to finish the question for me to know exactly what she was asking. “And I’m sorry that you had to hear it from me instead of him. That’s his to tell when he’s ready, and I shouldn’t have told you but I need to talk to you.”

“Are you his boyfriend?” It was obvious the word felt as weird on her tongue as it did to my ears.

“I guess that’s one way of putting it.” I shrugged, deciding it would have to do. I wasn’t about to use
the term lover, although I wasn’t fond of being called a boyfriend either.

“I’ve really missed a lot, haven’t I?” She sighed, and I could tell that the question wasn’t meant for me. “So, what do you need to talk about?”

“He needs to see you, and I want to know how I can make that happen.”

“I can’t see him right now.” The hesitation in her voice was all I needed. I knew I could crack her.

“Bull shit, you can’t. It’s the holidays, and if you’re going to see him it may as well be on Christmas.” I paused, but she gave no response. “Mikasa, he has to see you. He checks his phone every fucking second to see if you’ve called. I had to give him my number so it wouldn’t show up as unknown, because he practically jumped out of his skin every time it did. I’m sick of him worrying over you. You’re going to come back and you’re going to talk to him.”

“I can’t talk to him about that.”

The way she put emphasis on the last word made me uncomfortable, but I wasn’t going to waste time changing the subject. Whatever was going on with her was between them and I wasn’t about to insert myself in the situation if I didn’t have to.

“I don’t give a shit what you two talk about, so long as you talk to him.” I sighed and closed my eyes. I was going to be late, but this was more important. “Just tell me how I can get you here. Do you need a plane or a bus?”

“I’m actually not that far from him,” she admitted and then cursed under her breath, “Don’t tell him that.”

“I’m not going to tell him anything. You can tell him that you live in the middle of bumfuck nowhere for all I care, just come see him for one night.”

“I’m not going to that apartment.”

I paused, raising one eyebrow and turning my gaze out towards the balcony. I wasn’t sure what she had against Trost, but I wasn’t going to push to find out. “You don’t have to. We can meet in a coffee shop or something.”

“What coffee shop is open on Christmas day?” She asked, and I could practically feel her rolling her eyes.

“I’ll make sure that one of them is.”

“Oh, because you have that kind of power?”

I had to smile at the way she said that. She didn’t believe me at all. “Yes, actually. I do. You’d be amazed what people are willing to do for money.”

“I know exactly what people are willing to do for money,” she snapped back and there was a dark understanding in her tone that made me wonder exactly what she had been doing over the past three months.

“Are you going to see him?”

“I don’t even know what this place is like or who you are. How am I supposed to trust you?”

“I don’t really expect you to,” I admitted. I probably would have been just as cautious in her position.
“But for his sake, you should.”

“That doesn’t help.”

“Well, then pick a place you’re comfortable with and I’ll meet you there. I’ll even buy you lunch,” I offered. “You can talk to me and decide if you’re comfortable with everything.”

She was silent for so long that I started to wonder if she had hung up, but one glance at the screen told me the call was still going. I hadn’t exactly expected this conversation to be an easy one, but it was turning out to be much more of a headache than I could have ever imagined. She was cautious to the point that she was downright paranoid, and I was sure something had made her that way. Everything Eren had told me about her was different from the girl I was talking to now. Something drastic had happened and even though I wanted to stay out of it, I couldn’t help but wonder what she had gone through.

“Mikasa, you already told me that you’re in the city. I know your full name, and it won’t be a lot of work for me to figure out your number.” I didn’t bother to mention the fact that it would be just as easy to find out where she lived. Somehow I was sure that wouldn’t help my case. “I will call every fucking day until you agree to meet him. So let’s save each other a shit ton of headaches and just get together for lunch.”

“Fine,” she snapped before taking a deep breath and continuing in a calmer voice. “Fine, I’ll meet you for lunch.”

“Of course you will.”

“You know, I really don’t get what he sees in you.” She said after an annoyed pause. “You’re pushy and arrogant.”

“Those are two of my best qualities, honey. And some of his favorites.” I bit back a smirk when she openly scoffed at my words. She was easy to rile. “So where do you want to meet?”

“Do you know where Alidoro is?”

“Not off the top of my head, but I can find it.” I shrugged. After so many years in the city, I had become pretty skilled at finding my way around.

“It’s a sandwich shop in SoHo.”

“When do you want to meet?”

“I actually have tomorrow off if you can meet then.”

I was pretty sure that Eren would be spending most of tomorrow with Armin, so my day was going to be free anyway. “Tomorrow works for me. I’ll meet you in Alidoro at one.”

She took a deep breath and then was silent for a moment, as if trying to decide what she wanted to say next. Finally she sighed, “I’ll see you then.”

The line disconnected and I held the phone away from my ear, scanning through the recent calls and deleting the newest one. I knew that was the first thing Eren would be checking when I gave his phone back to him, and I wasn’t going to be able to explain away a long call that had happened while his phone was up in my apartment.

I pocketed the phone as I stepped into the elevator, hitting the button for Eren’s floor before leaning
into my favorite corner. I stared up at the ceiling, trying to decide if I’d made a good choice or if I
had just fucked everything up. Talking to Mikasa was something I had been hoping to do, but I
wasn’t actually expecting to be able to do it. At least not so easily. I had been trying to track her
down for over a week now, but I had never considered the fact that she was actually close by. I had
been searching states away with no luck at all, and now I knew why.

I decided shortly after giving Eren the key to my room that I would try to give him something special
for Christmas. It would be the first real Christmas gift that I’d ever given to someone that mattered to
me. I had exchanged gifts before, of course, but they were always with friends and usually some silly
little trinket that could be found in any store. I didn’t want to give Eren anything that he could buy
for himself. Hell, I didn’t even want to give him anything that he couldn’t afford to buy. I wanted to
give him her, because I knew she was what he needed.

I wanted to give him a memory that would last, even if we didn’t.

I knocked on Eren’s door and waited for a moment before he pulled it open. The first thing I caught
sight of were the tear streaks that had dried on his cheeks, and my initial instinct was to ask what had
happened. But Armin was standing at his side, and I knew that whatever support Eren would need
from me he would be able to get from him. I had to keep reminding myself that this was a night for
them. An important one at that. Judging by the look on Eren’s face, he had probably just finished
telling Armin the whole story.

“Oh, wow.”

I glanced over at Armin and didn’t bother to hide the amusement that crossed my features. He was
blatantly staring, and it was obvious that he was seeing me like this for the first time.

“Here.” I held the phone out to Eren, trying not to let my gaze linger on the dried tears. I wanted to
help him, but I knew I couldn’t right now. It was hard enough to keep a respectful distance, but I had
to assume that Eren didn’t want to give Armin a show.

Of course, I should have learned never to make assumptions about Eren. He grabbed the phone from
my hand in the same instant that he grabbed the front of my jacket, pulling me forward and capturing
my lips before I could object. Not that I had any plans to. I smirked against his lips and leaned into
the kiss, savoring the taste of him in the few moments that I had to enjoy it.

“Careful brat,” I murmured when he finally broke away from the kiss, “Or I’ll be dragging you and
the little mushroom along with me.”

A knowing smile crossed Eren’s lips, but he didn’t comment further on my little threat. I was pretty
sure Armin still had no idea about my private nightlife. “I’ll call you?”

“You better.” I looked between the two of them, offering one last smirk. “Have fun, you two.”

I heard Armin squeak in surprised alarm before the door closed and rolled my eyes. The kid was too
easy to mess with, but I kind of liked that. I dug my own phone out of my pocket as I stepped back
into the elevator, dialing Hanji’s number.

“Yes, my Lord and Master?” Hanji’s teasing voice came over the line, carrying a bit of a singsong
tune with it. She was in a pleasant mood, although she usually was.

“I’ll be at The Wall tonight.”

“Oh, goodie!” She squealed, and I could hear her clapping her hands together. “I’ll have them put on
a special show for you!”
“Good,” I watched as the elevator doors opened and a tall man with brown hair and round glasses stepped on. “I haven’t seen one in a while.”

“Oh, speaking of shows,” Hanji continued in the same bubbly voice, “Can I borrow the key to Eren’s apartment?”

“Why the hell would you need Eren’s key?” I frowned. The man’s head snapped in my direction. “What would that have to do with a show?”

“Shh! You’re going to spoil it, Levi.”

“Too bad.”

“Come on, please?” Hanji’s happy tone faded into one of seriousness, “I promise I’m not going to do anything weird.”

“Fine. I’m going to trust you,” I sighed and folded my arms. “I don’t know why, but I’ll trust you.”

“Good! See you in a few, Corporal.”

The line went dead and I rolled my eyes, clicking the end button and pocketing my phone. I stared at the elevator floor number for a moment before glancing over at the man who was still staring in my direction. Fuck, that was creepy.

“Anyone ever teach you not to stare?” I raised a brow, not bothering to keep the annoyance off my face.

“You said a name.”

What the hell kind of response was that? “Did I?”

“Yes, you said Eren,” he continued, still staring at me with the same expression. His eyes were so cold that I could feel it inside. Something about this man made every hair stand up on the back of my neck, especially when he said that name. How did he know Eren?

“So what if I did?” I shrugged, trying to seem as nonchalant as possible. It wasn’t easy. “What’s it to you?”

“He’s my son.” His voice was icy and filled with warning. I wanted to get the hell out of this elevator. There was something off about him, and I suddenly felt the need to protect Eren from someone who shouldn’t have posed any threat to him at all.

“Your son?” I raised both of my eyebrows and snorted, “I’m pretty sure she’s not your son. Last I checked, she doesn’t have a dick. But kudos to your son on having a chick’s name. You must be real proud.”

His eyes narrowed, but the look that crossed his features was more offended than it was suspicious. He had taken the bait. “It’s not a girl’s name.”

“Sure it’s not,” I laughed as I stepped off the elevator and into the hotel lobby. He followed after me as I walked towards the doors. “I’ll tell that to her the next time I see her.”

I stepped outside and turned in the direction of The Wall, but his words stopped me in my place.

“That’s a strange outfit for someone who has a girlfriend.”
I turned slowly to face him, fixing him with a stare that was as deadly as I felt. I angled my head to the side, trying to weigh the benefits of beating Eren’s father into a pulp on the sidewalk. Somehow I was sure the public spectacle would not end well for any of us, and I didn’t feel like spending the night in jail. I took a deep breath and then smirked.

“Honey, I only have this outfit because I borrowed it from my girlfriend.”

The look that crossed his face was almost satisfying enough to make up for the comment and the fact that I couldn’t legally beat his face in. I turned before he could say another word and walked the rest of the way to The Wall without glancing over my shoulder. I still wasn’t sure why Mikasa had run away from her family and abandoned Eren, but I had an idea of what the reason could be. Eren had mentioned that his father was searching for her, and now I realized that she might actually have a good reason for running.

I found the sandwich shop nestled between the other businesses on the street, with a white table and two matching chairs sitting just outside. No one was in them, of course. They would have had to be fucking insane to want to sit outside in this freezing weather. I couldn’t even remember why I thought it would be a good idea to walk through SoHo on my way here. Even if I hadn’t been through the neighborhood in a while, it wasn’t worth freezing my balls off for.

I tugged my jacket tighter around me as I entered Alidoro, instantly greeted with too many intoxicating smells to count. My mouth watered, reminding me that I had purposely ignored breakfast. I was running late, and a shower with Eren seemed far more inviting than chewing on a bagel. I’d been making it my goal to spend every waking moment attempting to drive him insane with lust. Partially because I wanted him to beg for sex, but mostly because I knew he was keeping a secret and it had begun to piss me off. I was going to make him pay for it.

The inside of Alidoro glowed with the yellow paint that decorated the room, but it wasn’t an obnoxious shade. There were little frames boasting Venice and Rome on the walls, and trinkets and books lining the little boxes of a white shelving unit. There were potted plants and streams of ivy, but I was pretty damn sure that none of it was real or alive at this time of year. Large framed posters from various Italian themed films were leaning up against the wall beside two small tables with three chairs each. One of the tables was occupied.

Mikasa’s gaze lifted to meet mine as I stepped up to her table, her eyes narrowing just slightly as she tugged her red scarf tighter around her neck as if I had brought a breeze in with me. I probably wouldn’t have even noticed her if it weren’t for the damn scarf. She had longer hair in the picture Eren had shown me, much longer than she had now. It had been chopped down to a pixie cut, although it was longer in the front and partially covered her left eye. Still, I was willing to bet that I might actually have more hair on my head, even when I wasn’t wearing the wig.

“Don’t look so happy to see me,” I commented as I pulled out the free chair and sat down.

She glowered at me for a moment before folding her arms, eyeing me speculatively. “You’re a little short to be his boyfriend.”

“Am I?” I asked, not bothering to keep the annoyed edge out of my voice, “Sorry, your brother doesn’t exactly have a ‘You must be this tall to ride’ sign plastered to his back. Trust me, I would have noticed by now. I’ve ridden him plenty.”
“Oh god!” Mikasa shouted as she waved her hands in front of herself, absolute disgust taking over her face, “Don’t say things like that! I don’t want to hear what you two have been doing!”

I kept the smirk off my face by pressing my lips together. “And I don’t want to hear comments about my height. So keep them to yourself and I won’t have to talk about how your brother can’t walk straight anymore.”

Her expression darkened and she gripped her soda bottle with a little too much force, the plastic crackling under the pressure. “Remind me again why I agreed to meet you?”

“Because you actually give two shits about your brother.” I shrugged before propping my elbows on the table, resting my chin against my entwined fingers. “And because you’re too fucking cautious to just meet him in a place that I can assure you is safe.”

“I don’t even know if you’re safe.”

“Eren seems to think so.”

“Eren’s too trusting for his own good,” she snapped, twisting the cap off of her drink and taking a swig before continuing, “He tries not to see the bad in people, even when it’s right there in front of his eyes.”

“Well, I’m not about to tell you that I’m a saint,” I muttered, watching her expression carefully. “Trust me, I know I’m not a good person. I can’t even begin to tell you what he sees in me or why he cares. I’m pretty sure I don’t deserve him at all, but you know what? He’s still there. He’s still with me. And while I have him, I want to make him the happiest fucking person he can be.”

“What the hell does that have to do with me trusting you?”

“Because you make him happy. And if you can trust anything, you can trust that I’m not going to hurt him.”

“You realize I’m going to take him from you, right?” Mikasa met my stare, her eyes narrowing. “When I finally have enough money to get him out of here, I’m taking him and we’re going.”

“And if he decides to go with you, then I’ll let him.”

I let my gaze drift away from her and pretended to admire the ‘Under The Tuscan Sun’ poster that was framed beside our table. I really couldn’t meet the challenge in her eyes because I knew there was no battle for me there. It wasn’t like I was going to chain Eren unwillingly to my bed. We had discussed the possibility of him leaving once, very briefly, and I had told him the same thing then. I wasn’t going to keep him if he wanted to go. And to be honest, I wouldn’t be surprised if he was the one to leave me in the end. I was pretty damn sure I was waiting for the inevitable at this point. Maybe I was even setting myself up for it now.

“You expect me to believe you actually care about him?” Her voice carried an incredulous note that had me aching to put her in her place. “If you’re just going to give him up like that, he can’t mean very much to you.”

“Oh, I think it’s the opposite.” I met her stare and this time I didn’t stop my eyes from narrowing. She was getting on my nerves now. “If I didn’t give a shit about your brother, I would have ignored your call. I wouldn’t be here now trying to get you to see him. I wouldn’t be willing to give him up so that he could be happy.”

“Maybe you’re trying to get rid of him. Maybe you don’t care -”
Her voice cut off as I smacked my hands down on the table and sat half way out of my chair, leaning over to glare inches from her face. “Don’t try to tell me how I feel about him when he’s the only thing that’s made me feel alive. You think I want to give him up? You think I want to see him leave? I don’t want him to go with you. I don’t want to lose him. I don’t know how I’m going to come back from that!”

Her eyes widened as she leaned back in her seat and I gradually became aware of the fact that I had raised my voice. Yelling was something I rarely ever did, and never in public. As I sat back in my seat, I tried to ignore the fact that all of the eyes in the shop had turned my way. After a moment they returned to what they were doing, but one set of eyes remained locked on my face. I took a deep breath and narrowed my eyes, prepared to fix her with a glare as I opened my mouth to speak.

“You love him.”

I snapped my mouth shut and stared at her for a long moment before finally speaking, “I never said that.”

“You don’t have to.”

I felt my jaw tighten, and suddenly I was interested in the movie posters again. Love was a word and an emotion that I hadn’t thought about since the last time I had been held in my mother’s arms. I might have felt it at one point with Erwin, but I was too cautious to let myself admit it. I definitely wasn’t about to admit now. Not when there was a chance that Eren would leave. I wasn’t going to set myself up for that kind of pain.

“How long?” Mikasa pressed after a moment.

“I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about.”

“Does he love you?”

I turned my glare on her and folded my arms, shrugging. If I was trying not to look defensive, I failed. “If he does, he’s never said it.”

She stared at me, her eyes scanning my glare as a million different emotions crossed her face. She looked like she was struggling with something, but I wasn’t sure if I should ask what it was. It wasn’t like I was the best with dealing with emotions, especially not when they came from other people. Still, the fact that she was related to him made me want to at least extend the offer.

“I’m not going to push,” I started, eager to change the subject anyway, “It’s not like I love talking about feelings, trust me. But you look like you’re going to burst if you don’t talk soon.”

“I probably am,” she muttered before letting out a hard sigh and leaning back in her chair. “I was so sure of what I was doing five minutes ago and now I don’t know if it’s right.”

“Why are you running?” The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, but if they shocked her she didn’t show it.

“I don’t want to run,” she replied, staring down at the bottle cap as she turned it slowly, “I would have been happy to stay if it weren’t for him.”

“Who?”

“Eren’s dad.”
My eyes narrowed slightly as her response turned around in my head. Eren had mentioned once that she was adopted into the family, but that had been when she was ten. Nearly eight years ago now. And even if that hadn’t been enough time for her to refer to the man as her own dad, the way she had said the words just now were hostile. Suddenly I had no doubt that the man in the elevator had done something to her.

“Did he hurt you?”

Mikasa’s mouth opened and closed a few times, her stare remaining on the top of the bottle cap. I almost thought about changing the subject after a few moments of silence had passed, but then she lifted her eyes to me. Her stare was dark, containing every emotion and yet void of everything all at once. I could have sworn that I saw tears building at the corners of her eyes, but I didn’t want to linger on them.

“Don’t tell Eren.”

Somehow I knew she was going to ask that, but it felt unfair anyway. I hated the idea of keeping any secret from Eren. Although I had told my fair share of lies, I was under the strict belief that you never lied to the people you cared about. The fact that I would have to keep something so important from him was something I was sure I couldn’t do.

“You’re going to have to tell him eventually,” I replied. It was the best I could do. I wouldn’t outright tell him, but I wasn’t about to lie to his face either.

“I know.” Mikasa shrugged and then ran a hand through her short hair, looking away from me. “I plan to. But I don’t want him living there when I do it. I want to have a place that’s safe for both of us, and it’s not like I can ask him to stay on the streets with me.”

I pinched the bridge of my nose and didn’t bother to stop the groan of disgust that left my lips. “Please tell me you’re kidding.”

“It’s not every night. I have places to go. I just don’t have my own place yet.” She frowned, “Please stop looking at me like that.”

“You’re living on the streets,” I repeated the little detail because I was sure she wasn’t understanding it. “You’re his sister, and you’re living on the streets.”

“Yea, trust me. I know.”

“I can’t let you do that.” I shook my head, trying to compose my expression. I didn’t want to think about what Eren’s reaction would be if he found out about that. He was stressed enough thinking that she was in some fleabag apartment. If he knew that she was on the streets, he would spend his nights searching them for her in order to drag her back home himself.

Still, she shrugged like this was no big deal. “You don’t have a choice.”

“The hell I don’t.” I rolled my eyes, pulling out my wallet, “Tell me where you want to stay. I’ll pay.”

“You can’t afford that!”

“Bitch, you could stay in the fucking Plaza for the next five years before I would actually notice a dent in my wallet.” I waved my hand dismissively. “I crap cash for a living, and I have more than enough to go around. Tell me where you want to go.”
“Drop it.”

“Not a chance in hell.”

“I’m serious, drop it.”

“That’s not going to happen.”

“If you drop it, I’ll meet Eren.”

I stared at her, feeling the annoyance rise in me. She knew how to make one hell of a deal, and it really pissed me off. If I wasn’t so desperate to get her to see Eren I might actually continue to push, but this was my chance and the reason I had met up with her in the first place. I wasn’t going to ruin this now. After all, I could always have Eren convince her to get an apartment later on.

“Fine,” I shrugged, pocketing my wallet, “Consider it dropped.”

“Where do you want to meet?”

“It’s a little café in the Village called Doma. I want you to meet him there on Christmas.”

I wasn’t going to mention the fact that she was actually my Christmas gift to Eren.

“They’ll be open?”

“I’m going to make sure that the building’s open.” I replied, “But no one else will be there but us. It’ll be a private meeting.”

“I don’t even want to begin to think about the power you have,” she muttered, looking away.

“Money can buy a lot of things.” I pulled my wallet back out and snatched a twenty from the inside; holding it to her, “Speaking of which… Order something. For you and me. I have no idea what’s good here.”

She eyed the money before reluctantly taking it from me, “Fine. But only because you owe me after putting those images in my head.”

“What? Of Eren?” I smirked, “Oh, honey, those are payment enough.”

She rolled her eyes and stood up, walking over to the cashier to order something from the long list of sandwich suggestions. I was pretty sure she was going to purposely order me something vile, but at least she didn’t expect me to follow her up there. My whole reason for having her order was to get her away from the table. I took the brief moment I had to slip the remaining cash from my wallet into her coat pocket.

At least now she wouldn’t have to be cold.
Mikasa stood up from her seat and clutched the scarf around her throat, fear and yearning clashing in her dark eyes. She opened her mouth as if searching for something to say, but I couldn’t give her the time to figure out what it was she wanted to tell me. My feet carried me quickly as I crossed the distance between us, and my arms were around her the instant I was close enough. A sound left her throat and the air rushed from her lungs as I crushed her against me, gripping her as if she would disappear again if I didn’t hold tight enough.

She was here. She was actually here, in my arms, as if she’d never been gone at all. And the whole reason I had her now was because of the man that stood a few feet away, watching us with an unfathomable expression. How was it that he was able to find her so easily when I had been trying for months with no success? How did he get her here and where had she come from? I couldn’t even begin to think about how difficult it must have been to convince her to be here. It was rare when I was able to talk Mikasa into anything she didn’t want to do. Did she do this willingly?

Her arms circled around me and suddenly the crushing grip was not my own. She always had a powerful hug, which I’d grown to appreciate in the rare moments that we actually exchanged them. I kind of had a feeling that she wasn’t fond of physical displays of affection and that her hugs were actually just an attempt to crush ribs. But the crushing sensation felt amazing now. I wanted her close. I needed her closer. The strength of her grip was a much-needed reminder that she was actually here and I wasn’t caught in yet another dream.

“I can’t believe you’re here,” I muttered into her hair, which was much shorter than before she’d left, and somehow managed to squeeze her tighter.

“I can’t believe you’re gay,” she spoke muffled words against my shirt, “You have a very convincing boyfriend. He doesn’t take no for an answer.”

“Boyfriend…” I blinked slowly in response to the word and felt the blood rush into my cheeks. I hadn’t fully considered the idea that Levi was actually my boyfriend, and hearing Mikasa say the word just made it seem strange. Of course, that was probably because I wasn’t expecting to hear it
from her at all. “Wait, who told you that I’m gay?”

Levi cleared his throat and started walking over to the coffee counter, “Are either of you thirsty?”

“You told her?”

He paused and took a deep breath through his teeth before letting it out in a rush, turning to face me as he ran a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry, kid. I know that was yours to tell. It wasn’t like I did it on purpose. It just kind of slipped out.”

I didn’t know whether to be mad that he had told Mikasa something so big, or to be thrilled that he had talked so naturally about our relationship with someone he barely knew. To be honest, I had been struggling with the idea of how I would tell her something so important. Of course I knew that I had to tell her. Levi was one of the many reasons I wanted to stay, and the main reason I wouldn’t agree to go with her in the end. I was dreading her reaction when I finally got up the nerve to tell her myself, but now it was done.

“It’s okay,” I said at last, and was surprised to see that Levi actually looked a little relieved. The fact that he was genuinely upset that he told her before I could make his apology seem far more sincere. Of course, I still didn’t know Mikasa’s full reaction to it. I took a deep breath and turned my attention back to Mikasa, scanning her expression warily. “It is okay, right?”

“What, that we both like guys?” Mikasa’s expression was bordering on amused and I felt myself begin to relax. “Of course it’s okay, Eren. Do you think that would actually change how I feel about you? You’re my brother. You’ll always be exactly who you are, regardless of who you love.”

I felt an overwhelming wave of gratefulness in the same moment that I felt undeniable dread. I still had everyone else to tell, and I knew that some of them would not handle the news as easily as she had. “I’m worried mom and dad aren’t going to feel the same way you do.”

“Don’t worry about what he thinks,” Mikasa spat the words and there was a sudden darkness in her eyes that shocked me into silence. She didn’t even call him dad. She must have noticed the surprise on my face because her expression softened and she set her hands on my shoulders and spoke in a calmer voice, “I know you want him to accept you. But don’t let your happiness be dependent on how he reacts.”

“I think that’s easier said than done,” I muttered. Even if I told myself it didn’t matter, it would still matter a great deal. I desperately wanted my family to understand. I didn’t want everything to change just because I happened to tell them something about myself that they didn’t already know.

“I’ll still be here for you,” she continued, squeezing my shoulders. The amount of affection I’d been getting tonight made me feel like a damn teddy bear. “I’m your sister, no matter what happens.”

“What good is that if you just leave again?”

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, but even after I said it I knew I wouldn’t want to take them back. It was a worry that had been floating in my mind since the moment I saw her sitting at the table. She didn’t have to tell me this was a temporary meeting for me to know that she would be gone soon. Somehow I knew that this little get-together was my Christmas gift, not her. She wouldn’t be here tomorrow, and there was nothing I could do to stop it. Hell, I was pretty sure even Levi couldn’t stop her from running away again. Even if he had gotten her to come back for a day, that didn’t mean this fairytale would last.

“It’s not like I actually wanted to leave you, Eren.” She frowned and released my shoulders, finally
taking a step back. There was distance growing between us again already. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. I just knew I couldn’t take you with me.”

“Couldn’t take me where?” I snapped, my voice already beginning to rise, “Where the hell have you been, Mikasa?”

“I can’t tell you that yet.”

“Bullshit you can’t!” My voice continued to rise as I took a step towards her. “You’re here now. You can tell me anything.”

“I can’t, Eren.” She spoke through gritted teeth, her dark eyes swirling with more emotion than I had ever seen in them. Usually she looked so impassive, but now she looked like she was on the verge of tears. “I want to, but I can’t.”

“Why can’t you?” I pleaded, “Just tell me that much. Is someone threatening you? Is someone trying to hurt you?”

“Eren, just let it go.”

“How can you expect me to let this go?” I meant for it to be an angry yell, but the words came out in an exasperated gasp. “You’re my sister, Mikasa. I can’t just stand by and watch you suffer without even knowing why. Let me help you.”

“I don’t want you to help me!” Her words snapped like a whip as she took a step back. “Did you ever stop to think that maybe I left because I wanted to? That maybe I was sick of that house?”

I was struck silent, staring at her with a dumbfounded expression. What the hell was that supposed to mean?

“I didn’t grow up there like you did,” she continued, staring down and occasionally looking around. Anywhere but at me. “They adopted me, but I never felt like I belonged. The only one I ever felt comfortable with was you. But you weren’t enough to stay around for.”

Mikasa’s words were suddenly cut off, as her mouth was flooded with whipped cream. Levi stood on the other end of the can, his expression caught somewhere between deadly anger and raw hatred. He barely managed to control his expression into one of masked calm when Mikasa turned her incredulous eyes on him, incapable of words both from shock and the fact that her mouth was still full.

“Do you want whipped cream on your coffee?”

He said the words with such innocence that I almost had to wonder if he hadn’t meant to squirt half a can of whipped cream into her mouth. Of course, his blue eyes easily betrayed the calm exterior he was trying to maintain. There was a vicious anger there that filled me with the sudden urge to protect Mikasa from whatever it was he was planning to do. I couldn’t remember another time when I had seen him so angry.

“What the fuck was that for?” Mikasa spat the words when she was finally able to speak again.

“You know exactly what that was for,” Levi snapped, his cool façade dropping instantly. He pointed the can of whipped cream in my direction, but his gaze never moved from her. “You don’t say shit like that to him. Not around me, not ever. If you had a reason to run, then fine. But don’t you ever fucking say he wasn’t enough to stay around for. He is more than enough, and I won’t stand here and listen to you make him feel like anything less.”
“I wasn’t trying to –”

“Don’t even try to feed me that bullshit,” he cut her off, his voice harsh and cold, “I know exactly what you were doing because I’ve done it myself. I know what it looks like when you cut people off. I know the words you use to hurt them just enough to make the break easy. I’m not going to let you do that to him. I know how important he is to you, and he deserves better than that.”

I was silent as started back and forth between them, not sure what I would say even if I were able to talk. It was true that her words had hurt me, but it was not nearly as much as I expected. Of course, that was probably due to the fact that I had already told myself the same thing over and over again. I was certain I hadn’t been enough of a reason for her to stay, and all she had done now was confirm it. That didn’t surprise me, but Levi’s anger did. The fact that he had been so quick to defend me left me unsure of how to react now.

And I wasn’t the only one at a loss for words. Mikasa stood there staring at Levi in a cold silence, but there was no anger in her eyes. It actually surprised me because I had expected to find hatred, but there was only pain. The two of them stared at each other, each wearing an expression that carried more anguish than I had ever known. I got the feeling that there was some silent conversation happening, some understanding that I would never fully comprehend myself.

“I’m sorry.” Mikasa finally spoke at last. She was silent again for another moment before shaking her head and turning to me. “He’s right. I shouldn’t have said something like. Not when you’re the reason I had such a hard time leaving.”

“Then why did you go?”

“Because I was scared I would die if I didn’t.”

I felt the color drain from my face at the sound of her words, worry and fear twisting in my gut. “What do you mean? Why would you die?”

She stared down as she held her scarf, clutching it close to her throat and opening her mouth before closing it again. Finally she closed her eyes. “Eren, you have somewhere safe right now. You have a home to go to and people who love you. I’m not going to take any of that away.”

“I never said you were going to.”

“I know you didn’t,” she sighed and then met my gaze. “But someday I’m going to ask you to come with me.”

I tried so hard to keep my eyes on her, but I barely even realized my gaze had turned to Levi until after it already happened. I cursed inwardly and looked back at her, finding a knowing look in her eyes. She knew exactly what she would be taking me from if she asked me to leave. I just didn’t know why she would. I didn’t understand what was so dangerous that she had to stay away, but I was becoming increasingly scared that I was living in the middle of it.

Somewhere in the depths of my mind, I kept remembering the conversation we had back in Armin’s car. Back when she had hinted at something that I was so unwilling to accept that I threw my phone into the dash. Even now, I didn’t want to admit that it could be true. It would change everything I thought I knew about a man I had known my entire life. It wasn’t possible that he was the one who had hurt her to the point that she ran. It couldn’t be possible.

“Eren,” Mikasa’s voice drew me out of my mind and back into the coffee shop, “I know you want to know what’s going on. And you have every right to be pissed off at me. But I just need you to trust
me when I say I can’t tell you this yet.”

“Are you ever going to tell me?” I asked the question even though I was beginning to wonder if I even wanted to know the answer now. I was scared to find out what monsters had chased her away. I didn’t want to know if they were actually familiar faces in my own home. I almost wanted to stay stuck in an illusion if knowing the truth meant shattering everything I knew.

“Of course I’m going to tell you,” Mikasa practically rolled her eyes when she answered. “Do you think I actually want to keep anything from you? I just don’t want to drag you away when I have nowhere for you to go.”

I was pretty damn sure I didn’t want her to drag me anywhere at all, ever. I was comfortable in my life now. I wasn’t ready to leave Armin or any of my other friends behind. And I couldn’t even bear the thought of separating myself from Levi at this point. I was ready to fight tooth and nail to stay exactly where I was, despite what it was she had to say. Even if her reasons for leaving ended up to be my worst nightmares realized, I wasn’t going to run. I wasn’t the type to just turn and walk away from a situation I didn’t like. I was going to fight to the very end, even if I had to do it alone.

“So, is that a yes or a no on the coffee?” Levi finally broke the silence, probably just as eager for a change in conversation as I was.

“Fuck yes.” I wasn’t sure if I was more excited about the coffee or to finally have the tension broken, but caffeine was definitely a plus. I glanced over at Mikasa, already knowing her answer. She practically lived off of the stuff back when she was still at home. “We both would.”

“Great.” Levi grabbed a hold of my wrist and started walking back towards the barista station. “Then you get to help me set up the drinks.”

I stumbled along behind him, suddenly feeling a little less than thrilled, “That’s probably not a good idea. I’m pretty sure I could burn a cup of Keurig coffee.”

“I’m actually gonna go to the bathroom,” Mikasa spoke up, removing her winter coat.

“Take your time,” Levi replied, snatching three cups from the shelf behind the counter. He paused to point in the direction of the bathroom. “That way.”

“Don’t let Eren make my coffee,” Mikasa warned as she started walking towards the door, “Unless you suck, too. Then I’ll just have water.”

Levi rolled his eyes, but a small smirk crossed his lips after the bathroom door closed. “She’s definitely got a personality on her.”

“Really? Most people seem to think she’s kind of boring.” I shrugged, leaning against the counter, “Although that’s mostly because she’s quiet and a little standoffish.”

“A little?” Levi raised one eyebrow, glancing in my direction. “I’m pretty sure she almost took off my head a number of times when I first met her.”

“You met her before now?” Suddenly I was interested. I’d been waiting to hear how he had managed to set this all up.

“Just once.” He shrugged, setting the cups down and starting up the machines. “She wanted to meet in a familiar place before trusting some stranger she only talked to over the phone.”

“You talked to her on the phone?”
“Your phone.” Levi glanced over at me, his eyes scanning my expression. “Get that look off your face, Jaeger. I wasn’t purposely invading your privacy, if that’s what you’re thinking. She happened to call when you left your damn phone in my apartment. I knew you were waiting for her to call, so I answered for you instead of letting the shit go to voicemail.”

I frowned, my hand brushing against the phone in my pocket. There hadn’t been any new unknown numbers in my missed calls list, and I knew that because I had been checking it religiously. He must have deleted the call he had with her. “Why didn’t you tell me she called?”

Levi gestured around the café with a wave of his hand, “Because I wanted it to be your Christmas gift. That and she was so fucking hesitant that I was worried anything could scare her off. It was hard enough getting her to agree to this at all.”

Levi pointed to a container on the shelf and I reached up to pull it down, holding it out for him. “What did you two talk about?”

“You, mostly,” Levi shrugged, scooping something into each drink. He paused to look at me, staring for a long moment before returning his attention to the coffees. “She told me why she ran.”

“She did?”

“She did,” he sighed and then turned to lean against the counter, folding his arms and fixing me with a stare. “And I’d appreciate it if you didn’t try to milk the information out of me. Honestly, it’s hers to tell. But I hate lying and I don’t want to keep the fact that I know this away from you.”

I felt an overwhelming sense of guilt twist hard in my gut, and I nearly wanted to double over with the pain. The fact that Levi hated lies and was so willing to let me in on this secret made my own secret with Erwin that much worse. But how could I tell him any of that now? It was a lie that had been festering for weeks and the only way to get around it was to carry on as planned. Even if I told Levi right now it wouldn’t change the fact that I had lied up until this point. He would still be just as mad. It would still ruin everything.

“Don’t get upset,” Levi frowned, watching me as he stirred one of the drinks. “She’ll tell you when she’s ready. It just might take a while.”

He had no idea why I looked like I was in pain, but I knew I could at least play it off. “I just don’t know why she told you over me.”

He gave a small shrug and worked on stirring the second drink. “Sometimes it’s easier to confide in a stranger. There’s not as much judgment because they don’t know all the details. And even if they do judge, they’re just strangers. You’ll probably never see them again anyway.”

“I guess that makes sense.” I murmured, picking up one of the finished coffees and taking a sip. My eyes widened slightly as the delicious flavor washed over my tongue. “This is incredible. I didn’t know you could make coffee like this.”

“That’s a latte,” he said with a small smirk, taking a sip of his own drink. “I hope I never stop surprising you, kid.”

I made a small sound of agreement, too pleased with my drink to offer much else in the way of words. I sipped it slowly, letting myself get used to the heat before taking in more. I’d had lattes before, but Levi added something else to the drink that had my mouth buzzing. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, enjoying the fragrance along with the taste. It was warmer, knowing that a chilly wind was waiting just outside.
“Hey, Eren.” Levi was eyeing me from over the rim of his cup when I glanced at him. He set down his drink and folded his arms, cocking his head to one side. “I need you to do me a favor.”

“Anything,” I spoke between sips. I was tempted to steal Mikasa’s drink after I finished mine.

“Well, first you have to promise not to flip shit when I tell you this.”

I wrinkled my nose at the phrase; not exactly fond of hearing the word shit when I was enjoying a frothy mocha drink. Not that I should’ve been surprised by it, of course. One of Levi’s favorite words seemed to be ‘shit’ and he applied it generously to every conversation.

“I’ll try not to.” It was the best I could do. We both knew that I didn’t always have the best control over my emotions. “What is it?”

“Mikasa’s not living in a good place right now.”

I couldn’t say I was surprised by that news. Mikasa didn’t take much with her when she left, and she had mentioned on more than one occasion that she was working to create a suitable place for the both of us. I knew her living arrangements wouldn’t be the best right now, but she would still be safe so long as she was warm and had some kind of roof over her head.

“I kind of figured that,” I shrugged, taking another sip. Levi watched me, his eyes wary as if he were waiting for me to explode at any moment. I frowned, suddenly feeling like I had missed something very important. “What? Are there roaches or something? Mikasa’s not that dainty, Levi. She can handle herself.”

“She’s living on the streets.”

I gagged on a sip of coffee as it lodged in my throat, quickly setting my drink down and pounding at my chest as I coughed. Once my throat was clear, I managed to rasp the words, “She’s what?”

Levi shot me an exasperated look as he poured me a glass of cold water, “This would be why I told you not to freak out. Here. Drink. You probably burned the fuck out of your throat.”

I couldn’t give two shits about my throat right now. I opened my mouth to ask the same question again, but I gave in when he pushed the rim of the cup against my lip. I grabbed the glass and downed the cool liquid as I stared at him, waiting for more of an explanation.

“Stop looking at me like I actually have more to tell you.” Levi snapped, his expression bordering on annoyed. I could tell he was upset with me for burning myself. He glared for a moment and then sighed, shaking his head before continuing in a softer voice. “I don’t know anymore than you do right now. All I know is that she’s been living close by.”

“She’s in the city?” My voice was still a little broken and my throat stung, but the drink had helped.

“Yea, I guess she wanted to stay close to you,” he shrugged, folding his arms as he leaned into the counter. “I offered to pay for a place, but she’s stubborn as shit. She wouldn’t even consider it.”

“So you want me to try to convince her for you?”

“Bingo.” Levi smirked, raising one eyebrow. “You know, you catch on fast, kid. Which means you already know that money isn’t an issue. Figure out where she wants to stay and get her to agree. I’m not going to have you panicking because she’s not in a safe place.”

I didn’t like the idea of Mikasa living out in the cold, but I also hated the idea of Levi handing over a
large amount of money for nothing at all. Mikasa was stubborn, but so was I. That wasn’t to say I would let her freeze, of course, but I also wasn’t about to accept charity on her behalf. I would figure out a way to pay him back every cent of what he spent on us.

“I have some money in my saving’s account,” I started, “And I can get a part time job until I have enough to pay you –”

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence,” Levi interjected, pointing his finger at me. “I’m helping her because I want to. It doesn’t have anything to do with you, got it? Do you really think I give a shit about that mountain of cash I’m sitting on? We could end whatever this is between us tomorrow and I would still pay for her.”

An overwhelming sense of gratefulness flooded me as I crossed the small distance between us and took his face into my hands, claiming his lips in a deep kiss. I felt him relax against me as his arms circled around my waist and he pulled me closer. I smiled into the kiss and my arms found his waist as well, getting a tight grip as I lifted him into my embrace and held him against my chest. I could have stayed like this forever, setting up house in this café and abandoning the rest of my worries to live happily with his lips on mine.

“So, I guess you two really are together, huh?”

We broke apart in a rush and I felt my cheeks heat up as I turned to face Mikasa, rubbing the back of my neck. “Uhm, yea… I guess we are. Kind of.”

“That didn’t look like kind of,” Mikasa returned with a teasing lilt in her voice. She walked over and retrieved her coffee from the counter, taking a tentative sip before appreciation spread across her features. “This is great, actually. I’m surprised.”

“That’s almost insulting,” Levi murmured, taking the last sip from his cup.

“It was supposed to be a compliment.”

Levi smirked. “You failed.”

I watched their conversation as I nursed my drink, trying to think of the best way to get Mikasa indoors for the night. I would probably be shooting a little too high if I tried to get her to agree to an apartment right now, but I could at least get her to stay one night at Levi’s. If he would even let her, of course. He had offered to buy her a place, but sharing his own home was another issue entirely.

“Hey, Mikasa,” I hedged, trying to get up the courage to ask in a way that didn’t sound desperate. “It’s already getting kind of late. Why don’t you spend the night with me? Mom’s been out visiting her sister, so it’s been lonely.”

“I’m not going to that apartment, Eren.”

“You don’t have to,” Levi spoke up, “You can both stay the night at my place.”

“Why, so I can fall asleep to the sounds of you two fucking like rabbits?” Mikasa shot back.

“Thanks, but I think I’ll pass.”

“Mikasa!” It was the only response I had, because it wasn’t like I could prove her wrong. I could practically feel my cheeks entering the shade of full-blown crimson as they heated up further.

Levi, however, seemed completed unfazed by her comment. “The two of you can take my bed. The sheets are clean, so it’s not like you’ll be sleeping in our bunny love nest.”
I groaned and let my forehead hit the counter as I bent over. This was one of the worst conversations of my life. I didn’t want Mikasa to know anything about what Levi and I did behind closed doors. “Levi…”

“What’s up, Doc?”

“Oh my god…” I sighed and let my shoulders sag. “Can we go now?”

“We probably should, actually.” Levi admitted as he set the clean cups back on the counter. “I promised to close up long before now.”

“Do you own this place?” Mikasa asked as she looked around the café. “Or do you just work here?”

“Neither,” Levi replied as he scooped up the keys. “I just happen to know the owner. He’s an old family friend. His name’s Mr. Pixis.”

I met him the first time Levi brought me to the coffee shop. He brewed us something that resembled coffee, but tasted nothing like it. Levi had taken the drink away from me after one sip, commenting that Mr. Pixis enjoyed his coffee stronger than most people could handle. He was an eccentric man, but Levi seemed to enjoy his humor when he was in the mood for it.

Levi turned off the lights as we walked out of the building and he paused to lock the doors. I pulled on my gloves in an attempt to ignore the biting chill, noticing Mikasa’s bare hands as I did so.

I frowned. “Don’t you have any gloves?”

“I don’t need them,” Mikasa answered quickly, a defensive tone in her voice. She tugged the sleeves of her jacket down over her hands until just her fingertips showed. “I’m not that cold, anyway.”

I rolled my eyes and tugged off my gloves, taking her hands in mine to put them on her. “You really should have a pair of gloves. It’s too cold out here not to.”

She wiggled her fingers and frowned, “Your hands are huge, Eren.”

“Not really. Not for a guy.” I shrugged and shoved my hands in my coat pockets. “Are you coming with us?”

She was silent for a long moment, pretending to be interested in the size of the gloves as she tried to think of a way out of it. Finally she sighed and looked at me, frowning a little. “I guess so. But it’s just for the night. I’m not staying longer than that.”

“Deal.”

We walked along the sidewalk with our heads held down, keeping the conversation at a minimum as we struggled against the chilly breeze that seemed determined to push us back the way we came. Trost wasn’t that far from the coffee shop, but in this weather it felt as if it were miles away. I leaned into Levi in search of warmth and felt my body begin to relax when he put his arm around my waist. I relaxed further when I saw the welcoming glow of Trost’s lights. We couldn’t get there fast enough.

“Eren! Levi!”

I turned in the direction of our names, but I didn’t really have to. I would know that singsong voice anywhere.
“Shit,” Levi cursed under his breath, “I forgot.”

Hanji bounded up to us with a grin spread wide across her face. “You’re just in time! We have the cake all set up. Come on!”

“Hanji, I’m really not in the mood…” Levi started, but she was not about to be denied.

“Oh, hush! It’s your birthday, and we always celebrate it.” Hanji continued, grabbing my arm and tugging me toward the door. She must have known Levi would follow if she dragged me in. “Bring your friend, too!”

I glanced over my shoulder at Mikasa, who was reluctantly following behind Levi. Shit. How did this happen? She was going to go inside The Wall and see all of the things that Levi was into. All of the things that I was starting to get into. Would she tell our parents? Would she call the cops? I felt my stomach twisting uncomfortably as I tried to think of a way out of this.

But there was no way out.

We had already stepped inside.
“What the fuck?”

I flinched slightly, but I didn’t bother to turn around. I could pretty much guess what Mikasa’s face must have looked like, and I wasn’t ready to face her until I had some idea of what I was going to say. The club wasn’t even open yet, although it wasn’t hard to guess what went on once everyone was inside. The smell of leather was heavy in the air and the club was glowing red tonight, which I could only assume was an attempt at being festive for the holidays. Somehow I didn’t think Mikasa was getting the whole Christmas cheer vibe from this place.

“Oh, yea,” Hanji laughed, “What the fuck, indeed. I’m guessing it’s your first time, huh? It’s a lot to take in all at once.”

“Is this a…” Mikasa trailed off and I fought the urge to look back at her. She wasn’t searching for a word. She was struck silent from the sheer shock of it all.

“A BDSM club?” Levi provided the answer as if she were asking something simple. Something that didn’t matter at all. “Yes.”

“Why would you come here?” Mikasa’s voice was filled with confusion as if she couldn’t possibly understand it at all. It was obvious that she wasn’t taking this well, but it wasn’t as if I actually expected her to.

“Why not?” Hanji blinked, looking between the three of us. She clearly had no idea who Mikasa was, but that wasn’t surprising. No one was able to tell that Mikasa was my adopted sister from sight alone. Hanji had probably assumed that we brought her here under the full knowledge of what this
club was. It was a fair assumption, of course. Even I had an inkling before I stepped through the doors my first time.

“Why not?” Mikasa repeated Hanji’s question and gestured around us, “It looks like a torture chamber in here.”

“It’s not that bad,” I interjected, surprising both Levi and myself. He looked over at me and raised one eyebrow, amusement crossing his features. I had never fully admitted to liking the things we had done while we were here, but I’d found myself craving them lately.

“Not that bad?” Mikasa put emphasis on the last word as she turned towards me, “Is this what you’re into now, Eren? Is it because of him? Did he force you to do this?”

“I didn’t force him to do anything,” Levi snapped, his eyes narrowing, “He followed me in here himself.”

“Why would he have to follow you here in the first place?” Mikasa shot back, turning her menacing glare on Levi. “Why were you here at all?”

“That’s a silly question,” Hanji laughed. She either didn’t notice the sudden tension or she was attempting to play it off entirely. “This is Levi’s club. He owns it.”

“You own this place?” Mikasa’s voice was incredulous as she took a step back towards the door. “Why would you own something like this?”

“It’s not for the reasons that you’re thinking,” Levi spoke through an exasperated sigh. It was clear that this was not the first time he’d been asked that kind of question.

“Do you like to hurt people?” Mikasa’s voice was taking on an accusatory note that had me fighting to stay out of it. Somehow I knew that I should let Levi handle the situation. I would turn it into a screaming match if I got involved. “Is that what it is? Do you like to cause them pain?”

“It’s not about hurting people.” Levi responded, trying to keep his voice even. She was starting to hit a very sensitive nerve, and pretty soon he was going to give up the attempt to remain civil.

“The hell it’s not! What else would you use these things for?” Mikasa snapped back, grabbing one of the whips dangling from the wall. She turned it on Levi, her eyes narrowed as she stepped forward, “Do you use them on him?”

Levi eyed the whip that was nearly being shoved in his face and pushed one finger against it to move it to the side. “Not this particular one, no. Not yet.”

I closed my eyes and let a rough sigh rush out of my chest. Oh, crap. He was trying to provoke her now, and I was pretty sure he had just succeeded. That was one of the very last things she wanted to hear, and he must have known it.

“So you hurt him, then,” Mikasa’s words trembled with rage and I opened my eyes to look over at her. She was stepping towards him and she looked as if she were prepared to throw him across the club. If he was intimidated at all, he didn’t show it.

“I don’t hurt him,” Levi replied icily. “I would never do anything he didn’t ask for.”

“Eren wouldn’t ask for anything like this!” Mikasa shouted. “If he did, it’s because he’s trying to make you like him. You’ve manipulated him into this. You’re making him think that you care just so you can hurt him!”
Levi grabbed the whip out of her hand and clutched it tight, staring up at her with eyes that were as deadly as they were hateful. “Get out.”

“Gladly.” Mikasa turned and grabbed my wrist. “We’re leaving.”

I jerked my arm away to free my wrist and stepped back towards Levi, shaking my head. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Yes, you are,” Levi spoke, pressing his hand against my lower back. His touch and his words were gentle; nothing like the way he’d been with her just now. “She’s your sister and you haven’t seen her in months. I’ll still be here tomorrow. She might not be, so go with her.”

I turned to face him, searching his eyes. He couldn’t actually want me to go with her. He had to be saying that for my sake, and it was pointless. I didn’t want to leave. “It’s your birthday and I want to spend it with you.”

“You’ve spent all day with me and it will be my birthday again next year.”

The fact that he was suggesting we would still be together next year made my heart race. If he was trying to give me reasons to leave, it wasn’t working. “We were gonna have cake.”

“Oh, right!” Hanji clapped her hands together, “We have to cut the cock!”

“The…” I blinked, slowly turning towards her. “Cock?”

“It’s cream filled,” she grinned, wagging her eyebrows at me.

Levi groaned and ran a hand down his face, “Hanji, tell me you didn’t order a giant dick for my birthday cake.”

“It’s not just a dick, silly,” Hanji replied, rolling her eyes. “There are balls, too.”

“Of course there are,” he sighed, “Why wouldn’t there be?”

“They’re really big,” Hanji continued, holding her hands apart to emphasize the size. “With chocolate sprinkled pubes!”

“How realistic,” Levi murmured, rolling his eyes before looking at me. “You better take off, kid. Before your prude of a sister has to be exposed to even more fetishes.”

“I’m not a prude,” Mikasa hissed, folding her arms.

“Well, you’re completely unwilling to listen to me when I tell you I’m not hurting him,” Levi retorted, glancing over at her. “Do you think people come here unwillingly? We enjoy this lifestyle. We do it because we want to, not because someone’s forcing us.”

“Eren wouldn’t do this unless he was forced to.”

“Yes, I would,” I interjected, earning a surprised look from Mikasa. I took a deep breath and continued, “I don’t know much about this lifestyle yet. Levi hasn’t tried to push any of it on me. He hasn’t even brought it up since the first time I came here myself. And when I was here, no one tried to force me to do anything. It was all my choice.”

“That’s what it’s all about,” Hanji chimed in, her voice suddenly holding the same sincere tone it had on my first visit to the dungeon. “We’re all about choice here. No one will force you to do anything you don’t want to do. That’s what we call abuse. We don’t abuse anyone here. We do what we want
because it’s what we enjoy. And we do so willingly or not at all.”

Mikasa opened her mouth to speak, but Hanji held up her hand and continued, “I don’t know you yet, and I understand that this place is very scary for a first timer. Especially when someone you love is involved in it. But that doesn’t give you the right to attack and berate someone I’ve known for most of my life. Levi is my best friend and he would never hurt anyone. That’s not the type of person that he is and that’s not the kind of relationship that they have. It’s not fair for you to label what they have as abuse because of some bedroom kinks that you don’t approve of. What they have is special to the both of them, and I can assure you that neither of them is being hurt. So let it go.”

I stared at Hanji, trying my best to keep the surprise off of my face. I hadn’t expected to hear any of that from her, especially not the comments on our relationship.

“I…” Mikasa faltered, glancing over at me and then back to Hanji. “I really don’t approve of it.”

“No one said you have to.” Hanji shrugged. “Just respect that it’s what they want.”

Mikasa opened her mouth to speak again, but it seemed like she was at a loss for words. Finally she nodded, looking once at Levi and then to me. “Just don’t do anything you’re not comfortable with. Promise me that.”

“I promise,” I assured her. It wasn’t like Levi had even brought it up since that night. I was pretty sure he was purposely taking it as slow as possible. He would probably be able to sense that I was uncomfortable with something before I even realized it myself.

“Good!” Hanji grinned, slipping back into her usual state of excitement. “Then let’s get to cutting the cock! I’m starving.”

“Starving for cock,” Levi remarked with a small smirk, “That’s something I don’t think I’ve ever heard you say.”

“And you probably won’t hear it again,” she laughed, “At least not until next year.”

“Oh, so this is going to be a tradition now?” Levi rolled his eyes as he walked, leading us towards the bar. “Tell me, why exactly did you decide to get me a birthday dick?”

“Well, mostly because I invited his little blonde friend,” Hanji wiggled her fingers at me, “And he happened to show up a little early. So I dragged him out to go get the cake. You should have seen him trying to order it!”

“Oh my god, Armin,” I groaned, smacking my hand to my forehead. She made my shy friend order a giant cock cake filled with cream. I was amazed that he was still around and hadn’t just died of embarrassment right there in the bakery.

“Eren?”

Armin stood up from his seat at one of the surrounding tables, and I noticed that there was still a little redness in his cheeks. He would probably be blushing for the rest of his life after tonight, especially if he was going to see the club in full swing. Still, despite the fact that his cheeks were red there was a smile on his face. Of course, his expression quickly faded into shock when he saw who was with us.

“Oh my god,” he breathed, stumbling away from the table and accidentally knocking over a chair as he made his way towards us, “Oh my god, Mikasa!”

He threw his arms around her the instant he was close enough, crushing her against him in a tight
hug. He held her in place, hiding his face against her as he trembled slightly. I felt my heart ache at the sight, realizing that he had known her just as long as I did. He had been just as close with her as I was. The only difference was that it was my family that adopted her. Aside from that, we were as close as three people could get. We had always been a little trio until she left.

“Hey Armin,” she murmured against him, her mouth partially covered by his hair.

“Hey Armin?” He repeated the words as if he couldn’t believe them. He drew back to stare at her, holding her by her shoulders. “You disappear for months, and that’s all I get? Hey Armin?”

She looked both confused and embarrassed, “What was I supposed to say?”

“I don’t know,” Armin shook his head, his voice cracking slightly. He wiped quickly at his eyes to disguise the fact that he was already so emotional. “How did you get here? When did you come back? Are you staying now?”

“I’m not staying,” Mikasa replied, “I’m just here for the night.”

“What? Why?” Armin frowned, “Why just for one night? What do you think you are, a Christmas present?”

“You could say that,” Levi shrugged, folding his arms. “I did ask her to come here for Christmas.”

“You’re the one who found her?” Armin gasped and looked over at Levi. “How?”

“He had my phone that night you stayed over,” I answered for him. “She called and he answered. They set it up that night.”

Armin shook his head slowly, looking like it was still too much to take in. “Why can’t you stay?”

Mikasa shrugged. “For the same reasons I left.”

“We don’t even know what those are.”

“And you’re not going to find out,” she replied simply, “At least not yet. So don’t push it.”

Armin kept his mouth shut, staring at her as he tried to decide if it was really a battle worth fighting. He must have decided that he wouldn’t be able to win right now because he sighed and looked over at me, “Hanji made me buy a really big penis cake.”

I laughed, “Yea, I heard. And as weird as it sounds, I’m really hungry right now.”

“So let’s go eat some cock!” Hanji added, clapping her hands and rubbing them together. “Someone get me a knife.”

“Nope,” Levi snatched the knife from Petra when she turned to hand it to Hanji, “Let’s keep the pointy objects away from her for a while. I don’t need my cake butchered because she’s too damn excited to cut straight.”

“Who cares if it’s cut straight?” Hanji frowned.

Levi pointed the knife at himself, “The birthday boy. Now move aside.”

Hanji huffed and moved out of the way, revealing an oversized pink penis cake. It was sitting in the middle of the table, fully erect and paired with two big balls covered in curly chocolate shavings. It was by far the most obscene cake I’d ever seen, but that wasn’t hard considering I’d only ever had
the simple sheet cakes that were usually served at parties. Those had always been enough to feed quite a few people, more than the handful that we had here. I had no idea how they expected us to finish this cake monstrosity.

“You know I can’t eat that much cake, right?” I commented, glancing over at Hanji.

“Don’t be greedy. It’s not just for us,” she grinned, wagging a finger at me, “We just get the first pieces as a private party. Then everyone else gets some.”

“Everyone else?” I looked around us. Save for our small get together, the club was empty.

“They’re lining up outside right now,” she said with a nod to the door, “We’re opening up at midnight tonight.”

“You’re open for Christmas?”

“Technically it’ll be the 26th at midnight,” she pointed out.

“And people will still show up?” I asked. I hadn’t seen anyone outside when we came in.

“Oh yea, tons. It’s kind of a tradition here. We all eat some cake. We dance. There’s a kinky Santa that gives out public floggings. Because, you know, everyone’s naughty here,” she winked and grinned wider as she nudged me with her elbow. Then she paused, a sly smile crossing her lips as she wagged her eyebrows at me. “Oh, and Levi does a sexy little striptease. You know, as a special Christmas gift to all our lovely patrons.”

“You’re going to do a striptease?” I exclaimed as I turned towards Levi. “And you were going to let me leave? Are you insane?”

Levi stared at me like a deer caught in headlights, the knife halfway through cutting off the tip of the cock cake. He looked between Hanji and me before sighing, shaking his head. “Damn it, glasses, did you have to tell him that?”

“Well, obviously he was going to see it.” Hanji replied with a roll of her eyes, setting her hands on her hips. “What were you going to do? Send him home early?”

“I was thinking of not doing it at all,” Levi shrugged, flopping the first piece of cake onto an empty plate.

Petra and Hanji gasped, practically speaking in unison, “You have to strip!”

“The hell I do,” Levi rolled his eyes, cutting off a second piece. “I don’t actually have to do anything.”

“But it’s tradition!” Hanji countered.

“And Eren stripped for you,” Petra joined in, “It’s only fair.”

“Wait, hold up. So we’re not going to see Levi’s ass tonight?”

That was a new voice.

I looked back towards the entryway into the bar to see two people standing there; neither of which I’d ever seen before. There was a taller man with light colored hair that was more or less as much of a mess as mine. He had a strong jaw and sharp eyes with an edge of intelligence to them that reminded me of Levi. He wore a simple dark red button-up and black slacks, looking like he had
actually planned to come to a fancier place than this.

The girl at his side, the one who spoke when they arrived, was as short as she was spunky. She had a wide, Cheshire-like grin and bright green eyes that I could see even in the dim lighting of the room. Her hair was pulled into two messy pigtails and was a bright red that practically glowed underneath the matching light of the club. Her clothing was similar to the man beside her and I had to wonder if they had just come from a job that was cruel enough to be open on Christmas day. The only difference between their clothing was the addition of her black vest and half-gloves.

She set a hand on her hip and cocked her head to the side, fixing us with an even wider grin, “You know that’s the only reason I came, right? I mean, if you’re not going shake that ass for us, I might as well take off now.”

“Levi! Levi, the cake!” Petra waved her hands as she grabbed for the knife that was now cutting through the length of the cake. Levi had apparently forgotten about it, because his stare was fixed on the two at the door.

“You actually came?” Levi breathed, letting go of the knife as Petra took a hold of it. I watched him cross the distance to the two, feeling more than a little confused.

“Who are they?” I asked, glancing over at Hanji.

“They’re his ‘cousins,’” Hanji answered, making air quotes around the last word before shrugging. “At least that’s what he’s told me. He went away every summer to France to visit this woman who was best friends with his mom. They were really close before she died and I guess it was a connection he wanted to keep. Those two are the woman’s son and niece.”

Levi pulled the short girl into a tight hug and she threw her arms around him, practically hopping off the floor as she did so, “We missed you, you sourpuss!”

“You’re one to talk,” Levi smirked, glancing over at the other man, “Was it a long flight?”

“Incredibly,” he answered in a heavily accented voice. “But you’re worth it. It’s been almost a year now, yes?”

“In February,” Levi nodded and then frowned, “Are you going to let go, Maggie?”

“Not any time this year,” she replied in a singsong tone that reminded me of Hanji.

“Really?” Levi asked, his voice growing amused, “Even if it means you get to meet Eren?”

“Eren’s here!” She exclaimed and pulled away, looking towards us. I felt color rush into my cheeks as my heart started hammering in my chest. He had been talking to his friends about me. His closest friends that lived so far away knew that he was in a relationship with me.

“Yes, he’s here,” Levi chuckled and set his hands on her shoulders as he stepped behind her, leaning in close so his head was beside hers. They looked like they were conspiring together. “Can you guess which one he is?”

“Hrm…” She drew out the sound as she walked towards us, one arm folded across her chest and the other lifted as she tapped her finger against her chin. “Let’s see… you said he was handsome. Very handsome.”

I could hear my heart pounding in my ears now and I knew that I had to be as red as a tomato.
“And taller than you,” she laughed and looked at him from over her shoulder, “Obviously.”

“Keep going,” Levi said with a roll of his eyes, waving his hand at us.

“Messy brown hair. A killer smile. And gorgeous bright green eyes. Levi, you’re such a sap.” She grinned as she stopped in front of me, tapping me on the nose. “Hello, Eren. Levi didn’t tell me you looked like a tomato.”

I suppressed a groan and the overwhelming urge to hide my face in my hands.

“He doesn’t look like a tomato,” Mikasa spoke up from my side, her voice tinged with annoyance, “He’s just embarrassed.”

“I don’t think that helps, Mikasa,” Armin murmured, giving me an apologetic smile. “It’s not that bad.”

I rubbed at my cheeks and then sighed, offering a hand to her. “I’m Eren.”

“Isabel,” she grinned, grabbing a hold of my hand, “Although Levi calls me Maggie.”

“Her last name is Magnolia,” Levi explained.

“Yea,” she laughed with a roll of her eyes, “Named after a flower. How great is that?”

“Why let anyone call you Maggie if you’re always going to complain about it?” The other man asked as he walked over to us.

“Because everyone started calling me Bella when Twilight came out,” Isabel retorted, “Maggie was a nice change at the time.”

“And I just stuck with it,” Levi shrugged.

“Oh, right,” he mused, angling his head to the side. “I forgot about that.”

“Sure, you did. After convincing half the school to call me that.” She rolled her eyes and looked at me, jutting a thumb in his direction. “That’s Farlan, by the way. You can call him Far, if you want. Or asshat. I personally prefer asshat.”

“I… uhm…” I glanced over at Levi for some help, but the most I got back was an amused smirk.

“Well, then,” Levi started as he snatched up a plate of cake from the table. “I better get my ass backstage if I’m going to strip on time. It’s usually the opening act.”

“So you’ll do it?” Hanji beamed, her excitement going full force. She was practically bouncing in place.

“Yea, I’ll do it,” Levi shrugged as he grabbed a fork. “They came all this way and Eren’s never seen me strip, so I may as well.”

“You don’t have to if you’re embarrassed,” I spoke up.

Levi stared at me for a moment, blinking before he began laughing. “Embarrassed, huh? We’ll see who’s embarrassed after this, kid.”

He was still chuckling as he walked away from us, heading towards a red door and disappearing from view. I stared after him, my heart still racing from earlier. Although I was sure it was also racing
because I was about to see him strip down naked in front of a group of strangers. Something about that made me feel oddly possessive, but I wasn’t about to turn down the show just so no one else could see.

“Do we have to watch?” Mikasa asked with her nose wrinkled at the thought. “Because everything about him taking off his clothes makes me feel squeamish.”

“Yea,” Armin piped up, shaking his head as he looked at Hanji, “I don’t know if I want to see that either. Especially not with Eren here.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Isabel exclaimed, “He’s my best friend and I so do not want to jump on his d, but come on! He’s hot. That’s like not wanting to watch a sexy statue shake its ass.”

“I don’t want to see a statue shake its ass,” Mikasa remarked. “Although I’d take that over his ass any day.”

“Crazy people,” Isabel sighed, shaking her head as she folded her arms. “You’re gonna miss out on a good show.”

“Doubt it.”

“Well, it’s not that we don’t want to,” Armin started, but Mikasa cut in.

“Speak for yourself.”

He looked at her and sighed before turning back to Isabel. “We’d like to, but we’re Eren’s best friends. It would just be weird to watch his boyfriend strip.”

“Say no more, say no more,” Hanji waved her hands at them before grabbing two plates of cake and holding them out to Armin and Mikasa. “Here, I’ll show you a great place where you can sit and avoid the eye-melting imagery of Levi shaking his luscious rump.”

Mikasa followed after Hanji all too willingly, but Armin paused and looked back at me. “I know the show’s about to start, so this can wait. But I need to talk to you later.”

“What about?”

He stepped forward and pulled me into a tight hug, speaking at my ear in a whisper that no one else could hear, “I think I fucked up something with Erwin.”

I wrapped my arms around his waist and held him close, angling my head until my lips brushed against his ear, “What happened?”

“I can’t tell you right now. Not here. There’s not enough time to explain.” He squeezed me tighter before withdrawing from the hug, staring up at me, “I promise, it can wait until tomorrow. Enjoy the striptease and then we’ll spend the rest of the night with Mikasa.”

“She’s going to spend the night at Levi’s,” I mentioned, trying not to let my mind linger on what might have happened with Erwin. “He probably wouldn’t mind if you stayed, too.”

“You can ask him after the show,” Armin smiled, “Enjoy yourself.”

I watched Armin walk off to join Mikasa and Hanji, my mind spinning with the possibilities of what he might want to tell me. I was so caught up in my own thoughts that I didn’t even notice when Isabel slid up to my side and nuded me in the ribs.
“Does Levi have a reason to be jealous?”

“Huh?” I looked down at her, my eyes filling with confusion.

“The blondie.” She pointed in the direction Armin had gone. “Is there something going on between
you two that he should know about?”

known him since we were very young. There’s nothing between us that way.”

She pursed her lips as she scrutinized my expression before finally smiling. “Good. Because he likes
you. I mean, he really, really likes you, Eren. And he’s not allowed to get hurt, you understand? He’s
not as tough as he looks, and if you hurt him then I’m gonna have to hurt you. Got it?”

“I’m never going to hurt him.” I assured her. “I promise. And if I do, you can break my arms.”

“Oh, I plan to,” she grinned. “Now sit your ass down and get comfortable. The birthday boy is going
to want to dance with you.”

I started to take a seat in the nearest chair, but I was stopped with a set of hands pressed against my
shoulders. “Ah, ah. Levi wants you up front.”

Hanji steered me through the crowd that was beginning to form and shooed a group out of one of the
front tables. She pushed me into the empty seat closest to the stage before taking one of the seats for
herself. She called over her shoulder for Petra, Isabel, and Farlan, and pretty soon our little table was
fully occupied. I sat there, fidgeting with my hands in my lap as I took a slow, shaky breath. I had no
idea why, but I was as nervous as I had been right before I had to strip for him. I wondered if maybe
he was actually nervous, too.

“Nervous?” Petra asked, glancing over at me.

I took a deep breath and swallowed, nodding. “Very.”

“Don’t be,” she smiled and tilted her head. “It’s just Levi. There’s no reason for you to be nervous
with him.”

Easier said than done. I was incredibly nervous, and I wasn’t even the one that would be naked in
front of everyone. But I would be naked to him. I already knew that he would be staring at me the
entire time, watching my every reaction to the things he did. I didn’t even know how to react to
someone stripping in front of me. I almost felt like I shouldn’t stare, even though I knew I was
supposed to. How was I going to prepare myself for this?

I felt my heart jump into my throat as the red lights focused on the center of the stage to reveal Levi
leaning up against the metal pole. His hair was long, as it always was when he was playing the
Corporal, and his eyes were outlined in dark eyeliner. He was wearing a military-style hat and a long
black trench coat that hid the rest of his outfit from the eyes of the audience. There were buckles
running down the center of it but that was the only addition to the black fabric, save for three patches
that were held on by safety pins. The patches, each of which had a pair of black and white
overlapping wings, were positioned with one over his heart and the others on the upper sleeves of his
jacket.

He turned his gaze out towards the club and his eyes settled on me as a seductive smirk crossed his
lips. My heart was pounding fast against my chest as I instinctively leaned forward in my seat, unable
to tear my eyes away from him. I barely heard the music start up when it did but as Levi began to
move to the slow beat, I recognized it as Nine Inch Nail’s Closer.
Levi’s hands worked as slowly and skillfully as his hips, undoing the buckles as he moved sensually against the pole. His piercing blue eyes remained on mine as his mouth began to move with the lyrics of the song.

*You let me violate you.*

*You let me desecrate you.*

*You let me penetrate you.*

Levi’s lips curled into a knowing smirk on the last line, watching as my cheeks flooded with color. I was already starting to squirm in my seat, feeling the tension build in my body from the mere sight of him grinding against a pole. I wanted to have him grinding against me.

He moved away from the center of the stage and started walking towards the audience, slipping the jacket off his shoulders and revealing the rest of his ensemble to our greedy eyes. He was all zippers and leather, with sheer black stockings and arm warmers that were filled with holes and runs in the fabric. His sleeveless shirt had one shiny silver zipper running straight down the middle, complimenting the two zippers running diagonally along either side of his leather shorts. One good pull on those and his ass would be bare.

His knee-high heeled boots clicked across the stage as he walked, holding my stare the entire time. Somewhere in the back of my mind I could remember the lyrics to the song, and somehow I knew what was coming next.

As he neared the edge of the stage, Levi suddenly dropped to all fours and crawled the rest of the way, mouthing the lyrics as he stared into my eyes.

*I wanna fuck you like an animal…*

My breath caught in my throat as my entire body lit up with arousal, causing my lips to part as I began to pant. He wasn’t even naked yet, but I could feel my mind slipping as I watched him crawl off the stage. As he straddled my lap and fisted his hands in my hair, I realized I couldn’t even remember my name. When he tugged hard and jerked my head back, letting his lips hover over mine, I realized I didn’t care if I had a name at all.

“I wanna feel you from the inside…” Levi moaned the next line of the song as he thrust his hips into mine. It took all I had not to cry out with desire, but I couldn’t stop myself from grabbing his ass to pull him closer.

“I wanna fuck you like an animal,” Levi repeated with the song, gazing down into my eyes and holding me hostage with his smoldering blue stare. His hips were still moving and my mind could focus on nothing else. “My whole existence is flawed…”

Levi brushed his lips against my ear, and I could feel the vibration in his chest as he chuckled. “You’re so fucking hard. It’s not even fair.”

He bit my earlobe and gave it a playful tug before suddenly pulling away. I fought back my cry of protest as I watched him move back onto the stage, grabbing an empty chair with him as he went. When he reached the center, he slammed the chair down against the stage and cast a scanning look at the audience. Straddling the chair, he moved his upper body in a way that was so sexual I was sure I would never be able to master it.

As he rolled his upper body to the beat of the song, he bit the end of the ripped up armwarmer and dragged it off his arm with nothing but his teeth. He wiggled his fingers at the audience as they
cheered before repeating the same motion with his other arm.

When he was free of the fabric, he grabbed the top of the chair and slid his body up until he was no longer sitting in the chair at all. His boots caught an angle that was just enough to keep him hovering above the seat as he grabbed the front of his shirt and rolled the zipper down. When the zipper slipped free, he jerked the shirt apart and let it slip off of his shoulders to reveal his bare chest.

I was pretty sure my cheeks couldn’t get any redder, which was surprising considering my blood was currently in another part of my body. Levi stood and kicked the chair aside as if it were in his way, moving with one heel in front of the other as he walked towards the pole. He grabbed a hold of it and lifted his left leg up, using the help of his one hand to pull it high above his head as he hooked his heel against the pole. I felt my mouth drop open as I stared at the wide spread of his legs, realizing that I never knew how flexible he was. All of the possibilities of how I could use that started churning in my head as I watched him grab the zipper and slide it down his leg.

Levi slowly slid his leg back down the pole and pulled off his boot as he did so, discarding it to the side. Then he bent over, maintaining our locked stare as he unzipped the other boot and freed himself from it. All that was left was a pair of ripped stockings and zippered shorts. He was shorter now, but that was the Levi I knew.

Levi reached behind himself and grabbed the pole above his head, lifting himself up before letting himself slide down it slowly, bending at the knees as he dipped down low. He set his hands between his spread legs and moved back to all fours, crawling once again towards the edge of the stage. I felt my body tensing with the anticipation of having him in my lap again, but I was disappointed when he stopped at the edge.

He sat with his side facing us, taking on the pose of some model seated beside a pool. He drew his left leg up as he slid the first stocking off of his creamy skin, swinging it once around before tossing it into the audience. I would have thought about catching it if my eyes weren’t locked on his. A smirk twitched on his lips as he slid off the second stocking, keeping this one in his hand as he moved off of the stage once more.

He walked towards me as he folded the stocking over once in his hands, swinging it over my head and catching it behind my neck as he straddled my hips and shoved his demanding length up against mine. My breath hitched in my throat and left me in a moan when my hips instinctively thrust up into his. He met the grind of my hips with a far more demanding one, panting at my ear as he growled, “Strip me…”

My hands trembled as they searched for the zippers, taking a moment to find them before my fingers latched on. I gripped them tight and pulled them down, listening to the satisfying sound as they came undone. The fabric slipped free of Levi’s hips and his body was left bare in my lap. I could almost make out the sounds of the audience around us, but I didn’t care enough to listen in.

I fisted my hands in his hair and pulled his lips to mine, claiming them in a hungry kiss. He moaned against me and dropped the stocking, his fingers threading into my hair and giving a playful tug. “We can’t right now, brat.”

“But I want you,” I groaned, moving my hips up as if to prove my point.

“And I want you,” Levi murmured before chuckling, the sound low and deep and mildly evil. “But I’m going to make you beg for it, remember?”

“This is me begging,” I insisted, trying to pull his lips back to mine, “If you need me to get down on my knees in front of everyone, I will. Right now.”
He laughed again and met my lips once before moving out of my lap. He was rock hard, but able to ignore it enough to torment me. How was that even fair?

“Don’t look so stung, kid,” Levi smirked, bending over to pick up his shorts. “Do you really want your first time to be in front of all these people? Because I don’t. I don’t want to share that with them. I want to share it with you. Just you. In our bed. When you’re ready.”

I was ready now, but I wasn’t about to protest when he had called it our bed. I took a slow breath and tried to urge my body to calm down, but I was pretty sure I was just going to have to hide my hard-on in the band of my boxers. “Fine. I can wait.”

“You can and you’re going to.” Levi bent down to kiss me once more. “I’m going backstage to get dressed. Round up Mikasa and Armin and wait by the door. I’ll meet you there in a few.”

“We’re leaving?”

“I get the feeling your sister’s not comfortable here, and she’s only around for the night. So you’re going to spend it with the two of them.” He started to walk towards the door and then paused, turning towards me, “I had Hanji put a blonde wig on Mikasa. Do me a favor and don’t ask why.”

I stared at him with confusion in my eyes, watching as he disappeared from view. “Why…”

“Oh, I’m sure he has his reasons,” Isabel grinned, patting me on the back, “I’m gonna go say goodbye to him for the night. We’re having dinner tomorrow. You should join us.”

“Oh, uhm… yea, sure.” I nodded, my eyes still on the door. What the hell had the wig thing been about? Why would Mikasa need to wear a wig? Why would she even agree to do so?

Isabel and Farlan said their goodbyes to me before walking off to join Levi. I found Armin and a blonde-haired Mikasa waiting for me by the door. I tried my best not to stare at the wig as we waited around for Levi, but it was one of the hardest things I’d ever done. She looked so weird in it.

“Could you stop staring?” Mikasa frowned, looking over at me, “It’s just until we get to his room.”

“Why are you…” I stopped myself, remembering Levi’s comment, “Nevermind. I’m sorry. It’s just a weird look for you.”

“Well, I don’t like it either,” she muttered, folding her arms and looking away.

“I don’t think it’s that bad,” Armin offered, staring at the wig. By his expression I could tell he didn’t like it either.

“Oh, it’s hideous,” Levi commented as he walked up to us, “But it’ll have to do.”

Mikasa rolled her eyes and stepped outside, waiting for us to join her on the sidewalk. Levi bit back a smirk and decided to keep the comments to himself as he led the way to Trost. We walked the short distance in silence, and no one spoke until we were already most of the way through the elevator ride.

“Are you okay?” Armin asked, his voice filled with concern, “You look like you’re waiting for something scary to pop through the doors.”

“I’m fine,” Mikasa snapped, causing Armin to jump. She stared at him for a moment and then sighed, her eyes growing apologetic. “I’m sorry. I’m just tense. I don’t know why.”
“Well, you don’t need to be tense anymore.” Levi cut in. “We’re here.”

The elevator doors spread open and the first thing I noticed was the little white table set up a few feet in front of us. On it were nine long stemmed roses with a little white piece of paper folded in half.

“What the hell…” Levi walked forward and lifted up the piece of paper. I glanced over his shoulders and stared at the note that was handwritten in an elegant script.

For every year I’ve known you.

I didn’t even have to guess to know who sent that.

Levi dropped the note and walked past the roses, ignoring them completely. I followed after him, nearly bumping into him as he stopped dead in the center of the living room. My eyes widened as I stared around us, seeing nothing but red. Of course, the red might have been due to my rage instead of all of the roses that were currently occupying every available surface. Clutched in the largest bouquet of roses was a little white note, standing out bright amongst all of the red.

Levi snatched it up and opened it, not bothering to hide it from my prying eyes.

For every year I’ll love you. –Erwin

I took a step back, sure that the floor was giving out from underneath me. I felt my stomach twisting painfully as fear began to course through my veins. He was trying to take Levi from me. I had done something horribly wrong. I had upset him in some way and he was going to take Levi from me. He was going to do it and I had no way of stopping him.

It was going to happen.

It was over.

I had lost.
“Eren, look at me.”

I was pretty sure I heard my name, but I couldn’t get my mind focused enough to understand what was being asked of me. All I could see were the roses that filled Levi’s once dull apartment with a vibrant red that I now realized I hated. It was too bright, too invasive, too threatening. It made me miss the pale blues, stark whites, and cold grays that I had grown accustomed to seeing every time I walked into his home. The colors may have been bland but they were his. I felt comfortable here. Or at least I had, until Erwin splashed red all over the happy life we had been creating. He was going to ruin it now. I was going to be a stranger here.

“Eren.”

There it was again. My name. I opened my mouth, certain that I was going to be able to manage some kind of response, but nothing came out. I wasn’t sure if I was even capable of a coherent thought, much less words. My mind was reeling with the fact that I might actually lose him. How was it that tonight had been so perfect and yet so horrible? What had I done to upset Erwin, and how would I be able to fix it? Part of me was certain that this was just a warning, but the rest of me was terrified that the game had already ended. Maybe Erwin had decided that he wanted Levi for himself,
and I wasn’t sure I would be able to stop him if that were the case. Levi wouldn’t want me over him.

“Damn it, Eren!” Levi’s voice came out sharp enough to snap my mind back into the room, and my eyes turned to meet his when he grabbed me by the shoulders. “Look at me and calm down.”

I stared into his piercing blue eyes and took a slow breath. My heart was hammering against my chest like it was trying to escape and my stomach was still twisted into a knot of complete anxiety, but looking into those eyes started to bring a sense of calm that I needed. That was, of course, until I reminded myself that this might be one of the last times that he looked at me with such caring eyes. We would be ending soon. It probably wouldn’t be long until Erwin revealed the secret I’d been keeping from Levi for weeks, and then all of that affection would turn to hate. He wouldn’t want me after that.

I took in a trembling breath and shut my eyes, remaining silent until I was certain that my voice would remain stable when I finally spoke. “I’m fine.”

“Bullshit.”


“Just flowers?” He didn’t sound convinced at all. “You’re not acting like this is just about flowers.”

“I’m not acting any differently,” I responded a little too quickly. Damn, that sounded more defensive than I wanted it to. “Honestly, why would it even bother me?”

“Why would it not bother you?” Levi countered.

I opened my mouth to speak, but I had no response for that. I would just be lying to his face if I insisted that I didn’t care at all when it was very obvious that I did. Levi had already made it clear that he hated lies and I didn’t want to give him more reasons to be upset with me. Not when I was already keeping a massive lie from him to begin with. There was no point in creating a mountain of lies when I had already thoroughly fucked up.

“Should we wait…” Armin turned towards the elevator and suddenly seemed to remember that there was no outside to wait in. “Somewhere else?”

I had forgotten that Armin and Mikasa were standing only a few feet away from us. They had seen the entire apartment decked out in roses and my resulting reaction to it. From the look on Mikasa’s face, I could tell that she was both confused and angry. Unlike Armin, she had no idea where the roses had come from. All she knew was that I was incredibly upset and something in Levi’s apartment had caused it. Which of course meant that she was once again blaming him for hurting me when he hadn’t lifted a finger to do so.

“What is all this?” Mikasa gestured around at the roses as if it weren’t already painfully obvious what she was referring to. Her stare was fixed on Levi, as I knew it would be. “Are you seeing someone behind his back?”

“What?” Levi snapped, his attention immediately turning to her. “Fuck no. No, of course I’m not seeing anyone behind his back. I wouldn’t do that to him. I would leave him first.”

I flinched before I could contain the reaction and he caught sight of it right away. His words had come close to confirming the worries that were currently raging inside of me. There was a chance that he could leave me.
“What the hell was that for?” Levi asked as he grabbed a hold of my chin. He must have known that I was planning to look away to avoid the conversation entirely. “Do you actually think that I’m going to leave you? Is that what this is about?”

“Hard to imagine he would think something like that when your apartment is filled with roses from another man,” Mikasa commented drily, folding her arms. “You’d think he’s actually threatened or something. How strange.”

“Mikasa,” Armin’s voice was a wary warning as he looked over at Levi and me. “We should probably give them some space. It looks like they need to talk.”

“Yes, we do,” Levi spoke, his eyes never leaving mine. “We’re going to my bedroom for a little bit. You two can stay here and get comfortable. Help yourself to anything you want in the fridge, and feel free to burn the roses.”

Levi didn’t bother to wait for their reply, although that was probably a good thing. I was pretty sure Mikasa had an arsenal of smartass comments ready and waiting if he wanted to stick around for them. He pulled me into his bedroom and shut the door, releasing my wrist once we were alone inside his room. He walked a few paces away from me, his brow furrowed in thought as if he were trying to figure out the best way to begin this awkward conversation.

“What the hell was that for?”

I could have sworn my heart stopped as I stared at him. He wasn’t looking at me, and somehow that made his question all the more painful to hear. “Of course I don’t. Why would you think that?”

“I don’t know,” he replied softly, his eyes remaining just out of my reach. “Why would you think that I’d leave you?”

“I never said that you would.”

“You didn’t have to,” he whispered, finally meeting my stare. “I could tell by your eyes that you were thinking that. I can see that you’re even thinking it now.”

“I can’t help it,” I muttered. There was no point in denying it.

“We’ve been together for weeks and I haven’t so much as looked at another man,” Levi spoke, running a hand through his hair. He looked away, but even by his profile I could see that he was thoroughly annoyed with me right now. “I’m not exactly the faithful type, Eren. That’s not to say I’m not capable of it, but I’ve just never had anyone I wanted to try to be faithful for.”

“I understand,” I said, even though I knew it was a lie. Why would he tell me that he wasn’t the faithful type when he was trying to reassure me that he wasn’t leaving?

“No, you don’t,” he snapped quickly, “You don’t understand what I’m saying, and I hate when you do that. I don’t need you to act like you get what I’m saying. I know that you don’t. Right now you’re standing there thinking that I’ll never be a faithful person or that I just haven’t found the right person to be faithful to yet. But you’re wrong, Eren Jaeger, because I have.”

I stared at him in silence, waiting for him to tell me that there was someone else. Waiting for him to say that the roses were enough to replace me. And when I saw anger flash across his features, I knew it was coming.

“You really don’t get it, do you?”
Levi walked over to me and took me by the shoulders, spinning me around to face me towards the full-length mirror. I stared into my own eyes as his arms slid around my waist and his chest pressed against my back. He rested his chin on my shoulder and then he met my eyes through the mirror, holding me hostage with his stare. He tightened his arms around me, pulling me closer as if I were somehow too far away.

“I found the person I want to be faithful to,” Levi said softly as he held my stare. His fingers brushed slowly along the length of mine in a gentle touch that eased me in a way that nothing else could. “He’s the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen, both inside and out. Of course, he can be a little thickheaded at times and he has the shittiest tempers.”

Levi smirked and then paused to press his lips to my shoulder, “But that’s part of his charm. And probably part of the reason he’s able to get to me the way he does. He’s the only person that’s ever been able to make me cry because I’m happy. He has no idea how much he’s given me. No one has ever been able to make me feel the way that he has. No one has ever made me feel alive the way that he does. And I know that I can be faithful to this man because no one, not a damn fucking soul, can compare to him.”

“And you should know exactly who he is,” he whispered into my ear, “Because you’re staring right at him, Eren Jaeger.”

The man that was staring back at me was blushing brighter than all of the roses in the other room. I could feel my heart racing in my chest and I knew that he could too, and yet somehow that didn’t embarrass me. Somehow I knew that it wouldn’t be fair for me to hide my emotions after everything he had just said. It wasn’t easy for him to say any of that. I was still having trouble finding a way to put my own emotions into words. The most I had managed was giving him the scarf, and now I didn’t feel like it could compare to what he had just given me.

“I…” The next word caught in my throat because I knew I was about to make the declaration that I wasn’t sure either of us was ready for. I desperately wanted to say it, but I was terrified it would ruin everything. So I settled for the next best thing. “I only want you, Levi.”

“And I only want you, Eren.” He pressed his lips against my shoulder once more before turning me around to face him. “So stop panicking over the fact that some manipulative asshole sent me a shit ton of flowers. It was a waste of his time and money, and I’ll bet you anything that it wasn’t even meant for me. He sent it as a warning to you.”

“Why would he send me a warning? What did I even do to piss him off??”

“It probably has something to do with that little blonde friend of yours,” Levi said, tilting his head in the direction of the living room. “It’s obvious that he’s taken an interest in him, and it’s even more obvious that you’re not okay with it. All of the roses out there are his little way of warning you to get on board with their relationship before he has to find a way to destroy you.”

If Erwin was planning to use Levi against me then he had found the perfect way to destroy me. But regardless of that, I wasn’t about to let him have Armin when he would do nothing but hurt him. I was willing to let my own heart be broken if it meant keeping Armin safe. I would find a way to fix things with Levi if Erwin managed to tear us apart. I would have to. Losing him wasn’t an option anymore.

“Speaking of your friends,” Levi continued as he walked towards the bedroom door, “I’m going to send them in here. The three of you can have the bed and I’ll take the couch. I’m fucking exhausted as it is, so I’m going to sleep. Spend the night with them and try to convince your stubborn sister to take my offer of buying her an apartment.”
“Easier said than done,” I muttered, eyeing the door to the living room. “Mikasa doesn’t like charity.”

“It’s better than living on the streets.”

“Yea, but I’m not supposed to know about that,” I pointed out. “She told you, not me.”

“So?” Levi raised one eyebrow, looking mildly amused. “Tell her I told you. It’s not like I care. You’re my fucking boyfriend and I can tell you whatever I—what the fuck is that look for?”

I was grinning so wide that I was pretty sure my face was about to split in half. Judging by his confusion he had absolutely no idea what he had just called me, and the fact that he had done it so naturally made me even more thrilled to hear it.

“You just called me your boyfriend.”

“I—” Levi stopped speaking as realization filled his eyes, and for a brief instant I could have sworn I saw some color flood into his cheeks. He turned away as he cleared his throat, running a hand through his hair and rubbing the back of his neck before finally speaking, “Yea, I guess I did.”

He left it at that, but it was more than enough. He didn’t reject the fact that he had said it and he wasn’t trying to take it back now. As childish as it sounded, I was happy to be called his boyfriend.

“All right, enough of the sentimental shit. Anymore of this and I’m going to feel like a fucking Tellitubbie.” Levi rolled his eyes and pulled open the door, walking out into the living room.

“All better?” Armin asked, his expression still filled with concern. He was bent over the kitchen island with a glass of water resting between his hands. Mikasa was leaning up against the fridge, chugging the last of her glass as she watched me with inquisitive eyes. She was looking for some hint that I was still upset.

“I sure as fuck hope so,” Levi answered for me, walking over to the kitchen to join them. “I think I’ve had enough sharing and caring for one day.”

I tried to hide my smile as I walked over and leaned against the kitchen counter beside Armin. I snagged his glass and took a sip as I watched Levi stare at Mikasa in mild annoyance when she didn’t immediately move from her position against the fridge. She was fucking with him, and I was pretty sure it was because of the comment he’d just made. She didn’t realize that he was just covering up his emotions with an indifferent attitude so of course she wouldn’t understand that he didn’t mean any harm.

“Are you going to move or not?” Levi finally asked, his voice caught somewhere between annoyed and exasperated. He wore the expression to match.

“Do you always talk to people like that?” Mikasa remarked as she folded her arms.

“When they’re standing in my way, yes.”

Mikasa shrugged as if she couldn’t care less that she was blocking Levi’s way to the fridge. “Well, that’s what you get for acting like you’re sick of Eren’s emotions.”

“I’m not sick of his emotions,” Levi snapped back, his voice taking on an incredulous note.

Armin leaned into me, bumping his shoulder against mine as he gave me a sideways glance. I looked over at him and saw a small smile pulling at the edge of his lips. I returned the smile and bumped my
shoulder back against his before taking another sip of his drink. It was a silent exchange, but we knew exactly what it meant. We were both happy to have her back.

“Really?” Mikasa retorted, “Because that’s not how it sounded.”

Levi rolled his eyes and grabbed her shoulder, holding her to the side as he opened up the fridge, “Eren, I think it’s time you and your friends get to bed.”

I was already walking over to them when Levi made the comment, knowing that I would have to intercept Mikasa before she tried to take Levi’s arm off for touching her. I grabbed her shoulders and spun her around in the direction of the bedroom, grateful when she didn’t protest or try to rip my hands off. Of course, I was sure that was mostly because she was handling me with baby gloves right now. She had been gone for months and probably assumed that I was just one wrong move away from snapping or breaking down.

“Are you sure it’s okay?” I heard Armin ask Levi as I paused at the bedroom door. “I mean… it’s your house. You don’t have to give up your bed for us.”

“I never said I had to,” Levi shrugged, pouring himself a glass of water, “I said I’m going to.”

“Are you sure you’re going to be comfortable here?” Armin pressed, staying at the kitchen island beside Levi. “Why don’t you join us? I’m sure Eren would prefer to sleep with you anyway.”

Mikasa walked into the bedroom and headed for the balcony. I heard the curtains pull open as I lingered in the doorway, watching them in their awkward conversation. Levi was staring at Armin with a curious expression as he sipped his water. It almost seemed as if he had no idea what to say, and that was probably the case. He had willingly excluded himself from us because he expected to be unwanted. The fact that my friend was asking him to join us would be enough to throw him off.

“I’m fine,” he said at last, setting down his glass. “I’m exhausted and I’m sure you three have plenty to talk about. Eren won’t mind sleeping with just you.”

Armin opened his mouth to say something more, but seemed to think better of it and simply nodded. He picked up his glass and then paused at Levi’s side, setting a hand on his forearm to draw his attention.

“Thank you for finding her,” Armin spoke as Levi’s surprised eyes met his. “And for being with him. I didn’t think I’d see him smile again, and then he met you. And I have to admit that I was jealous at first. I still am, a little bit. But you deserve him, Levi. I’m happy he has you.”

I ducked into the bedroom before Armin could turn around, feeling my cheeks heat up as I stared at the opposite wall. I was certain I’d just heard something I wasn’t meant to hear, and as much as I tried to convince myself to forget it the words just kept repeating in my mind. Maybe I’d completely misunderstood and maybe I was just taking it out of context.

Or maybe my best friend had just admitted to wanting me as more than a friend.

I groaned and ran my hands down my face before looking across the room to see Mikasa leaning against the railing of the balcony. Her short black hair was moving in the breeze that was swirling around her, and I watched as she tugged her scarf tighter around her neck in an attempt to protect herself from the cold. I had given her that scarf the day she’d been adopted into our family and I couldn’t think of a time she’d taken it off since.

“Sorry, I had to refill my cup,” Armin spoke up from my side and I jumped in surprise. He gave me an apologetic smile and held out a glass of water. “I got one for you, too.”
I took the glass and cleared my throat, trying my best to seem nonchalant, “Thanks, dude. I was dying of thirst.”

Dude? Shit.

Suspicion immediately entered his eyes, “Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah,” I rolled my eyes and waved my hand dismissively as if I didn’t have a care in the world. Unfortunately the hand I waved was the one holding the glass and I had just spilled water all over the carpet. “Shit!”

I set the glass down on the table and turned in the direction of the bathroom, but Armin caught me by the wrist and held me in place. “How much did you hear?”

“Armin, the carpet’s soaked.”

“It’s water. It’ll dry.”

“We should clean it up.”

“How much did you hear, Eren?” Armin persisted.

I tentatively met his eyes and gave him a small, teasing smile, “You have a crush on me?”

“Shit,” Armin muttered and then slapped a hand over his mouth. I blinked in surprise; counting it as one of the few times I had actually heard him swear.

“So it’s true?”

“I… you… I mean… I mean, we…” Armin stammered as he blushed to the point that even his ears were tomato red. He groaned and hid his face in his hands, mumbling incoherently.

It was very hard not to smile and I was sure I failed at the attempt not to. I took his hands in mine and held them away from his face, but even then he refused to meet my eyes. “Armin, look at me.”

“I don’t have a crush on you,” he blurted out, finally looking up at me. “I mean, I did. But I don’t anymore.”

“Oh?” I grinned. I really couldn’t help myself. I had been suspicious for years, but it had never affected our relationship. Even after having him confess, it wasn’t going to change a thing about us. “Did I do something wrong?”

“What? No!” Armin looked horrified, obviously taking my joke seriously. “No, you didn’t do anything wrong. I haven’t had a crush on you since I started dating Jean. And maybe for a tiny bit after, but I was lonely and heartbroken and… I just…”

“Armin, it’s fine.”

“No, it’s not!” Armin’s voice was starting to tremble and the sight of tears in his eyes made guilt twist like a knife in my gut. I had taken my teasing too far. “Everything’s going to be weird between us now, and I didn’t want that! I didn’t want you to hear that, Eren! I just knew that he was suspicious and I wanted him to know that I wasn’t going to get in his way. I just… Eren, I’m—“

I pulled him against me and steeled my arms around his waist, holding him there as I pressed my forehead to his. I held his stare until the tears started to dry and then I took a deep breath, determined to phrase this in a way that wouldn’t make him cry again. “I knew, Armin. I knew for a very long
time, and it was never a bad thing. I’m lucky to have someone like you care about me that much. Nothing’s ever going to change between us. Whether you had a crush on me then or you have a crush on me now, nothing’s going to change. You’re always going to be my best friend.”

He stared at me as he took in a shaky breath before nodding. Then he frowned and shrugged, looking down between us, “I just didn’t want you to hear that. You weren’t supposed to.”

“Weren’t supposed to hear what?”

I was actually proud of myself for sounding so oblivious. If he didn’t want me to know, then we never had to talk about it again. As much as I accepted the way he felt about me, I had to admit that it was a little awkward to talk about it when my lover was on the couch in the next room.

Armin stared at me for a moment more and then he smiled softly. “Nothing. Never mind.”

I gave him another tight squeeze and glanced over his shoulder as I did so. As I expected, Mikasa was standing in the doorway to the balcony, staring at us both with wide eyes. She had heard most of our conversation, including the tail end of it. She was shocked; that much was obvious. Still, no matter how much she wanted to talk about it, I knew that Mikasa would respect our vow of silence. She met my eyes and her expression smoothed over as she gave a small nod, as if somehow reading my mind. She had a way of knowing exactly what I was thinking.

“Do you two always hug when I’m not around?”

Armin pulled away from me and quickly turned to face Mikasa. She acted as if she was just walking in from the balcony and her face gave nothing away to suggest otherwise. I watched Armin visibly relax and knew that he’d bought the performance.

“Is it cold outside?” I asked, deciding to make the change in conversation as quickly as possible.

“Freezing,” Mikasa shrugged, touching her scarf, “But I like the cold. It actually gives me a reason to wear this without looking ridiculous.”

“Levi’s…” I cut myself off instantly, realizing I was about to mention his mother when I had no idea if that was okay. I’d discussed her briefly with Armin when we were looking for the scarf, but I didn’t know if it was something I could share with Mikasa.

“Levi what?” Mikasa prompted, raising one eyebrow.

“He, uhm…” I looked around the room for some help and pointed to the bathroom, “Has an amazing shower, if you want to warm up.”

She looked in the direction I pointed and shrugged, “Maybe in a little bit. I just feel like spending time with you two right now.”

She walked over to the bed and threw herself into the softness with a small, appreciative groan. It made me wonder how long it had been since she’d spent the night in a bed. And then suddenly I remembered that I had to convince her to spend every night in a nice bed. Which honestly shouldn’t have been a difficult task at all, but somehow I knew it was going to be with her.

“You should let Levi buy you an apartment.”

The room went dead silent and I could practically feel her muscles stiffening as she tensed in her place on the bed. As the silence dragged on, I became certain that she wasn’t going to answer me at all. She was waiting until I decided to change the conversation to avoid this awkwardness, but it
wasn’t going to happen. I had actually managed to say the words and I wasn’t just going to back down now. Not when I had a chance.

“Mikasa,” I pressed, “I’m serious. We need to talk about this. You can’t just spend every night on the streets. It’s dangerous and cold and…”

“You’re living on the streets?” Armin cut in, his eyes wide and mortified, “Mikasa, why would you…”

“He told you?” Mikasa nearly shouted as she sat up quickly, turning on the bed to stare at me with the most betrayed expression I’d ever seen. “I told him not to say anything and he told you anyway? What the fuck is wrong with him?”

“He’s not just going to keep something like that from me, Mikasa,” I shot back defensively. “And you shouldn’t either! Do you have any idea what could happen to you out there?”

“I can handle myself, Eren,” Mikasa snapped before flopping back down on the bed. “I don’t want to talk about this right now.”

“We have to talk about this!” Armin insisted; his voice strained with worry. “You could die out there.”

“I’m not going to die, Armin,” Mikasa muttered, and although I couldn’t see it I knew she was rolling her eyes. “I know how to defend myself. I’m not going to get hurt.”

“No!” Armin yelled as he walked over to her side. He grabbed her hand and tried to pull her up, his eyes filled with a wild mix of anger and concern. “No, you’re not, because I won’t let you!”

Mikasa tried to smack his hand away and then reluctantly sat up and fixed him with an annoyed expression. “I can take care of myself.”

“No, you can’t,” Armin snapped quickly, cutting her off. He grabbed her shoulders so that she had no choice but to look at him. “I know you think you’re some fucking bad ass, and maybe you are. But that won’t stop a bullet. That won’t stop some crazy asshole from stabbing you from behind. That won’t stop someone from killing you!”

I moved over to Armin’s side when I saw his shoulders trembling, knowing that his composure was starting to break. He released her shoulders as I drew near and she hid her expression from the both of us by hanging her head, her jaw tightening. “Mikasa, he’s right. We all know you’re strong, but that doesn’t mean you can’t get hurt. You’re not invincible.”

Mikasa was silent for a long moment, staring down at the bed. “I don’t need anybody’s charity.”

“Then pay him back,” I countered, “Ask him for the receipts and pay him back every cent. Have him draw up a contract if you want to. It doesn’t have to be charity. It can be a loan.”

“Or stay with me,” Armin offered, “Gramps won’t mind if you stay with us. I know he won’t.”

“I can’t stay with you.”

Armin nodded as if he understood her reason why. Maybe he knew more than I did, but at this point it seemed like everyone had more information.

“That can you at least take the loan?” he prompted.
“I don’t even know Levi,” Mikasa sighed, “I don’t know if I can trust him. I don’t even know where he’d put me.”

“Trust me, he’d put you somewhere very nice,” I assured her. She gave me a look and frowned, so I added, “Somewhere nice that you could actually pay off.”

Mikasa stared down at her hands and took a deep breath before letting it out in a long sigh. “Can I think about it?”

“Of course,” I answered immediately, willing to agree to anything that might get her into an apartment. Even if she was only thinking about it, it was a start.

“Fine, I’ll think about it,” she sighed and then paused to look around the room before her eyes stopped on the clock. “I’m going to get a shower. Can we talk about something else when I get out?”

As much as I wanted to get this all settled tonight, I had a feeling that wasn’t going to happen. And I didn’t want to waste what little time we had together fighting about living arrangements. Not when I actually had her back after all this time. I nodded and angled my head towards the bathroom. “All the towels are clean and the shower’s easy to use.”

“Great,” Mikasa nodded and then stood from the bed. She walked towards the bathroom and paused at the door, looking back at us with a teasing smile. “I’ll let you two get back to hugging.”

She closed the door behind herself just as Armin groaned and flopped over onto the bed. He dragged a pillow on top of his head and stayed there for a moment before mumbling in a muffled voice, “This bed is really comfy.”

I laughed and dropped down beside him, stretching out and enjoying the sensation of sinking into the soft mattress, “Yea, I know. I can’t remember the last time I slept in my bed. It probably feels like a rock now.”

“Probably,” Armin said as he moved the pillow off of his face. He glanced over at me, his eyes searching my expression, “Are you two going to be okay?”

“I think so,” I frowned, “I hope so.”

“Are you gonna miss him?”

My brow furrowed in confusion and I turned onto my side to look at him, “Why would I miss him?”

“Because he’s going away for a week?” Armin’s expression grew concerned as my eyes widened. “Didn’t you know that?”

“No,” I shook my head, suddenly feeling betrayed, “He didn’t tell me. How’d you find out?”

“Because Erwin invited me to go with them.”

I felt the room spin around me as I paled, the jealousy and fear I felt earlier coming back full force. “Erwin and Levi are going away together? For a week?”

“I’m sorry, I really thought that you knew.” Armin continued, and then he took my hand to give it a reassuring squeeze “Eren, I’m sure it’s okay. It’s just a business trip.”

“A business trip with his ex-boyfriend that he didn’t tell me about,” I pointed out.

“Well, yea,” Armin hedged, “But I don’t think he meant to keep it from you. It’s a trip they take
every year. He probably wasn’t thinking about it.”

“Or he doesn’t want me to know.”

“Or maybe he’s going to invite you with and he wants it to be a surprise.”

I wasn’t about to take that chance and watch him jet off to some private island without me.

“Are you going with them?”

“No. I think that’s why Erwin was upset with me,” Armin muttered, looking down at the bed, “I’m sorry I got you in trouble.”

“It’s not your fault,” I said, shaking my head. “It’s not your responsibility to act like you actually like him.”

“But I do like him,” Armin admitted and then flushed and looked away from me when I gave him an incredulous stare. “Don’t look at me like that, Eren. I can’t help it. The more time I spend with him, the more I fall for him. I don’t know how it’s happening, but it is.”

“He’s not good for you, Armin.”

“He’s probably not,” he shrugged, “But let me make that mistake if I want to. I don’t need you to protect me from this.”

Oh, you really do.

I wanted to push the issue, but I could tell by the look on Armin’s face that I was going to get nowhere. At least not right now. “If you like him so much, why did you tell him you didn’t want to go?”

“Because I was worried it would mess up everything you’re trying to do with him,” he sighed, “Apparently I wasn’t supposed to know about that, huh?”

I flinched, “You said I told you everything?”

“Oh, no!” Armin sat up quickly and shook his head, “No, I didn’t. I just said that you were interested in him and I didn’t want to get in the way. I said it would upset you if I went near him.”

And Erwin probably saw through that excuse like a pane of glass. Armin didn’t have to tell him he knew everything because Erwin had already figured it out. No wonder he had made such a move on Levi. He had essentially threatened my relationship for fucking with his. Only I couldn’t tell Armin any of that when I knew he was just trying to help. He told me he’d stay away from Erwin so I had a chance, and he did. It wasn’t his fault that it wasn’t working out like I’d hoped.

“I’ll talk to Levi about the trip,” I sighed, shaking my head slowly. “Maybe it would be a good idea if you went, but you’re not going without me.”

Armin seemed to perk up slightly at that, a smile touching his lips, “Really?”

I had to smile. Armin had given up the opportunity so easily because he wanted to help me. It was a business trip for an elite company, probably to some exotic place he had never been before, and he gave it up for me.

“Yea, really,” I shrugged, resting my hands behind my head. “It could be fun, and maybe it’ll give me sometime alone with him. He might not mind being around me so long as he can watch you in a
I tried not to sound too bitter when I said that, and I think I almost managed it. Armin flushed slightly and shrugged, trying to act like he didn’t care even when I knew he did. I wasn’t thrilled about the idea of Armin going on the trip, but I would be even less thrilled with the idea of Erwin and Levi going alone.

Now I just had to convince Levi to bring me with.
I watched Armin’s chest rise and fall with the heaviness of sleep as I fought back my own exhaustion. It had been an hour since Mikasa had finished her shower and joined us on the bed, and nearly twenty minutes since they had both given in to their own fatigue and sunk into the welcoming comfort of the bed. Armin had managed to outlast Mikasa by a few minutes, determined to keep me company when I told him I wasn’t tired at all. It had been a lie, of course. I was ready and willing to hit the bed like a sack of potatoes, but I had other things to do first. A conversation I needed to have before my mind would let me rest.

Because as tired as I was, I couldn’t stop thinking about the fact that Levi had hid the trip from me. And even though I was keeping a secret from him as well, I couldn’t help but feel betrayed by him. He had known that he was going on this trip and not once had he so much as mentioned that he would be gone for a week in some exotic place with his ex-lover. Or at least I assumed Erwin was his ex at this point. Levi and I had never discussed whether or not we were exclusive, so I could only hope that things were over between Erwin and him.

I took in a slow breath and tried to keep my eyes open, arguing against my body’s constant protest for sleep. I wanted to give my other bed partners a few more minutes to slip into a deeper slumber before I crawled out of the bed. Levi was probably fast asleep in the other room, but waking him wouldn’t be much of a challenge. On more than one occasion I had turned over in my sleep and dry humped Levi’s ass until the both of us were wide awake and going at it. After spending a few nights in his bed I started to realize that it didn’t take much to wake him up when the promise of sex was involved.

Which it would be now, if he were willing. He had done nothing but tease me since that day in the shower, and I had been in a near-constant state of arousal for days. At this point it was probably a
medical issue, but he wasn’t giving in. I had tried begging in every position I could think of, but none of it had been enough. I was starting to think that he was never going to have sex with me again. It was amazing he had lasted this long, considering he loved to be as physical as I was and hadn’t been in weeks.

At least not with me, I reminded myself.

I tried not to linger on that thought, but it wormed its way into the depths of my mind and stayed there until I was forced to move out of the bed. As hard as it was, I took my time and tried my best to keep the mattress from jostling around too much when I slipped out of it. I turned to watch Armin and Mikasa for any signs that they were waking up, but there were none. As I stared, I couldn’t stop myself from smiling at the sight of them tucked in together. Armin’s hand was resting near her, clutching her blanket as if to reassure him that she was still there and hadn’t crept out in the middle of the night. He had missed her more than I realized, and I felt guilty for never noticing that he was hurting, too.

I crept quietly to the door and pressed against the wood as I slowly turned the knob. It popped open immediately and I moved silently into the hall, closing the door behind me. As I walked down the hallway, I noticed a subtle glow that grew as I entered the living room. It was filled with a warm yellow light that made the normally cold white décor shine a brilliant gold. Levi had started up the fireplace sometime after we had gone to his room, and he was sitting in front of it now with a glass of wine in his hand and a book in his lap.

“You’re still awake?”

He didn’t jump in the slightest, so I was sure he must have heard me coming down the hallway. He set his glass on the short table beside him and turned his eyes to me, the brilliant blue turned a shade of gold with the help of the fire.

“I didn’t think it would be so difficult to sleep without you,” he spoke through a soft laugh. He closed the book and set it down beside the glass of wine. “I slept alone for years before you but tonight I just couldn’t. Something was missing.”

I was missing.

I tried to ignore the way his words made my heart flutter and reminded myself that I was supposed to be angry with him. At least to some extent. As far as I knew, he had purposely kept the trip a secret and intended to keep it that way.

“You weren’t able to sleep either?” he asked. I shook my head in response and he patted the rug besides him. “Good, then get your ass over here. We can be exhausted together.”

As angry as I was supposed to be, I couldn’t deny the fact that I wanted nothing more than to be pressed against his side. I walked over to him and sat down, noticing the fragrance that was coming out of the fire once I was close enough to it. With one quick look around the room, I realized that there was not a single rose in sight. Even the vases that had held the bouquets together were nowhere to be seen.

“Where did you put all of it?”

“The roses?” Levi murmured as he snaked an arm around my waist and pulled me close. “Most of them went to The Wall. I piled them into the elevator for Hanji and Petra to pick up. They’re handing them out as late Christmas gifts.”
“And the rest of them?” I asked as I glanced over at the fire. It was obvious that he had burned at least one.

“I burned them,” he replied, following my gaze. “Nine of them. One for each year that I’ve known him. One for each year that he’s scarred me.”

“He gave you scars?” I couldn’t help but ask the question, even if I was sure he didn’t mean it that way. The thought of Levi with any scars from anyone sent me into a protective rage.

“Only in the hypothetical sense,” he shrugged. He took my hand in his and stared down as he laced our fingers together. “I wasn’t lying to you.”

“Lying…” I repeated the word as my brow furrowed in confusion. I hadn’t accused him of lying about anything, even though I’d planned to. “How did you…”

“I called Erwin afterwards to bitch him out,” he said as he drew me closer. “And I was right in thinking that he sent those flowers to get to you. He hinted at the reason why, and apparently he invited your little friend to go on a certain trip with him.”

I immediately tensed up and cursed myself inwardly for doing so. Levi angled his head to the side and fixed me with a knowing stare, searching my eyes before continuing. “I figured he must have told you. You know, you’re not really good at hiding your anger, kid. You might want to work on that.”

“Were you ever going to tell me?” I asked, trying to keep my tone as neutral as possible. As it was, I had to keep my eyes away from his. I knew they would betray my anger otherwise. “Or were you just going to disappear for a week and not explain why?”

“I wasn’t going to disappear on you,” he shot back quickly, and I could tell by his tone that I had stung him with my words. “I was trying to get out of going at all, but it doesn’t seem like that’s going to work. My second choice was to bring you with me, if you even wanted to go.”

“So,” I hedged, wondering if I should drop the topic entirely but deciding that I couldn’t. “You were never going to go alone with him?”

“It’ll extend a little into your school year,” he shrugged, “Not by much, but you will have to make up a few extra days of work. You’d be excused from your job at the Survey Corp, of course. I could see to that much. We could just say the trip was part of your training or an award for excellent services.”

He smirked as he said the last comment, and I knew exactly what kind of services he was talking about. They were precisely the ones that I wanted to provide right now.

“So,” I hedged, wondering if I should drop the topic entirely but deciding that I couldn’t. “You were never going to go alone with him?”

“Not without telling you,” he answered, “But if you didn’t want to go with, I would still have to go.”

“Levi, you could tell me we were going to stay in a broken down barn in the middle of nowhere and I would still want to go with you.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s only because you’re jealous of him.”

I tensed for a moment, not at all expecting him to just come out and say what we both knew to be true. I opened my mouth to protest, but there was no point in trying. He would see right through the lie.
“Can you blame me?” I muttered. “I don’t have any ex-lovers for you to be jealous of. Or current lovers, if that’s what he is.”

I shouldn’t have said that last part. I knew as it came out of my mouth that it was one of the worst things I could have possibly said to him, and yet it came out regardless. It was a stupid fear that I didn’t even need to voice. He had given me no reason to suspect him of running around with another man behind my back, but I had just gone and openly accused him anyway. I wasn’t even surprised when he pulled away from me and fixed me with an angry stare.

“Are fucking kidding me right now, you brat?” he spat the words, his voice a hiss as he tried to control the volume of it to avoid waking the rest of the apartment. “After everything I said to you earlier, you’re still thinking things like that?”

“You said that you were with him,” I pointed out, using it as a vain attempt to defend myself.

“Before I was with you,” he shot back, “What the fuck makes you think we’re still together now?”

“You said that you were with him,” I pointed out, using it as a vain attempt to defend myself.

“Because you never said you weren’t!”

“Well, we’re not. Okay? Does that make things better?” His voice was as cold as his eyes. “We haven’t been together since I started seeing you. My last time with him was my first time with you. I broke it off after that.”

“I’m sorry,” I blurted out quickly, feeling my throat begin to tense. We hadn’t argued like this in weeks, and knowing that I had been the cause of it made it that much worse. “I didn’t mean to accuse you of anything. I’m just jealous of him. He’s rich… and attractive… and powerful…”

“And not you.” Levi cut in. “Which is honestly the only thing that matters to me. I don’t need someone who’s rich or powerful, and you have him beat as far as looks go. So stop getting your panties in a twist over him. It’s not worth it. You have me, and he doesn’t.”

I stared at him for a long moment, feeling my heart pump in my chest as if reminding me of who it belonged to. He always had a way of calming me with his words, and even though there was still some ice left in his eyes I knew that he was starting to relax as well. And in the aftermath of our short-lived argument, I could feel an electricity stirring between us as desire started to rise in my core. He had just reinforced the fact that he was mine, but that wasn’t enough right now. I needed to mark him physically and wash away the last of what those roses had done to my confidence. I needed to prove that he was mine. I needed his scent on my skin.

“Show me that I have you.”

“Show you?” Levi asked, amusement filling his eyes. “And how do you want me to do that?”

“By fucking me,” I whispered, my voice too strained with lust to do much else. Now that I had the thought of his body working into mine, it was all I could think about. It was all I wanted.

“Didn’t I say you had to beg for that?”

“I have begged,” I growled, my hands sliding down to grip his thighs as I leaned into him. “I’m done begging.”

I watched with satisfaction as his blue eyes widened in surprise. He wasn’t expecting me to be forward, but maybe that was what he wanted all along. The begging hadn’t worked at all, so clearly there was something else he was waiting for me to do. Maybe he wanted me to get fed up with being denied. Maybe he wanted me to be dominant just so he could flip me over and show me who was
really in control.

The thought made me want it that much more, and I could feel my member throbbing with hard protest against my pants as I leaned closer. I narrowed my eyes and gripped his thighs tighter, trying to look as sexually intimidating as possible and actually managing to do so. Levi’s lips parted and his eyes glazed over with a look of pure desire, one that I hadn’t seen in days and had been dying to see again. He wanted me as badly as I wanted him, and I knew I could use that to my advantage now.

“Fuck me, Corporal.”

Levi groaned as if he were experiencing an internal struggle, but whatever struggle it was didn’t last very long. He jerked me into his lap and grabbed my ass tight with both hands, forcing me down onto the pulsing arousal that was waiting for me between his legs. As he moved his hips up to meet mine, I felt my own stiff member grind against his hard abdomen and a cry tore from my throat before I could stop it. I clamped a hand over my mouth and the both of us turned our attention to the hall, waiting in silence to see if we had woken them. After a minute had passed, I breathed a sigh of relief and lowered my hand from my mouth.

“Sorry,” I whispered into the silence, and he answered with a breathy chuckle.

“I shouldn’t be surprised. You’ve never been quiet.”

“I can try,” I urged him, not willing to let our night end here. I had been waiting too long to have him and he was finally agreeing to take me. He could gag me if he needed to, so long as he didn’t send me back to my room rock hard and unsatisfied.

“You’re not going to be able to stay quiet.” Levi murmured, leaning closer to whisper into my ear, “Not with all the things I’m going to do to you.”

The air left my lungs in a rush and I groaned, “Don’t tease me if you’re not gonna do it right now.”

“Who said I’m not going to?” he purred, his lips still pressed close to my ear. His hands gripped my ass a little tighter, but he didn’t grind us together like I was waiting for him to. “You said your apartment’s empty, right?”

He was a genius. It was almost scary how quickly he was able to think through a situation. “My mom’s out of town for two more days.”

“Well, then I think we’ve found the perfect place to have you scream your pretty little head off,” he replied, pressing his lips against my collarbone before giving my ass a quick smack. “Go to your room and get yourself ready for me. I’ll be down once I get what we need.”

I felt my cheeks flush red-hot as I moved out of his lap, trying to quell the erection that was straining against the front of my pants. I had no hope of explaining myself if anyone else joined me in the elevator on the way down to my room, but right now I didn’t care about that. All I wanted to do was to get him in my room so that he could finally get in me. I had waited long enough.

I didn’t stop to ask what he meant when he told me to get myself ready. I was worried that any sort of delay would keep us from doing what I desperately wanted to do. I got into the elevator without another word and hit the button for my floor, leaning into the corner that he usually occupied. It was strange to take the ride down without him at my side, and it gave me too much time to think. My mind started turning over the possibilities of what he was bringing with him and what he would do to me.

Would I be ready for it? Would I be comfortable with any of it? Would I disappoint him if I wasn’t?
I forced back the questions and tried to calm myself by breathing in slowly. He wouldn’t force me into anything I wasn’t comfortable with, and if he was disappointed I knew he would never show it.

I walked into the apartment and left the door unlocked, turning on the lights on my way to the bedroom. I peeled off my shirt and dropped it in the laundry bin; which was something I rarely did, but I wasn’t about to spoil Levi’s mood by making a mess. The rest of my clothing followed my shirt into the bin and I was left standing in the middle of my room, stark naked and without a clue of what to do next.

“Get myself ready…” I muttered as I looked around the room.

My eyes fell on the little nightstand beside my bed, where I kept a container of lube that I rarely used. I snagged it from the drawer and crawled onto my bed, taking a moment to coat two of my fingers before tossing the bottle back onto the dresser. I stared at my fingers, rubbing my thumb against the slick lubricant as I tried to decide how I was going to position myself. It wouldn’t be long before he got here, and I wanted to give him something to walk in on.

Falling back against my stack of pillows, I spread my legs and bent them at the knee, lifting my ass slightly as my fingers probed around my entrance. It had been a while since I’d used my own hand on myself, and as I slipped one finger into the tight heat I realized it felt foreign compared to Levi’s. I bit into my lower lip as I worked my finger in and out, waiting for my body to adjust before pushing another one in. As I moved my fingers together, the pulsing erection between my legs gave a hard throb of demand and pulled a husky moan from my lips.

“Not quite what I was asking for,” Levi spoke from the doorway, his voice thick with lust as he eyed my hand, “But I think this might be better.”

I met his eyes with my heated stare and continued to move my fingers, “What did you want me to do?”

“I was only expecting you to strip,” he murmured, walking towards the bed as he removed his shirt. He tossed it aside and then paused, taking a moment to appreciate the sight of my body as he slowly undid his pants. “That was supposed to be my job.”

“This will get you in me faster,” I moaned.

He chuckled softly, “You’re such an impatient brat.”

My breath caught in my throat as his pants dropped to reveal a thick erection, stiff and swollen with need and glistening at the tip. I wanted to put my mouth on it, but I wanted it in me even more. My fingers stilled in my ass and my hips squirmed, my own member pulsing harder as the anticipation started to build. Over these past few days he had built me to my peak and now I was going insane with the need to come. As much as I wanted him to play with me, I wasn’t sure I could wait much longer.

“Corporal, please…”

“Calling me by that name is not going to get my dick in you any faster,” he warned, his eyes darkening, “If anything, I’ll make you wait longer.”

The promise in his words silenced me immediately and I found my gaze drifting down to his hands, looking for any tools that he might have brought along with him. I’d called him Corporal back in the apartment and it’d been a long time since I’d used that name on him. It had probably set him in the mood to toy with me, which would explain why he had to take his time getting supplies together.
“What are you going to use on me?”

My voice wavered and I wasn’t proud of it. I didn’t want him to know that I was nervous, and I really didn’t want him to think that I was scared. But as usual, he noticed right away, except this time his expression didn’t soften at all. Instead a smirk spread across his perfect lips and he raised one eyebrow, regarding me with an amused expression.

“Whatever I feel like using,” he replied as he walked towards the bed. His movements were slow and exact, and reminded me of a predator creeping up on its prey. My stomach twisted with a newfound fear and I suddenly realized that maybe he would actually go past my boundaries without permission.

I removed my fingers from myself and kept my legs spread as I stared up into his cold blue eyes. I wasn’t able to read them and something about that unnerved me. I didn’t know what he was thinking and I had no idea what he was planning to do next. Even though he knew it was my first time, it didn’t mean he was going to be gentle. This might actually hurt more than I anticipated, and that scared me.

“Levi…”

His expression changed immediately, as if someone had turned the lights on in a dark room. His eyes softened, although the amusement remained in them. He reached out and cupped my chin in his hand, lifting it until he was certain my eyes were on his.

“Oh, so am I the one you want then?”

My brow furrowed in confusion, “What?”

“You need to stop using that name every time you’re trying to turn me on,” he explained, pushing down onto the bed as he straddled my hips. He set his hands on my shoulders and leaned over me until his lips hovered above mine, “There’s a difference between the Corporal and me. And I’ll be happy to take you that way when you’re ready, but don’t use the name to fuck with me.”

“I wasn’t trying to…”

“I know,” he cut me off, a smirk crossing his lips, “That’s why I’m explaining it. You can call me that when we’ve finally reached that point, but you’re not ready yet. You don’t trust me enough yet.”

“I do trust you!” I protested.

“But you’re scared what I might do.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but nothing came out. There was no point in lying to him. I was intimidated by the lifestyle and I couldn’t deny that fact. But that didn’t mean I didn’t want to learn.

“Nothing’s ever going to change if you don’t teach me.”

“We’ll get to that,” he murmured, running his thumb slowly along my lower lip. “Like I said, you’re
an impatient brat. One thing at a time.”

I boldly bit into his thumb and watched as his eyes widen and filled with a wanton desire. Suddenly our conversation and my moment of fear didn’t matter any more. All of our words were forgotten as he pulled his thumb free of my teeth and fisted his hand into my hair, crushing his lips to mine in a kiss that made me certain he had been craving me for days.

Unfortunately it didn’t last very long. He broke away from my lips and reached over to the nightstand, where I noticed a new bottle of lube and a packet of condoms sitting in the center of a black leather whip. I felt my breath catch in my throat, but I gave no other reaction to the unlikely addition to my dresser. There was no guarantee he was even going to use it after our little talk.

I quickly forgot the whip as I watched him spread the lube onto his fingers, my body pulsing in anticipation for what I knew would be coming next. My back arched and my head pressed into the pillows when I felt his finger enter me. He joined it quickly with another finger when my body accepted him so readily, still slick from my previous exploration.

I had managed to make myself ready for him, but my fingers could never compare to his. He turned his hand in a slow twist and jerked his fingers in a quick and skillful motion; pressing them into the bundle of nerves he had become so adept at finding. I practically lifted off the bed as a sharp cry tore free of my lips, my hands fisting in the sheets when I steeled my arms against the mattress to keep myself elevated for him. Somewhere in the haze of my pleasure I could hear him chuckling softly.

“You’re so fucking sensitive. I love it.”

He moved his two fingers apart; slowly stretching me little by little until he finally felt I was ready for a third. He’d only ever used two fingers before and now that I had three inside of me I realized how tight I really was. I squirmed my hips and a soft sound caught in my throat. It was a little uncomfortable to feel so much pressing inside of me and I knew there would be more soon, but I found myself yearning for it. I wanted to be filled by him.

“Levi,” I gasped his name as his fingers moved once again over my prostrate. We had barely begun and already the edges of my vision were starting to blur. If he didn’t hurry soon, I didn’t know if I would last. “Please…”

His fingers slipped out and left me feeling empty, but he silenced me with a kiss before I could form any kind of protest. When he drew back from my lips, he searched my eyes and then smirked, “Fine, if you’re so ready. Get on your hands and knees and show me that perfect ass of yours.”

He was trying to make me flustered and it worked like a charm. It was almost annoying, really. It wasn’t fair that he could control my reactions so easily with just a few words. Of course I knew I could do the same to him and I’d done so before, but the only word that popped into my mind now was one I knew I couldn’t use. Not if I didn’t want him using that whip on me, which I was almost sure I didn’t. Almost. It wasn’t like I wanted to be whipped for my first experience, but at the same time I didn’t want him to take it easy either.

As I moved into position, I heard the foil packet tear open and desire flooded every inch of my body. My hands gripped the sheets tight, as if anticipating that he would be rough with me. And as that thought entered my mind and my member throbbed in response, I realized I wanted him to be rough. I needed him in me, but I wanted to feel more than that. I wanted his teeth in me, his nails dragging down my back. I wanted to feel his passion as he took me for the first time.

“Don’t be gentle,” I rasped as I felt the head of his cock press against my slick entrance.
He stilled for a moment and then spoke in a husky voice, “I wasn’t planning on it.”

As if to emphasize his point, he dragged his nails down the length of my back and dug in just enough to let me feel it. A hiss escaped through my clenched teeth when his nails slid over my sides and stilled on my hips, digging in to claim their place. The small bit of pain he caused mingled with a pleasure I had never felt before and it lit me up inside. I would have never imagined pain could feel good, but I found myself wanting more.

That was, of course, until I felt the thick head of his member pressing into my body and spreading me apart. I groaned against the small sting of pain I felt as I was being stretched and gripped the sheets even tighter. Although I was very familiar with his body at this point, he was much thicker than I had expected him to be. I was suddenly grateful that he’d taken the time to prepare me with three fingers instead of two. It made it easier for my body to adjust now, and I found myself squirming when he didn’t immediately thrust inside.

“Just put it all in,” I gasped, desperate to feel more, “I can handle it.”

“It’ll hurt if I rush.”

“I want it to hurt.”

He kept his hips still and I could practically hear the smirk in his voice as he spoke, “You’re such an impatient shit. I’m not going to hurt you, Eren. Trust me when I say I know what I’m doing.”

“I know you know what you’re doing,” I argued, “I just want you to do it right n-AH!”

Levi’s hand cracked across my right ass cheek and my vision blurred as pleasure shot directly into the head of my cock. I felt my arms go weak as a whimper stirred in my chest, and my hips instinctively wiggled in an attempt to push me back against him.

“Oh, so you like that?” Levi chuckled as he spanked me again, drawing the same reaction and inadvertently forcing me further down his length as I writhed. He was quiet for a moment and then his hand struck once more, his voice growing husky. “I asked you a question, Eren.”

“Y-Yes!” I cried out, my voice raspy. The pleasure coursing through me was overwhelming and my cheeks were heated and flushed. I had no idea why it felt so good, but I knew I wanted him to keep doing it.

“Tell me how I feel, Eren.”

His lips were against my neck and through the haze that was clouding my mind I realized that he was fully inside of me now. Somewhere in the spanking I must have pushed back against him and he had thrust forward to meet me, filling me entirely. I had no idea why I’d tried to avoid this for so long. I’d never realized I was lacking anything but now my body felt complete, full of him and aching for more.

“Good,” I gasped, just barely able to answer him. My mind wasn’t in the mood to think. All I wanted to do was feel. “Oh gods, it feels so good…”

“And you feel so fucking tight,” he growled in response, pulling his hips back before pushing in once more, forcing me forward on the sheets.

A moan spilled from my lips and I hung my head as I held onto the sheets, letting him move my body with each thrust. He was gradually creating a rhythm that mine was able to follow, the both of us instinctively moving together as one. Every time he pulled out my hips moved to push him back
in, determined to keep him buried inside of me. The tension was quickly building in my body and the pleasure I felt from the friction was causing the room to spin.

“L-Levi!” I cried out his name and the instant my mouth was open it was filled with the sharp taste of leather.

My eyes widened with surprise as I tongued the smooth material that was now clenched between my teeth. He pulled the whip around my head and used it as a pair of reins, causing my body to arch as I angled my head back. The new curve of my hips forced his throbbing member to thrust into me at a different angle, filling me with another wave of sensations that made it that much harder to hold back from my release.

He must have sensed the tension in my body and known I was close, because his hips started to move roughly against mine, pounding me forward. His voice was husky as he spoke in a commanding growl, “Grab yourself and start jerking, brat. I want to hear you scream.”

My right hand shot out and grabbed a hold of the headboard to keep myself steady while my other hand slipped between my legs to obey his command. I had never felt myself so hard before, and it was like fisting a rock as I jerked my hand up and down my swollen length. It was impossible now to ignore the sensations erupting in me, and I cried out against the leather cord in my mouth when my resolve started to break.

I wasn’t even sure which screams were mine anymore, although I was positive that I wasn’t the only one crying out. Everything in the room started to spin as my vision went hazy, my hand slipping down the headboard as it smacked against the wall. I could feel something hot and sticky sliding down my other hand, but I couldn’t even hope to place it right now. The only thing I was aware of was that he was throbbing inside of me and yelling my name, and somehow that was all that mattered.

With one final thrust on his part, my hand slipped off the headboard and suddenly I had no energy to keep myself up anymore. I probably would have collapsed into the mattress face first if it weren’t for the arms that circled around my waist and helped me down. I made a soft noise in the back of my throat, and I was pretty sure I meant it as a ‘thank you,’ but my mind was too clouded to know for sure.

My exhaustion had finally caught up with me and it took everything I had to turn over in those strong arms. My nose pressed to the soft skin of his chest and I inhaled the delicious scent of his body, a smile crossing my lips. He was mine.

As fatigue finally took a hold of me, my lips brushed against his chest just over his heart. Without thinking, they moved to form words.

But in my sleepy haze, I couldn’t be sure of what I said.
YAY! Thursday update time! ^_^  

I hope every enjoyed the early (smutty) update last week. I know many people have been waiting for that to happen, so hopefully it was worth the wait!  

And thank you so much for all of your comments! I really had fun reading them this week. ^__^ I can tell most of you are wondering / deciding what Eren must have said and... well, it will be discussed in this chapter.  

I'd like to give a special thank you to arseniks, phoenyx-ailles-taille-la-lune, the-mahou-shoujo, and epicmonkeyturd for the The Intern fan art this week! ^__^ epicmonkeyturd also posted a picture of a henna tattoo modeled after Intern!Levi's, so definitely check that out!  

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. I tend to check lootibles more often now, and I've been posting special little Intern tidbits there. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' so please feel free to write whatever you want there as well! ^__^  

OH! And a special thing tonight... someone asked me to do a tinychat after the update. So I will! ^__^ Please check lootibles for the link. I'll be posting The Intern tinychat tonight at around 8pm and I'm happy to answer any questions (so long as they don’t spoil the plot), so feel free to join us!  

ENJOY! ^__^  

“Lately I’ve been… I’ve been losing sleep… Dreamin’ about the things that we could be…”  

The smooth, deep voice filled my ears as Levi’s chest rumbled gently beneath my palm. My fingers brushed against his skin and my eyes slowly opened, the familiar lyrics rousing me from what had been the most comfortable sleep I’d had in my own bed. In my sleepy haze I wasn’t quite sure where the voice had come from, and it took me a moment before it finally registered. I turned surprised eyes up to Levi and he stared back at me with an amused smirk spread across his lips.  

“What?”  

“I didn’t know you could sing,” I blurted out before realizing how rude that probably sounded. I shook my head quickly, correcting myself, “I mean, I didn’t know that you do.”  

“Only when I’m alone,” he shrugged, tightening his arms around my waist to pull me closer. “Or when I don’t think anyone’s listening, like now.”
“I can pretend not to be listening,” I offered, resting my head back against his chest. I felt it move as he chuckled softly.

“Not happening, kid.” He angled his head to the side and moved his fingers slowly through my hair, playing with the strands. “Besides, I don’t like singing in English. I’ve just had that song stuck in my head for the past few days.”

My brow furrowed and I tilted my head to gaze up at him, “What do you sing in?”

“French, mostly.”

I felt my cheeks heat as the thought of Levi singing or speaking anything in French flooded my mind. A moment ago I wanted to hear him sing simply for the enjoyment of the sound, but now I had to hear it. The mere thought of his tongue moving over those foreign words did strange things to my body.

“Can I hear it?”

“Hear what?” he frowned, gazing down at me, “I already told you I’m not going to sing. What difference does the language make?”

“Well, you’re more comfortable singing it,” I argued as I propped myself up and rested my folded arms on his chest. “And I’ve never heard you say much of anything in French before. You could make up for that.”

“I wasn’t aware I had an obligation to speak in French,” Levi commented, raising one eyebrow.

“I’d say it’s more of an unspoken obligation,” I smirked, not bothering to keep the joking edge out of my voice.

“Is that so?” he teased back, “Well then…”

He suddenly grabbed a hold of my waist and flipped me over, pressing me down into the soft comfort of the bed as his lips brushed against my ear. His hand slid slowly along the length of my thigh as he purred in a husky voice, “Oui, oui. Baguette. Omelette du fromage.”

Breakfast never sounded so sexy.

He smacked my ass and laughed before moving off of the bed, “Speaking of which, I’m fucking hungry. I’m gonna go take a dump and get dressed. Your friends are probably waiting for us.”

From French to shit talk in under two seconds. That was definitely one of the reasons that I lov-

My face paled as images from the night before came rushing back to me. Our bodies moving together as the sweat dripped off our skin, the both of us moaning and writhing until we were left panting in exhaustion. I had curled up in his arms and enjoyed the scent of his skin as my mind drifted off into the haze of sleep. I had been so consumed by fatigue and emotions that I’d had no control over my mouth. I had said something to him before falling asleep. Three short words. I was sure of it.

“Levi, did I say something last night?” I desperately tried to keep my voice from trembling. “You know, after we…”

“Do you think you said something?” Levi asked, watching me with a guarded expression as he folded his clothing over one arm.
“I…” I hesitated, not certain whether or not this was some kind of test. “I really don’t know. That’s why I’m asking.”

Levi looked away from me and then turned, giving a dismissive shrug as he stepped into the hall. “You might have said something.”

I felt the air catch in my throat as the room started to spin, gripping the sheets as if they could somehow provide support. The panic didn’t fully set in until after Levi was out of my range of sight, and then I found myself struggling to breathe. I had confessed my feelings to him before either of us was ready, and he had heard me loud and clear. I didn’t even have the chance to see his reaction, then or now. He had turned away from me before admitting I had said anything at all, and now I didn’t know how he felt about it.

What if it was too much? What if he backed off completely now?

I pressed my hand against my chest and shut my eyes tightly, dragging in a slow breath as I tried to calm myself. I wanted to pretend like I hadn’t said those words and I wanted him to play along. I wanted to move past what would now be a large elephant in the room, but I couldn’t think of a way that would be possible. I had said the words and I couldn’t take them back now.

Right?

Despite the fact that I didn’t want to bring it up again, there was a possibility that I could play the whole thing off as some accident. I could blame it on my exhaustion or claim to have meant something else entirely. I could even say that I didn’t mean it at all, although that would be a blatant lie that he would probably see through in an instant. But still, there was a chance that I could fix this.

“You’re still not dressed?”

Levi walked into my room, wearing the same outfit he had on last night. Knowing him he was probably itching to get upstairs and into something fresh and clean, and the fact that I wasn’t dressed yet was delaying that. I scrambled off of my bed and moved over to my dresser; yanking out the first clean shirt I got my hands on.

“Uhm, about what I said,” I hedged, hesitating as I pulled on my shirt. “I was really tired and I wasn’t thinking, and…”

“Don’t worry about it,” he interrupted me, “It doesn’t matter.”

I tried to ignore the way that stung, but I couldn’t. It was like he was dismissing my feelings as if they didn’t matter. Somehow I felt like that confirmed the way he felt, and it definitely wasn’t the way I felt. It hurt more than I wanted to admit. And that was probably why my words came out harsher than I meant for them to.

“You’re right. It doesn’t matter. I didn’t mean it, anyway.”

The look of pain that filled his eyes was unmistakable, but it was gone an instant later and replaced with ice. He stared at me, his eyes cold and guarded, and I knew that he was beginning to build a wall between us again. I had hurt him by taking away those words, and suddenly I realized he might not have seen them as a bad thing at all. Even if he wasn’t ready to return it yet, that didn’t mean that he didn’t want to hear me say it.

“Levi, I…”

“Don’t,” he stopped me, “Just drop it. Before we both say more shit that we’re going to regret later.”
“But I regret this now!” I snapped, not willing to just push it aside when I knew I’d hurt him. “I didn’t mean to say that!”

“Yea, you already mentioned that part. I get it. No need to nail it in.”

“No, not that,” I groaned, pressing a hand to my forehead. I had not gotten enough sleep for this. “I meant that.”

“Did you?” Levi asked, folding his arms and leaning against the doorframe. “How can you say that when you don’t even know what you said?”

“Because you told me what I said,” I replied, my brow furrowing in confusion.

“No, I didn’t. I said that you might have said something,” he pointed out before shrugging, “I was too fucking tired to hear you either way. But based on the little shit fit you’re throwing now, I can guess what you think you said.”

I stared at him with a blank expression, embarrassment warming up my cheeks. He had been playing with me from the start of this conversation and I had followed along so easily. Now we both knew the way I felt. I watched as his eyes gradually softened with amusement and although I was happy to see that the pain was gone, I was now thoroughly pissed off.

But I wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of knowing that.

“Can we forget this happened?” I spoke through gritted teeth and he smirked.

“Forget what happened?”

I let out a sigh of relief and then bent over to grab a pair of dark blue jeans out of the bottom drawer. As I tugged them on, I noticed him eyeing me with a frown on his lips. I had somehow managed to do something else wrong.

“What?”

“You’re coming to dinner tonight, right?”

“With your friends?” I shrugged, buttoning my pants in place before reaching for a belt. “Yea, if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind at all,” he replied, eyeing my shirt, “But you might want to think about changing your top. Those two come from the fashion capitol of the world and I’m sure they’ll have something to say about it.”

I pursed my lips and stared down, scrutinizing my top. It was a well-worn, dark orange Thin Lizzy tour shirt that I had found in the bargain bins with Mikasa in one of our favorite thrift shops. I honestly couldn’t find anything wrong with it. “Is it that bad?”

“I personally like it on you,” Levi smirked, tilting his head, “But I like anything that’s a little tight on you, so I don’t think my opinion counts.”

I hid a small smile and glanced behind me at my dresser, debating on if I really wanted to change at all. I put it on in the first place because I wanted to wear this for Mikasa. It had been such a great day when I found it, and part of me was hoping that she would remember it, too.

“You know what, fuck them,” Levi interrupted my thoughts, “I like it, you like it, and that’s what
matters. Now come on, it’s almost one and I’m willing to bet that neither of them set an alarm.”

“One?” I gasped, turning to the alarm clock as if it would tell me something different. “We slept that late?”

“Well, we were up fucking late, too,” Levi remarked, a wry smirk on his lips. He was playing with the words. “Besides, it’s not like you have anything to do until after the break.”

That was true, at least.

I followed him out of the apartment and paused to lock the door, checking the handle before stepping into the elevator. Levi leaned into his usual corner and eyed me carefully before speaking.

“So, seeing as you have nothing to do for the next week or so… were you planning on going with me?”

“I thought I already agreed to that.”

“Not officially.”

“Well, then consider it official,” I grinned, “It’s not like I’m going to turn down a trip to… where are we going?”

“France.” He smiled when my eyes widened. “Although I probably should have asked if you even have a passport.”

“Yea, I do. Mikasa and I have always had current ones, just in case. My dad likes to be prepared for… well, whatever, I guess.”

“I bet,” Levi murmured, glancing to the side. “So, do you want to bring her with us?”

“I don’t think I have enough money for that, and I know she doesn’t.”

“Eren,” Levi’s voice was mildly offended, “I’m paying. What the fuck makes you think I’d let you buy your own ticket?”

“Well, maybe not my own ticket, but…”

“It’s covered, okay? I got it. So invite her if you want to.”

“It’d probably be a good idea,” I mused, “That way she’s around you a little more.”

When Levi fixed me with a confused stare, I added, “She’s not going to let you get her an apartment because she doesn’t trust you. She said she doesn’t know you well enough yet.”

“Well, then this will give her a chance to know me,” Levi said as the doors slid open, “But I can’t say she’ll like me any better.”

I grabbed his hand as he walked out ahead of me, following him out, “I did. I do.”

“That’s only because you were interested in my ass,” Levi teased, pulling his hand away, “And I’m pretty sure that’s not going to get her to like me.”

I angled my head to the side and leaned a little as I looked at his ass, “It is a nice butt.”

Levi rolled his eyes and walked past me, heading for the kitchen, “What about Armin?”
“Armin’s butt? I don’t really look at his butt,” I shrugged, “I guess it’s okay as far as butts go, though.”

“I wasn’t asking about his ass.” Levi shot me an annoyed look as he leaned against the kitchen island. “Do you want him to come with or not?”

Well, that was certainly what Erwin wanted, and I didn’t exactly want to parade Armin around in a swimsuit in front of the hungry lecher. But at the same time, I knew I would be denying Armin an amazing experience in a foreign country simply because I was worried. As much as I didn’t want to admit it, I had to accept that Armin was able to take care of himself. He was a smart boy and capable of making intelligent decisions.

“Yea, I’d love to have him there,” I hesitated, “But it’s not exactly going to make things easier with Erwin.”

“What do you mean?” Levi asked, raising an eyebrow, “If anything, having Armin there will keep Erwin out of our hair.”

“Well, yea… but then there’s that whole thing where I’m supposed to try to seduce him, remember?”

Levi opened his mouth and then shut it quickly, blinking once before turning to the fridge. He busied himself with getting out eggs and cheese, and after a moment I realized he wasn’t going to answer me.

“Did you actually forget?”

He spun around to face me, his expression defensive. “No! I just…”

Levi shut his mouth again and then shook his head, returning his attention to the fridge. Feeling completely and utterly lost, I walked over to the kitchen island. I had no idea if I should press the issue or what I was supposed to do at this point. Even if I hadn’t made any progress, I had been trying. I’d gone to Erwin’s office but I was usually dismissed immediately after, and that was if Levi didn’t drag me out of there himself.

“You just what?” I prompted, and watched as his shoulders stiffened.

“It’s not that I forgot what he did or what I want to do,” Levi sighed as he turned to face me, “But for the first time in my life I’m too happy to waste it on some seven year old revenge plan.”

“What are you saying?”

“That you’re too important to lose,” he whispered, holding my stare, “Eren, I don’t want to risk you. I don’t want to risk us. I want my fucking revenge, but you’re more important than that. I’m not going to lose you over him.”

My heart was racing and the room was spinning as the true meaning of his words started to sink in. “Then do you want me to stop?”

“I don’t know. I…” Levi gritted his teeth and for a moment he looked frustrated to the point of genuine pain. “I don’t know. I don’t know what I want anymore.”

“Then I won’t change anything until you decide,” I cut in before he could continue, “It’s not like I’m getting anywhere with him anyway. At this point Armin has a better chance than I do. But I’m not going to let him get hurt for me.”
“I’ll come up with something,” Levi muttered, cracking one of the eggs on the side of the pan before letting the contents spill out. “I always do.”

As much as I trusted him, I still have no idea what to do at this point. I’d been aware that he was jealous of Erwin, but I didn’t know he might be willing to forget his revenge plot entirely. At least where I was concerned. And even though I wanted him to find peace with his past, this new turn of events might have given me an easy way out of the lie I’d been holding onto. There’d be no reason for him to ever find out about it if he didn’t need me to pursue Erwin. This had every chance of working out for the best as long as his alternate plan didn’t involve Armin. That was one thing I was not willing to risk.

“Eren?”

I looked over at Armin as he walked out of Levi’s bedroom and had to wonder if I’d actually spoken out loud. Or worse, if he had heard any of our conversation. His hair was mussed from a good night’s sleep, although it looked like he attempted to tame it by running his fingers through the mess. That was the best he could do, of course. He had no comb with him and his outfit was the same he’d worn the night before. I’d completely forgotten that he never expected to stay the night and had no clothes to change into. Not that I couldn’t fix that.

“Well somebody slept late,” I commented, grinning widely as I watched him rub the sleep out of his eyes, “Need to borrow some clothes?”

“Uhm…” Armin glanced over at Levi and then leaned against the counter beside me, “I don’t really feel right wearing his clothes.”

“You and me both, kid,” Levi added as he stirred the eggs in the pan. “But I think he was offering his clothes, not mine.”

“What he said,” I confirmed, pointing my thumb in Levi’s direction. “My apartment’s just downstairs, after all. It’d be something temporary.”

Armin tugged at the sleeve of his shirt and then shrugged. “I’m planning on going straight home after this, so I can just change when I get there.”

“Well, the offer’s there if you want it.”

“So, Armin,” Levi spoke up, his focus still on the pan, “Do you have your passport?”

“Yea, I actually got my first one this year,” he replied, reaching out to grab an orange from the fruit bowl that was sitting in the center of the kitchen island. “I was supposed to go overseas with my grandpa, but that fell through, so…”

“How would you like to go to France?” Armin froze in place, the orange rolling out of his hands when his fingers went limp, “What?”

“Well, Eren is planning to come with me,” Levi explained. He scooped the eggs onto a plate and then looked up at Armin. “And I know that he’d like to have you there. It would be business related, of course, so it would all be paid for.”

“Are you…” Armin paused and shook his head, as if not quite sure what he should say, “Are you sure about this?”

“Am I sure?” Levi repeated, raising one eyebrow. A smirk crossed his lips and he set the plate of
eggs down in front of me. “Yes, I’m positive. You’re one of the best in the program, if not the best. We’d be stupid not to take you along with us.”

Armin’s expression brightened considerably with that last statement and he nodded, “Then yes. Yes, I’d love to go with. I really, really would.”

“We were also thinking about inviting Mikasa,” I mentioned. It was probably bad timing because I didn’t want to sink Armin’s sudden surge of pride, but I wasn’t sure how else to bring it up. “Levi was going to pay for her separately.”

“That’ll be good for her if she can get off of work,” Armin agreed, retrieving his orange and beginning to strip the peel. “She said they’re really strict there, so it might be a problem.”

“Where does she work?” I asked, almost fearing the answer.

Armin only shrugged in response. “She didn’t say and I didn’t want to push it. I mean, we just got her back…”

“Yea, I know,” I frowned. “It’s probably better if we don’t ask for too much right now. A little at a time.”

“Well, start by asking for her to come with us,” Levi suggested, snagging an orange slice from Armin’s batch. “At least that way you’ll both get more time with—”

“Fuck! No! No, no, no!”

Our attention shot to Levi’s bedroom as Mikasa came bolting out the door, hopping on one foot as she tried to zip up her boot and move at the same time. She stumbled slightly and cursed again, stopping only long enough to zip up her other boot. She grabbed her jacket and pulled it on as she walked over to us, pulling me into a fierce hug when she reached me.

“I’ll see you again soon, okay?”

“You’re leaving now?” I blurted out, my grip instinctively tightening on her, “You just woke up! You can’t leave.”

“I’m late for work, Eren,” she explained, trying to wrench free of my steel-like hug. “Incredibly late. As in they might fire me late.”

“Well, if they do that then you won’t have to ask for time off,” Levi commented, not at all distressed by the fact that Mikasa’s job was currently in crisis. Of course, he probably saw that working out to his advantage. It would be easier to convince her to take his offer of an apartment when she had nowhere else to go.

“Ask for time off?” Mikasa finally pulled free of my relentless hug and looked at Levi, her brow furrowed in confusion. “Not that I could even get time off, but why?”

“Eren’s coming with me to France as part of his internship,” Levi replied, snatching up another orange and popping it into his mouth.

Mikasa turned her wide, surprised eyes on me and I smiled sheepishly. “Yea, apparently it’s something they do every year and I get to go with.”

“Because you’re boning the boss?”
“Pretty much,” Levi flashed her a smirk. “And since you’re his sister, you’re invited to go with.”

“I wouldn’t even be able to get the time off,” she answered automatically. Then she took a moment to zip up her coat and turned to face me, avoiding a second hug because she knew I wouldn’t let go. “I’ll get in touch with you as soon as I can.”

“That’s not going to be a problem,” Levi spoke up, turning around and opening a drawer before walking over to us with a box. He held it out and then pushed it into Mikasa’s hands. “Your new phone. Unlimited minutes and programmed with our numbers. Including Armin’s.”

“How did you get my number?”

“It was one of my three wishes when I found a genie,” Levi rolled his eyes and then glanced over at him. “It was on your application to the company.”

“Oh,” Armin flushed. “Right.”

“I can’t take this.” Mikasa shook her head and held the phone back out to him. “I’m not going to.”

“Yes, you are,” Levi shot back, folding his arms stubbornly. “I’m not going to have him constantly worrying about when you’ll call next. No one else needs to have your number. Just make sure you call him.”

Mikasa’s jaw tightened and I could almost hear her grinding her teeth as she stared at Levi. Then she took a slow, deep breath and shoved the box into her pocket. “Fine.”

“Good,” Levi replied in a voice that was just as snappish as Mikasa’s. “Then while you’re in an agreeing mood, let me drive you to work.”

“I can walk.”

“So you can be even later than you already are?” Levi asked, raising a brow. “That doesn’t make much sense.”

“I don’t need you knowing where I work,” Mikasa shrugged, turning and walking towards the elevator.

“I already know where you work,” Levi said as he followed her. He jerked to a stop and held up his hands when Mikasa spun around to face him with wide eyes. “No one else knows, and I’m not going to tell them. You saw what I do for a living. You should already know that I’m not going to pass judgments on you.”

It took everything I had not to step into the conversation, and I knew it wouldn’t matter if I did. Levi wasn’t going to tell me even after Mikasa was out the door, and as curious as I was I wouldn’t waste my time asking.

“Whatever,” Mikasa muttered, shaking her head as she walked towards the elevator. It was obvious she didn’t want us to hear the rest of the conversation. “If you think you can get me there faster, then let’s go.”

Levi snagged his keys off of the table and glanced over at me. “We’ll go to dinner when I get back. Maggie texted me and said they want to move it up an hour or two.”

I nodded and tried to keep my thoughts on the conversation at hand. There was too much spinning around in my mind right now. I met Mikasa’s stare and offered her a small smile, trying to convey
that it didn’t matter what she did for a living as long as she was safe. Even though that wasn’t entirely true. There was a list of things I knew I wouldn’t be comfortable with.

“I’ll call you.”

Her hand instantly went to the pocket that was stuffed full with the new phone, as if I’d just reminded her it was there. Then she nodded and stepped onto the elevator, her expression a little guarded when Levi joined her. I had to bite back a small smile as I watched the doors close. I couldn’t help but be reminded of a pair of siblings who did nothing but fight with each other. Although despite that, I could see the mutual respect that was beginning to grow between them. She was already starting to trust him. The fact that she was letting him drive her to work proved that.

“Are you really okay with me going?”

The question was unexpected and I blinked as I turned to face Armin. “Huh?”

“To France,” he clarified, “Are you really going to be okay if I go with?”

That did nothing to clear up my confusion. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because it might make things difficult with Erwin.”

“Yea, it probably will,” I shrugged, “But I don’t know what I’m doing with that right now anyway.”

“What do you mean?” Armin frowned.

“I mean Levi doesn’t want me to be the one to do it,” I explained, “But he still wants it done.”

Armin fidgeted slightly, slowly tearing apart a slice of orange as he stared down at his hands, “I could…”

“No,” I cut him off, shaking my head quickly, “No, not a chance. Not happening. No.”

“Doesn’t it make sense, though?” Armin argued, looking up at me. “I already like him, and he likes me. It’s not like it’d be difficult.”

“I didn’t say it would be difficult! I know it would be easy, Armin. Trust me, I’ve seen the way he looks at you. But I don’t want you to do it.”

“Why not?”

“Because you deserve better than him!”

“And what if someone said that you deserve better than Levi?” Armin shot back, his expression growing defensive.

I froze, staring at him for a long moment before shaking my head. “That’s not the same and you know it.”

“It’s not the same to you because it’s personal then,” Armin continued, “But who says it’s not personal to me? Maybe I don’t want better than him.”

“You should,” I snapped. “Hell, Armin, even Jean was better than him.”

“Don’t talk about Jean around me!” Armin shouted, pulling back from the kitchen counter. “You know I hate hearing his name!”
“You were with him for years, Armin,” I pushed as I walked towards him. “I know he fucked up bad, but how long are you going to punish him for it? You don’t even look at his face anymore.”

“Oh, don’t say crap like that. I know you hate him.” Armin’s voice rose. “You’re only defending him because you don’t want me to see Erwin!”

“Yea, you’re right!” I yelled. “Okay? You’re completely right. I don’t want you to be with Erwin! I hate the thought of you with him. I’d rather see you with Jean.”

“He hurt me!” Armin cried out, his hands held clutched together against his chest as if he were still protecting himself from the painful blow that happened weeks ago. “I can’t forgive him for what he did!”

I opened my mouth to speak but was interrupted by a faint buzzing coming from the kitchen island. We both looked down as Jean’s face lit up the screen of Armin’s phone and I shot forward before he could stop me, snatching it up and swiping my thumb across the screen.

“Jean?”

“Armin! I…” Jean paused as recognition struck him. He knew Armin’s voice well enough to know I wasn’t him. “Wait, Eren?”

“Yea, it’s me.”

“Is Armin there?” His voice suddenly grew worried. “Is he okay? Why do you have his phone?”

“He’s fine. He’s right here.” I glanced over at Armin who was currently staring daggers at me. “He was just in the other room when you called.”

“Oh.” Jean let out a sigh and then spoke in a hopeful voice. “Can I talk to him?”

“He would love to talk to you,” I replied, meeting Armin’s withering stare. I held out the phone to him and he snatched it from of my hand, turning away from me as he pressed the phone to his ear.

“I can’t talk right now,” he spoke in a tight voice. “Not yet.”

He was silent for a moment and then I heard his breath catch on the inhale, “Jean… Oh, Jean, please… don’t…”

Armin pressed a hand over his mouth and his eyes flooded with tears as his shoulders started to tremble. I felt a wave of guilt and looked away, but I knew I wouldn’t have done it differently. He was still hurting and Armin was never going to get over this if he didn’t talk to Jean. I shut my eyes tightly when a small sob broke free of Armin’s lips.

“Jean, don’t cry… don’t…” Armin hung his head and trembled harder, his voice coming out broken, “Oh, Jean…”

I moved over to him instantly, not really giving a damn that he would probably shove me away. But he didn’t. My arms circled tight around his waist and I pulled him against me, letting him shake in my arms as I offered what little support I could. He kept the phone pressed to his ear and gave a shaky nod that I knew wasn’t meant for me.

“Yes, okay? Yes. I’ll meet you, just… please…” Armin went silent for a moment and then nodded again, whispering. “I’ll be waiting outside.”
He drew the phone away from his ear and hit the button to end the call, standing there for a long moment in silence. He continued to shake and I refused to let go until he decided to pull away, which he eventually did. He wiped at his eyes and fixed me with an annoyed stare, taking a slow breath before shoving his hand into my shoulder in a mock punch.

“You can be a real jerk sometimes,” he muttered in a voice strained by tears. He shook his head and wiped at his eyes once more before pocketing the phone. “Jean is coming to pick me up. We’re going to dinner.”

“Armin, I’m sorry…”

“No, you’re really not,” he cut me off, staring down between us. “You’re not sorry at all. You don’t even look sorry, Eren.”

“I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

“I know you didn’t,” he sighed and then finally looked up at me. “You just have a really lousy way of trying to fix things that don’t involve you.”

I pursed my lips and held back any comment I had. He was my best friend so of course this involved me, but I wasn’t going to say that right now. We’d just had an actual screaming match followed by Armin crying and I wasn’t about to sign up for round two. The most I could do was hug him tight and let him go to Jean. As mad as he might have been at me, we both knew that this needed to happen. Even if he didn’t choose him in the end, he needed to have this talk. And if it happened to push Erwin aside, then it worked out for the best.

Once the elevator doors were closed and carrying him down to the lobby, I turned to face the empty apartment. Armin left me in an awkward silence, and I stayed there as I waited for Levi. I was fidgety and I didn’t know why. I kept pacing the length of the apartment, occasionally looking over to see if he had come back yet. I was nervous to have dinner with the two people I assumed were his best friends, despite the fact that I had already met them the night before.

The buzzing in my pocket made me jump and I snatched my phone out to press it to my ear, “Hello?”

Levi was on the other end. “I’m pulling up now and traffic is a bitch. Meet me outside, okay?”

“I’ll be right there.”

I hung up and took a deep breath, in and out. I could do this.

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Breathing through dinner was harder than I thought it would be, but that was mostly because I couldn’t stop laughing. Any childhood story Levi would never want me to hear came flowing out of Isabel’s mouth like a waterfall, and Levi seemed incapable of stopping her. He spent most of the meal scowling, but I found the small curve of his lips hard to miss. He was enjoying this in his own way, but I knew he would never admit it.

“And did he ever tell you about how he used to wear dresses?” Isabel managed between laughs, “You should have seen it! He was so cute.”

“I did not wear dresses,” Levi corrected her with a steady glare. “That was the style at the time and my mother put me in those.”
“Oh, they were definitely dresses,” Isabel countered, “Style or not, you looked like a girl. Especially with that long hair.”

“She liked it long,” Levi shrugged, “And so did I.”

“Actually, I kind of like it long, too,” I admitted. Levi glanced over at me and raised a brow, and I smiled sheepishly. “What? Long hair is actually kind of hot on a guy.”

“Oh, is that so? Then maybe you should grow yours out,” Levi commented, reaching out to run his fingers over the longest strands of my hair. “I’d like to see it long. It would give me something to pull.”

I felt my cheeks heat up and I cleared my throat, reaching for my glass of water. “I could do that.”

“Oh, that would be cute,” Isabel grinned and then paused, glancing over to eye Levi’s hair. “Remember when we cut yours?”

“You mean when you chased me with a pair of scissors and Farlan held me down?” Levi smirked and took a sip from his own glass. “Yea, I remember.”

“I didn’t hold you down,” Farlan spoke up, rolling his eyes, “I restrained you gently.”

“That was gentle? I’d hate to see you be rough.”

“If he was rough with you, he’d probably break you in half,” Isabel cut in, reaching out to poke Levi in the side, “I’ll never get over how little you are. What, did you stop aging after six or something?”

Levi pushed her hand away, “You’re not exactly big yourself.”

Isabel grinned at him and then looked over at me, “Well, I guess if you like his size it’s not so bad, right?”

“Oh, his size is just fine,” I murmured between sips. I wasn’t talking about his height, and I was sure my tone of voice made that obvious.

“Too much information,” Farlan cut me off before I could say more, holding up his hand. “Levi is my brother and he is a gummy bear. I don’t know what he does in the bedroom and I don’t want to.”

“I bet he’s kinky in the bedroom,” Isabel continued, unfazed. “I mean, if you consider The Wall and everything…”

“Do you like your cake?” Farlan said, pointing at the half-finished piece in front of her. He was desperate to change the conversation, and she finally decided to let him.

“I love my cake,” she replied, taking a bite and continuing with her mouth half full, “But I love all cakes.”

“We know you do, honey,” Levi smirked, “Try not to choke.”

Isabel rolled her eyes and then popped another bite into her mouth. Levi chuckled softly and shook his head before he paused, reaching into his pocket to pull out a vibrating phone. He stared at the screen for a moment and then stood up from his seat, glancing at me.

“I’ll be right back.” He hit the button as he started walking away from our table. “Hello, Mikasa.”

I stared after him, wanting desperately to follow but knowing that there must be a reason she called
him instead of me. Maybe it was something they talked about when he drove her into work. Either way, I was grateful that she was actually willing to give him a call. It was another step forward, which was a lot in two days considering her usually stubborn attitude.

“So,” Isbael spoke up, drawing my attention back to her, “Are you nervous about the plane ride?”

“Not really,” I admitted, “Planes and heights don’t bother me too much.”

“Farlan hates them,” she mentioned, glancing over in his direction. “Which is why I’ll be sitting with him. Otherwise I’d offer to be your plane buddy. Of course, I’m sure Levi’s going to be attached to your hip the whole time.”

“You’re going with us?” I asked, not bothering to keep the surprise out of my voice.

“Oh, right,” Isabel frowned, “I forgot he didn’t get the chance to tell you. We talked about it earlier on the phone.”

“We have to go back anyway,” Farlan explained, “And we only came out here to see Levi. We figured we may as well fly back with him and spend our time there.”

“Will we be close to your house?” I tried not to seem too excited, but I was interested in seeing where Levi spent his childhood summers.

“Yea, we won’t be too far from it,” Farlan answered.

“You should come see it,” Isabel grinned, showing the excitement I was trying to contain, “It’s been so long since Levi was there.”

“I’d really like to see it,” I admitted. “If he doesn’t mind, that’s is.”

“Oh, he won’t mind,” Isabel rolled her eyes and waved her hand dismissively, “You’re a part of his life now.”

My heart started to race at the thought and I felt my cheeks heat slightly. I hid my reaction by picking up my glass, taking a long sip and looking around the room. My eyes fell on Levi as he walked back to our table, and I felt a pang of fear when I saw his expression. He seemed worried about something and he still had the phone in his hands.

“What happened?” I asked as he took his seat.

“Mikasa lost her job,” Levi muttered, shaking his head as he slipped his phone back into his pocket.

I frowned, trying to decide whether or not that upset me. I wasn’t sure if she was working in a good place to begin with, and now she would be free to go with us. Not only that, but I knew she would help me keep Erwin away from Armin.

“Well, it kind of works out,” I said, glancing over at Levi “This means she can go with us, right? And she can keep Erwin away from Armin.”

“Oh, I don’t think that’s going to be a problem,” Levi replied, running the tip of his finger along the rim of his glass.

I felt my brow furrow with confusion as I eyed Levi’s expression. He had done something. “What do you mean?”

“I made two calls when I went outside, and one of them was to Jean. He’ll be coming with us to
France.” Levi paused and then met my eyes. “Consider it payback for the roses.”

I stared at him, unable to breathe or process the thought. Levi was genius on a dangerous level and he was making a play against Erwin. And as much as I liked the idea of Erwin’s expression when Jean stepped on the plane, I couldn’t help but feel like Armin had become the new pawn in this game. He was being used between the two of them, even if Levi didn’t see it that way.

He was going to take away the one thing he knew Erwin wanted, and he was going to make it hurt.

“If Erwin’s going to fuck with you, then I’m going to fuck with him.”
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

YAY! Another Thursday update! ^_^ I hope everyone enjoyed the Valentine's Day update last week. If you haven't read it yet, you can find it under 'The Valentine.' Thanks again to puppybrateren for doing a collaboration with me! ^____^ If you're not already following her on tumblr, definitely check out her blog - she's an amazing artist!

Speaking of art, I'd like to thank tumblr users the-mahou-shoujo, hakorin, dontacknowledgeorspeakof, and aaapple-jax for submitting art for The Intern! ^_^ OH! AND SOMEONE COSPLAYED AS INTERN!LEVI! I was seriously fangirling - if you want to see then please, please, please check out the amazing cosplayer kidofmischief! There are pictures under the tag 'fic: the intern.' ^_^

Thank you all so much for the kudos and comments you left on The Valentine! ^_^ I really hope you all enjoy this chapter. Please feel free to leave comments both here and on tumblr. If you're not already following me, you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern'.

Oh! And the song feature in this chapter is 'Je Cours' by Kyo. ^_^

ENJOY!

“Erwin is going to kill me.”

I groaned and let my forehead fall against the mirror, finally giving up on choosing a suitable top. It didn’t matter what I put on, after all. Whatever I picked out would be stained in blood and hidden from view once I was long and gone. It would all be over once Jean stepped onto that plane and Erwin realized I had made yet another move against him. Not that it had been my choice. I’d spent the past three days trying to subtly convince Levi that bringing Jean along with us was not the best idea, but nothing had worked. Of course, it wasn’t like I could outright say that I didn’t want Jean to come with because I knew that it would push Erwin into coming after me. Levi wasn’t even remotely aware of how quickly Erwin could destroy me, and if he knew then it meant that the secret was already out. And at that point I would lose him anyway.

Unfortunately it seemed I would have to go through with this and pray for the best.

There was no other way around it. Armin’s ex would be joining us on what was supposed to be Erwin’s romantic tour through Paris. And although I didn’t want to see Erwin do anything with Armin, I was almost willing to give in just this once if it meant holding the fraying threads of my relationship together for a little longer. I wasn’t ready to see it come crashing down, and I had no plans on how to repair it if it did. I needed more time.

Then again, I could have all of eternity and still mess this up. All because I had lied.

Stupid.

“Stupid, stupid…” I muttered, hitting my head against the smooth surface, “So fucking stupid.”
“If you’re referring to the way you’re slamming your head into my mirror, then yea. I agree.” Levi spoke from across the room. I turned to find him leaning against the doorframe ever so casually, his arms folded as he watched me with a bemused expression. “Care to explain why you’re giving yourself a concussion? Or did you already knock that information out of your head?”

He didn’t walk over right away, and I noticed immediately. It had been two days since we’d really seen each other, and he’d been cold to me since I walked in the door.

“I’m just nervous about the trip,” I muttered, stepping away from the mirror and pausing to rub my forehead. It wasn’t exactly a lie but it wasn’t the full truth either. Not that I could give the full truth anymore. I was in too deep for that now.

“Oh, please don’t tell me you’re choosing now to mention that you’re scared of flying,” Levi remarked, rolling his eyes and pushing away from the door to walk towards me. “Because it’s a little late. We’re leaving in the next hour.”

“No, it’s not that,” I frowned, looking down when Levi took a moment to straighten my shirt. He eyed it and then turned his attention back to me, seeming to approve of the selection. Which wasn’t surprising, considering he was the one who bought it in the first place.

“Then what is it?” Levi asked, “Are you scared of the Eiffel Tower? The amazing food? Your first time in a foreign place?”

“It’s not any of that,” I said, sighing in a rush. I stayed still for a moment after and then forced myself to meet his eyes. “I’m scared of how Erwin’s going to react when he sees Jean. I’m worried he’s going to think that I’m the one who set it all up.”

“And he probably will,” Levi agreed, raising a brow. “Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“It’s just going to make things worse.”

“No, it’s going to show him that you have a backbone,” Levi countered, “You’re going to make him realize that he can’t jerk you around like this. Not where I’m concerned.”

Oh, it would show Erwin a little more than that. And I was certain that backing down would not be his first response.

“I really hate putting Armin in the middle of this,” I muttered. It was the only other excuse I had, but I already knew it wouldn’t work. I’d tried it a handful of times already.

“Armin is in the middle of this, Eren. You’re not doing anything to change that.” Levi assured me. He crossed the room to his closet and pulled open the door, pausing to look back in my direction. “If anything, you’ll be helping him with this. Armin needs to make a decision, and he’s never going to do that if he doesn’t settle things with Jean.”

“And what if he doesn’t choose Jean? What if he chooses Erwin instead?”

“Then he chooses Erwin,” Levi shrugged. “Is that really such a bad thing?”

“You hate Erwin.”

I watched him sigh, but he said nothing more as he went through the contents of his closet. He pulled a black leather jacket from a hanger and slipped it on over his grey shirt, leaving it unzipped. Paired with the black jeans he had on, he looked more relaxed then I was used to seeing him. He grabbed the white scarf I had given him and turned to face me.
“I hate what he did to me, and I want him to suffer for it,” Levi responded, slowly twisting the scarf around his neck. “But I don’t know if that means I hate him, too.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” I argued, “You want to hurt someone, destroy their life, and yet you don’t hate them? That’s not possible.”

“Says who?” Levi shot back, closing the closet door. “You? Well, Dr. Phil, it’s nice to know you understand everything about the human heart. Because honestly, I could have a hundred years and not know a damn thing about what goes on inside my chest.”

“So you don’t hate him?”

Levi paused with his mouth open, staring at me for a moment before finally sighing. He shook his head and stared off in the direction of the balcony, muttering, “I don’t think I could ever truly hate him. Trust me, I’ve tried.”

“Then I really don’t know what you want anymore,” I growled.

I turned and started walking towards the elevator, feeling a sudden anger blazing inside of me. He wanted me to hurt a man he couldn’t even say he hated. Hell, he could probably sooner say that he loved him and have it be true. The thought of that made my stomach turn and the room spin, but I tried my best to ignore it. It wasn’t like I was blind to his feelings for Erwin. I knew he had them, but I had hoped they were disappearing by now.

I jerked to a stop when Levi’s hand closed around my wrist and he spun me to face him. “Do we have a problem here? Is there something we need to talk about?”

I stared into his eyes, which had a shred of anger hidden in them. He was frustrated as well, although I wasn’t sure if it was with himself or me. To be honest, we had both been on edge all day and I knew for a fact that it was because we had spent the majority of the past two days apart. Mikasa had lost her job, and it was only through me staying in an apartment halfway across the city that she agreed to stay indoors. Levi had paid, of course.

He spent his time with Farlan and Isabel, who both were quick to ditch their hotel reservation in lieu of staying with him. Armin joined Mikasa and me, and our two little groups of three had remained busy enough to keep us from speaking more than a handful of words to each other for more than forty-eight hours. When we were finally back together, there was this unspoken resentment over the fact that neither had taken the time to talk to the other.

“I missed you,” I blurted out, unable to stop the thoughts that had been bubbling up in my mind since we exchanged our cold hellos and refrained from touching save for small moments since. “You didn’t call. And neither did I, and I know that was fucking shitty of me. I should have called. I wanted to call.”

“So did I,” he cut me off. His hand tensed on my wrist, gripping a little tighter before he finally jerked and pulled me into his arms. He banded them around my waist and held me close, and my arms hurried to do the same. “I don’t know why the fuck I didn’t. This is my first fucking relationship and I feel like I’m messing it up every step of the way.”

“Well, it’s not like I’ve had a ton of relationships either.”

“Which is why we’re both fucking up and pissing each other off,” he spat. “I didn’t want to bother you, and I’m not exactly the clingy type. I’m used to people just being there without me calling them first and usually that pisses me off, but it was all I wanted with you.”
“Then I’ll call,” I assured him, tightening my arms around his waist, “I’ll be a pain in the ass until you tell me to go away. Just stop being mad at me.”

Levi rolled his eyes and released me, lightly shoving my shoulder. “I’m not that mad, kid. Don’t flatter yourself.”

He turned and pressed the button for the elevator, and I watched as his lips twitched with the beginning of a smile. My body was already beginning to relax, and I could feel my heart beating steadily again. I hadn’t realized how tense the atmosphere was until it was clear and I could breathe again. It almost made me wonder if talking through things could actually fix everything with him, but I was sure that wasn’t the case. At least not where Erwin was concerned.

“Hurry up, brat,” Levi drew my attention back to the present. He was already leaning into his usual corner of the elevator, watching me with a small smirk on his lips. “We don’t want to be late.”

I stepped inside, feeling oddly uncomfortable without the weight of a suitcase in my hand. We were going directly to the airport from here and our luggage was already there waiting for us. Even stranger still, I knew there was no hurry. The plane wouldn’t be leaving without us no matter how late we were. I’d never gone on a vacation where I wasn’t on some sort of deadline, but I supposed that was one of the perks of owning your own jet. I didn’t even want to think about how much money there was between Erwin and Levi. The two of them could probably own the world and have change to spare.

We had the option of being picked up by a town car, but Levi only mentioned that in passing. Despite his gratuitous amount of wealth, Levi hated being in a car where anyone but him was driving. He said once that it was because he preferred to be in control. He didn’t like knowing that someone else could choose the direction and speed of how his body moved. Luckily his need for control didn’t go to the point that he wanted to pilot the plane. Even he knew his own boundaries.

Despite the fact that he refused to be driven to the airport, Levi had arranged for the others to be picked up. It was partially my idea because I didn’t want Armin to leave his grandfather without a car for the next week, even though he insisted he wouldn’t need it. Mikasa had been more than willing to take the offer of the car, but I was pretty sure that was because she was trying to avoid my father. I tried not to linger on that fact.

My mother hadn’t heard from him in weeks, which I learned in my brief conversation with her two days ago. She would be coming back halfway through my vacation and I was technically forbidden from going at all, but I convinced her that I would be staying at Armin’s house instead. Either way, I would be out of the apartment for the week and she didn’t need to know that I would actually be overseas. It wasn’t like I needed her permission, after all. It had been easy enough to forge her signature on all the school forms.

And that would probably be the only easy thing about this trip.

“Still nervous?” Levi asked as he slid into the driver’s seat beside me. He paused to buckle his belt and made sure I did the same. He was like Armin in that aspect. The both of them were always worrying about my safety.

“A little,” I admitted, “But not as much as before.”

That wasn’t entirely true, but I didn’t want to worry him. My stomach seemed to be determined to flip faster the closer we got to the airport. It was so bad that by the time Jean actually stepped onto the plane, I would probably just hurl all over Erwin. But at least then he would be upset about something other than the fact that I had effectively cock blocked him for a week.
“That’s a lie,” Levi said through a soft laugh. “I can tell by your expression. You’re still panicking.”

I chewed my lower lip and looked over at him, shrugging. “I can’t help it.”

“Would you just calm the fuck down?” Levi rolled his eyes and turned his attention to the road as he pulled out into traffic. “It’s not like he’s going to eat you or something. If anything, he’s going to be impressed. Pissed, but impressed.”

“Why would he be impressed?” I frowned, watching as Levi fiddled with the dial for the stereo. His fingers stilled and he glanced over at me with a smirk.

“Because he’s a chess player and this is a game. The fact that you’re playing and not just submitting is going to go a long way in getting his attention.”

If that was the case, I could see why it would work to my benefit. “So he might back off of Armin and be interested in me?”

The smirk left Levi’s face and he shrugged, “I’d rather not think about that.”

He twisted the dial and the car suddenly filled with the opening beats of a song I was certain I had never heard before. I leaned back in my seat, fully aware that our conversation was over for now. I couldn’t say I was disappointed. It wasn’t like I wanted to talk about a potential relationship with Erwin either. The thought of him actually showing a genuine interest just didn’t sit right with me.

“Fais moi de la place. Juste un peu de place. Pour ne pas qu'on m'efface… J'ai pas trop d'amis,” Levi’s tongue moved over the words as if he was born to speak only them, his deep, sensual voice flowing with the music like he had written it himself. “Regarder en classe… c'est pas l'extase. J'ai beaucoup d'espace. Je suis seul et personne à qui le dire…”

My eyes widened as I turned slowly to stare at him, my body tingling from the sound of his voice molding those French words into the single most amazing thing I had ever heard. There was no thought left in mind and my mouth could only open with the vain hope of managing a phrase to describe how I felt. But even if I had the world’s words at my disposal, I wouldn’t have been able to manage it. When I asked him to sing, I just thought it would sound nice. I had no idea it would be like this.

He glanced at me from out of the corner of his eye and his lips turned into an amused grin as he worked his mouth around the next word. If he was embarrassed at all, he didn’t show it. He sang the lyrics as if he had done so every single day, with or without an audience, and I had to admire that. I knew I would have trouble getting through one line of a song, and yet he made it look so easy.

He drew out the last note and I could hear the song click into the next as he turned down the volume. He was silent after that and I knew he was anticipating my reaction, which I was desperate to give. Unfortunately I couldn’t get my mouth to move the way I wanted it to; it seemed determined to hang open uselessly rather than form any of the words I wanted to say. But I tried anyway.

“Wow.” I managed to mumble right before a mouthful of drool fell down my chin.

Levi stared at me, blinking once before he suddenly burst out laughing. It was a sound I was certain I would never hear, as much as I wanted to. Levi laughing to the point of tears. The sound would have been amazing if I wasn’t so horrified.

My hand slapped over my mouth and my eyes went wide. I could feel the deepest shade of red filling my face all the way to the tips of my ears, but it wasn’t enough to express the level of embarrassment I was feeling right now. I wanted to dig a hole in this seat and hide in it until I was guaranteed that
Levi had forgotten the entire reaction. I was positive I would never be this mortified again. It wasn’t possible. Even if I ran naked through the public streets on a very cold day, it wouldn’t top this.

I just drooled in front of my boyfriend.

My sexy ass boyfriend just sang to me in French, and I drooled.

And he saw.

I groaned and hid my face in my hands, mumbling into my palms, “Can we please not talk about this?”

“About what?” Levi chuckled as he pulled into the parking space. I was amazed he was able to drive with those tears in his eyes. “About you drooling all over yourself?”

“Yes,” I muttered, keeping my face hidden.

“I have to say, it wasn’t exactly the reaction I was expecting,” Levi mused, leaning back in his seat now that we had come to a stop. “I mean, I guess I’m flattered. I don’t think I’ve ever had anyone drool over me.”

I groaned again and dropped my hands into my lap, fixing him with an annoyed glare. “You probably have. They were just good at hiding it.”

Levi made a soft sound of agreement and then smirked, tapping his chin and raising an eyebrow. I quickly rubbed at the spot on my own chin and looked away, trying to urge the redness to leave my cheeks. I wasn’t about to get on that plane cherry red with Jean waiting for me. He would pounce on that immediately and I couldn’t deal with that right now.

“You can be such an ass, you know.”

“Oh, I know,” Levi said through a soft laugh.

I was about to insult him further in an attempt to get the attention off of me, but I forgot what I wanted to say when his long fingers cupped my chin and turned my face to his. He leaned close to me and claimed my lips in a kiss that was soft at first, but quickly deepened as I fell into it. My fingers found their way into his hair and gave a small tug as I drew him closer, eager to taste more of him. It had been too long since I had his lips on mine, and I’d been going insane without the sensation.

He bit my lower lip between his teeth and tugged gently, teasingly, before finally breaking free of the kiss. “They’re waiting for us.”

“They can wait longer.”

“Oh, you’re giving Erwin far more credit than you should,” Levi smirked, unbuckling his seatbelt and moving out of the car. The plane was a short walk ahead and there was a valet waiting to take Levi’s keys from him.

I scrambled to get out of the car and shut the door behind me, following after him. “He’s already going to be in a bad mood.”

“Like I said, it’s a game,” Levi continued, pausing just long enough to take my hand in his. “Jean’s presence doesn’t mean that Erwin has to back off of Armin. It just gives him an obstacle to overcome. He’ll enjoy that.”
“Why?” I frowned.

Levi glanced at me, his eyes amused. “Think of it as intellectual foreplay.”

I didn’t want to think about Erwin and anything to do with foreplay. I wrinkled my nose and shook my head, grabbing the rung as I followed Levi up the steps and onto the private jet.

“Well look who finally decided to show up,” Isabel cheered, a wide grin plastered across her face. “We were getting ready to leave without you.”

“Oh, I’m sure you were,” Levi replied, rolling his eyes. “Because the trip would be so interesting then.”

“It would be,” Isbel countered, “I’d still be here. And Farlan, who’s really… very… yea, you’re right. It’s a good thing you showed up.”

Farlan frowned at her, raising an eyebrow, “Should I be insulted? Because I kind of am.”

“Nah. You’re loads of fun,” Isabel smirked, leaning into him. “Just not as fun as Levi.”

“Levi’s fun?” Mikasa spoke up, regarding Isabel with a speculative gaze. “Do you also think rocks are fun?”

“Remind me again why I’m paying for your hotel room?” Levi shot back, fixing Mikasa with a glare.

“I thought it was Eren’s hotel room,” Armin corrected with a frown, glancing over at me.

“Technically,” I shrugged. I took a moment to scan the interior of the plane, but Jean was nowhere to be seen. Maybe he’d decided not to come after all.

“Ah, Eren. Levi,” Erwin greeted us with a smile as he walked up the aisle. He had a glass of wine in his hand, which I assumed he’d gotten somewhere in the back of the plane.

“Well, I’m surprised,” Levi murmured, folding his arms, “I thought we’d at least get here before you.”

“No, you’re the one that’s fashionably late this time. Although I only just got here myself,” Erwin replied, holding up his drink, “They had this waiting for me. There’s one for you, too.”

“Maybe later.”

“Fair enough,” Erwin shrugged, taking a sip from his glass before gesturing around the rest of the plane. “Should I assume this is everyone? You should have told me you were inviting an army, Levi. I would have come prepared.”

Levi smirked in response to the comment and took one glance around the cabin. “We’re waiting on one more, actually.”

“Oh?” Erwin raised an eyebrow and looked at each of the occupants. “Who are we missing?”

“I believe that would be me,” Jean spoke up as he stepped onto the plane.

Armin’s drink slipped out of his hand and I heard him stifle a curse as he rushed to clean it up. Luckily all he had was a glass of ice water, but I knew that wasn’t the reason he was upset. His sudden reaction made it obvious that he was surprised, and his red cheeks showed the rest of us just
how embarrassed he was. He stayed on his hands and knees with a handful of tissues longer than
necessary, but no one made a move to help him up. Mikasa and I knew he wanted to stay hidden and
we weren’t about to drag him out.

“Oh, I see.”

Erwin’s voice drew my attention away from my panicking friend. It was cold to the point that I felt it
in my veins. I turned slowly to stare at him, bracing myself for the anger that I was certain I would
find. And there it was. He was staring at me as if I was the only one standing in the plane, as if he
could melt me with his stare alone. To be honest, he probably could. Despite the calm exterior he
maintained, I could see the anger in his eyes. They were cold and dangerous and screamed one thing
very loud and clear.

You fucked up, kid.

I took a deep breath and tried to swallow my fears, but I couldn’t stop the panic from rising. This was
bad. It was very, very bad.

“Jean, it’s about time you showed up,” Levi broke the silence with his snide remark and gestured at
the seat beside Armin. “Sit your ass down and buckle up. We’ve been waiting long enough.”

He grabbed my hand and led me towards the two seats that were a few rows back, not bothering to
check whether or not Jean had followed his order. He had. Levi let me take my seat first and I
gratefully chose the seat by the window, needing the distraction of the outside world. He seemed to
realize this because he took my hand in his when his sat down beside me, giving it a small squeeze.

“Would you calm down?” he spoke softly, “There’s no reason to panic like this. It’s all a part of
playing the game.”

“He’s angry.”

“Of course he is,” Levi agreed, rolling his eyes. “He’s going to be. You knew that before you got on
the damn plane, Eren. But that doesn’t mean he’s going to be angry forever. Give him time to let this
sink in. It’s not going to be so bad.”

Easy for you to say.

I let a sigh hiss through my clenched teeth and closed my eyes, tilting my head back to rest it on the
seat behind me. Maybe sleep would be a good thing right now. How long was the flight to Paris? A
few hours, at least. I could keep my eyes shut for that long, right?

“Is he going to sit by us?” I muttered, my eyes still closed.

“I doubt it,” Levi shrugged. “He’s sitting across from Armin at the moment. Like I said, he’s not
going to let Jean throw him off track.”

“He’s a determined asshole.”

“You have no idea.”

I was pretty damn certain I did, but I didn’t have the energy to argue about it.

And apparently I didn’t have the energy to keep myself awake either. When my eyes finally opened,
the plane was in the air. It was tilting slowly back and forth as it righted itself into the direction it
needed to be. My head was resting on Levi’s shoulder and his was resting against mine, but he
wasn’t sleeping. He sat up straight when he felt me stir, and he released my hand to wiggle his fingers.

“Your grip’s almost as tight as your ass, brat,” he commented with a smirk, stretching out his hand as he glanced at me.

I felt my cheeks heat up and looked away with a quick roll of my eyes, “How long have I been asleep?”

“Not too long,” he replied, “We only just got in the air.”

Which meant we still had the entire trip to go. I stretched my arms above my head and let out a wide yawn as I looked around the cabin. Everyone was still seated where they were before I had closed my eyes, but I don’t know why I expected anything else. It wasn’t like I had been out long enough for it to make much of a difference.

“So, have you finally calmed down, kid?” Levi asked, scrutinizing my expression for any sign that I might be lying. “Because I have to take a fucking piss like you wouldn’t believe.”

“I’m fine,” I assured him with a laugh, “Go on. Piss off.”

“Cute,” he rolled his eyes and then grabbed the back of my head, his fingers lacing into my hair as he pulled me close to press a kiss to my forehead. When he drew back he took another moment to scan my eyes, still not fully convinced. But whatever he saw there must have been enough, because he finally got up from his seat and headed in the direction of the bathroom.

As Levi walked towards the back of the plane another movement caught my attention and I found myself watching Erwin make his way over to me, wineglass in hand. Everything in my body went on high alert as I tensed in my seat, all of the air around me seeming to vanish in an instant. Suddenly breathing was impossible. His expression was calm and inviting on the surface, but I couldn’t miss the anger in his eyes. I had definitely crossed a line.

“Eren,” he greeted me with a smooth smile, gesturing to the seat. “Can I sit here until Levi comes back?”

No, you butt monkey. I’d rather become best friends with Jean. Or get a lobotomy. Or both. Both sounds good.

“But, I forced the words out through gritted teeth and tried to disguise my grimace as a smile. I probably looked like I was in immense pain, and it wasn’t far from the truth.

Erwin laughed softly as he took the seat beside me, leaning back and pausing to enjoy a sip of wine. His eyes scanned the area around us, as if trying to gauge how private our little talk would be. Armin and Mikasa were having a conversation a few rows ahead of us and Jean was trying his best to be involved. Isabel had her head resting on Farlan’s shoulder and was snoring loudly enough to block out anything he might hear.

We were essentially alone, and Erwin seemed to realize this.

“Maybe I didn’t make myself clear the first time,” he began, keeping his eyes straight ahead. “I must not have, because otherwise you wouldn’t have done something like this.”

I took a deep breath and said nothing. I was hoping I could get away with silence by letting him speak his piece while I nodded.
He turned his gaze to meet mine and smiled diplomatically. “You would have realized this was a mistake if I’d been clear. Right, Eren?”

I felt my jaw tighten as I forced the nod.

“That’s good,” Erwin continued, “Because I’d hate to think that you’re trying to cross me when I’ve been nothing but fair with you.”

If by fair he meant leaving my relationship alone, he hadn’t exactly been fair. But I wasn’t about to start an argument in this small space when he was already angry with me. Erwin wasn’t like Jean. I couldn’t just win by holding a screaming match with him. He was too cunning for something like that. If I was going to fight back, I had to be careful and I had to think it out.

Which meant I would need Armin’s help before I could make a move.

“So I’m going to be fair once again, Eren. I’m going to give you a second chance.” Erwin turned so that his gaze was holding mine. “Are you listening this time?”

I nodded slowly, my eyes narrowing. “Yes.”

“Good,” Erwin’s smile didn’t reach his eyes. The warning was clear. “I’m interested in Armin. More so than I’ve ever been in anyone else, including Levi. Trust me when I say that means a lot. I’m not going to hurt your friend, nor will I make him do anything he doesn’t implicitly ask for.”

“And if he’s not interested in you?” I shot back quickly, my voice more venomous than I intended.

“I’ll back off and leave him alone,” Erwin replied with a casual shrug. Then he fixed his eyes back on mine. “But that has to come from him, not you. If he’s not interested in me, that’s fine. But I know how to read my men, and if he’s not interested then he’s been sending all the wrong signals. I’ll be genuinely surprised if he doesn’t want me.”

“Armin doesn’t even know how to send signals,” I scoffed.

“Maybe you need to learn a little more about your friend,” Erwin countered, his smile remaining in place. “Because he’s been one hell of a flirt with me.”

The idea made my skin crawl and I felt my nails ache in protest as they dug deep into the armrests. “I don’t need to know about that.”

“You’re right,” he agreed, “You don’t. The only thing that you need to do is understand that Armin is capable of making his own decisions.”

“Not good ones.”

“Good or bad, he can make them on his own,” Erwin insisted, his eyes narrowing just slightly.

I had struck a nerve. The thought of that actually enticed me to the point that I felt stupid enough to try again. I opened my mouth to strike back with another remark, but Erwin cut me off before I had the chance.

“And if you insist in fucking with my relationship, then I’m going to have to destroy yours,” Erwin continued in a calm, collected voice.

I felt my breath catch in my throat, but I couldn’t say another word. What could I possibly say that would even remotely threaten him in any way? He was capable of unraveling everything I had and
we both knew it.

He chuckled softly and then paused, taking a slow sip of his wine before lowering the glass and turning his attention back on me. He regarded me with intelligent blue eyes that held an icy threat in their depths, the sight of which twisted like a jagged knife in my gut. A serene smile crossed his lips and he leaned close, his voice so soothing that I almost didn’t hear the threat at all.

“Back off now, or I’ll take him away from you.”
“Oh, and the Louvre. Of course we have to see that! You can’t go to Paris and not see the Louvre.”

“Oh, and the Louvre. Of course we have to see that! You can’t go to Paris and not see the Louvre.”

“Mmf,” I muttered into my pillow and buried my face deeper.

I suppose I meant the sound to be some form of an agreement, or at least something that would pass as a response. Either way I knew that Armin wasn’t going to take the lack of enthusiasm for much longer. Not that he expected me to be thrilled to see a museum of any kind, but he at least wanted me conscious enough to understand his own excitement. Although I could honestly be in the depths of REM sleep and still feel how ecstatic he was to be in Paris.

I was willing to bet that all of Paris was aware of Armin’s joy at this point. The attendants had barely managed to open the plane door before he went flying out of it, and he turned into a jumping bean in the limo on our way to the hotel. It was like he had a case of springs hidden in his ass and they were finally getting loose. At least that’s what Levi had muttered to me as I did my best not to fall asleep on his shoulder. When he shook me awake about twenty minutes later, I knew I had failed.

That wasn’t surprising, of course. I had spent the remainder of the flight trying to hide the fact that I was emotionally distressed. Erwin had returned to his seat long before Levi came back to join me, and when he finally did he was holding two drinks in his hands. I was grateful for the drink up until the point that I realized it was nothing but cranberry juice. Not that I expected him to give me alcohol, but the thought of having anything that would calm my nerves was something I desperately needed. Still, I didn’t want to push for something he didn’t offer.

I was a jittery wreck when we finally landed, although I managed to hide it well enough throughout the flight. I passed the time by talking to Levi, Farlan and Isabel about their favorite things in France. I tried to keep my eyes off the front of the plane, where Armin and Erwin were locked in a constant and almost flirtatious discussion. Jean, surprisingly, stayed at Armin’s side throughout the flight and even joined in on their conversation after a while. It bothered me that he didn’t look as disgusted with them as I wanted him to be. He was Armin’s way out of a dangerous relationship, and yet he looked...
happy for them.

The only one who actually seemed to agree with me was Mikasa, who abandoned them after an hour and joined me at the back of the plane. She gave me a look that only I could understand and angled her head in the direction of Armin and Erwin. I sighed and shook my head, not bothering to keep the look of repulsion off my face. She frowned and flopped back in her chair, glancing over at Levi once before deciding to sleep the rest of the flight. She flipped her scarf over her face to block out the sun, and any potential conversation as well.

By the time I finally crawled out of the car, my body was exhausted down to the bones. I wasn’t even sure my muscles knew they had a purpose anymore, and I relied on leaning into Levi to make it to our room. Somewhere in that short trip I remember hearing Armin gush about the architecture, but I couldn’t get my mind to focus. I could barely recall escaping into the strong warmth of Levi’s arms when he finally held me in our bed. His lips had brushed against my forehead and I remember him chuckling softly as he told me to sleep. Which I had been only too willing to do.

“Eereeeeeen!”

Armin drew out my name as he tugged on the sheets, pulling me out of yet another dream. I grunted in response and tried to roll over, but his hand caught my shoulder and kept me from escaping. He huffed and pushed me onto my back, pressing his hands down on my shoulders as if that would prevent me from moving. As if I actually had enough energy to move at all.

“Ugh… do whatever you want to me, just let me sleep,” I mumbled, throwing my head to the side and exposing my neck as if I were giving in to some kind of animal.

“What?” Armin practically squeaked in embarrassment. I could see his blush in my mind’s eye and I had to hide a smirk.

“If I promise not to, will you let me sleep?”

“You’ve been sleeping for over a day,” Armin informed me, his voice tinged with annoyance. “You’re going to miss all of Paris if you don’t wake up soon.”

My brow furrowed as I tried to focus on his words, my mind slowly coming back to me. I could have sworn I’d just fallen asleep in Levi’s arms moments ago. It wasn’t possible that an entire day had passed. It was probably just Armin’s attempt to get me out of bed as soon as possible. But then again…

My arm shot out and brushed the area where Levi’s body had been, finding nothing but the silk sheet. “Where’s Levi?”

“He and Erwin had a meeting to go to this morning,” Armin replied, flopping down next to me. He was starting to give up. “You were still asleep when he came back and he didn’t want to bother you. I’m pretty sure he went out with Isabel and Farlan.”

I sighed and rolled over to snatch my phone from the nightstand, taking one look at the screen before groaning. “Oh, shit. You were serious.”

“Why would I lie?” Armin frowned.

“Because you want me to go places with you,” I answered with the obvious, dropping my phone back onto the nightstand. Even with all the sleep I’d managed to get, sitting up seemed like the biggest challenge of my life.
“Well, if you were listening,” Armin pointed out, “You would have heard me say that I’m going to those places with Erwin.”

“What?” I cried out as I snapped up in bed. I turned quickly to stare at him with wide eyes, getting no more than a sheepish grin in response. “What the hell do you mean you’re going with Erwin?”

“Pretty much what it sounds like,” Armin replied as he raised an eyebrow. “Unless there’s some secret code I don’t know about.”

“Is it a date?” I blurted out.

“What? Oh, I…” Armin was suddenly much more flustered than I was happy with. “I don’t know. I mean, I guess? Maybe.”

“What about Jean?”

“What about him?” Armin frowned, folding his arms. “I’m not the one who invited him, you are.”

“I didn’t invite him,” I argued, “Levi did.”

Armin rolled his eyes before fixing me with a stare. “Why would Levi do that?”

“I don’t know,” I groaned. It was pretty much the truth. “To piss off Erwin, I guess.”

“Yea, well, I’d say it worked like a charm.”

My eyes narrowed and I felt a sudden suspicion rise in me. They had been talking for hours, so it was possible the topic had come up. “Did he say something?”

“Not really, no,” Armin shrugged. “He didn’t have to, though. I could tell by the look on his face when Jean got on the plane. He wasn’t happy.”

That was the understatement of the year.

“Well, let me get ready,” I said as I tugged off the sheets, “I’m gonna go with.”

“No, no,” Armin waved his hands at me, “You stay here and rest. You still look exhausted.”

“Well, good to know I look like crap, but I’m still going,” I replied, trying my best not to sway as I stood up. “Besides, you made it sound interesting. I want to go to the loo.”

“Eren!” Armin spoke my name through a laugh, his bright blue eyes filled with mirth. “The loo is a bathroom. The Louvre is a museum.”

“Well, fine, whatever. I want to go there, too.”

“Levi’s going to be back soon,” Armin hedged, glancing over at the door. “Don’t you want to see him?”

Armin must have been desperate to be playing a card like that. The fact that he wanted to be alone with Erwin so badly made me want to prevent it from happening that much more. Of course, I had to remember that there was Erwin’s threat hanging over my head now. If I continued to interfere with them from this point, it wouldn’t be long until he unraveled my own relationship. How far was I willing to go to keep Armin away from him, and why was I doing it in the first place? Was it worth the risk I was taking?
A movement caught my eye and I noticed Mikasa walking past through the crack of the door. Armin must have left it open when he came into my room, and Mikasa was probably in the apartment as back up just in case Armin couldn’t wake me. Which was unnecessary now, but I had a new use for her that I was sure we could both agree on.

“Fine,” I sighed dejectedly and flopped back into the mound of pillows behind me. “Go and have your romantic date with the middle-aged man.”

“He’s not middle-aged,” Armin protested, but I could tell he wasn’t upset. If anything he was thrilled to have my permission.

“He’s not far from it,” I smirked, angling my head to the side.

“You know, you’re really starting to look like Levi,” Armin commented, eyeing me with an amused stare, “With your mannerisms and all. You might be spending too much time together.”

“Oh, I agree,” I teased, “I’ll take a break and go with you instead.”

Armin’s eyes widened when he realized he’d set his own trap. He shook his head quickly and flushed. “On second thought, I think you could really use the day together. Especially after you slept half the trip away.”

I rolled my eyes and pointed at the door. “Go. Have fun. Before I change my mind.”

To say that Armin smiled was an understatement. He beamed from ear to ear and moved across the bed to throw his arms around me in a crushing hug. “Thank you for trusting me. Really, Eren, thank you.”

Well, didn’t that make me feel like a piece of shit.

I hugged him tight and tried to keep my expression as guilt-free as possible when he finally pulled away. It wasn’t as easy as I hoped, but if he suspected anything he didn’t show it at all. I watched him walk out the door and when it was spread wide open, I noticed Mikasa lingering in the hall. I caught her eye and gestured quickly for her to join me and to close the door.

“You look like you’re plotting something, Eren,” Mikasa frowned as she walked towards the bed, her eyes suspicious. “What are you up to?”

“What do you think of Erwin?”

“Is that the wall of flesh that was talking to Armin?” she asked, raising an eyebrow. When I nodded, she rolled her eyes. “I’m not his biggest fan. But I guess he’s not the worst thing in the world.”

“He’s too old for him.”

“Well yea, it’s like watching Daddy Warbucks hit on Annie,” Mikasa muttered, glancing over her shoulder to check on the door. “But what can we do about it?”

“We can try to keep them apart,” I suggested.

Mikasa frowned and turned her attention back to me. “Eren, I don’t exactly approve of Levi either, but I’m not about to tell you to break up with him. Armin’s a big boy. He can make his own decisions.”

“What do you mean you don’t approve of Levi?”
“Maybe approve isn’t the right word,” Mikasa murmured, looking down between us. “He’s just not what I would have expected for you, and I don’t just mean because he’s a boy. Levi’s got a dominant personality and so do you. At least you used to. I’m worried he’s going to take that away from you. I’m scared that you’ll lose yourself by staying with him.”

“I’m not going to lose myself,” I assured her. I might have been angry if she didn’t look so genuine. “If anything, I’ve found out more about myself by being with him. I’m happy with him, Mikasa. I really am.”

“And I trust you to know that,” she shrugged, “And you should trust Armin, too.”

“Armin doesn’t know what he’s doing.”

Mikasa rolled her eyes and let a sigh rush through her teeth. “Listen, I’m not going to help you piss off Armin if that’s what you’re trying to do. He’s as much my brother as you are, adopted or not. If this is what he wants, then let him have it. If it turns out to be a mistake, then help him pick up the pieces when it’s done.”

“I don’t want to see him get hurt,” I argued, “I want to keep it from getting to that point. I—“

“News flash, Eren,” she interrupted me, flicking her finger against my forehead. “Armin’s human and he’s going to get hurt. Unless you’re planning to wrap him in bubble wrap for the rest of his life, you’re going to have to deal with that.”

I rubbed my forehead and tried my best not to glare at her, but by the look on her face I could tell I wasn’t doing a great job. I sighed. “Can you do one thing for me?”

“If it involves ruining Armin’s relationship, then no.” Mikasa took a seat on the bed beside me and folded her legs in to sit with them crossed. “If it’s anything else, then maybe.”

I rolled my eyes and didn’t bother to stop the smile that took over my mouth. I had missed her so fucking much it hurt.

“It’s not directly ruining his relationship,” I hedged.

She fixed me with a stare that clearly said she was done with my shit and raised an eyebrow. “Because that’s supposed to get me to hop on board? I think maybe you missed my point. You know, the one about me not fucking with his relationship. At all. Directly or indirectly.”

“Well, you never said indirectly,” I pointed out.

Mikasa snagged one of the pillows and whipped it at me. “Well, I’m saying it now, jackass.”

I grinned as I caught it, stuffing it behind my head. “It’s not like I’m asking you to do something awful. I just want you to tag along with him.”

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“Why would you want that?”

I knew better than to mention that she would be cutting in on Armin’s date. If she had any idea those two were planning a romantic tour around Paris, she’d never agree to go with.

“Because he’s missed you as much as I have.”

It wasn’t really a lie at all. Armin had missed her a great deal, and I knew that he was craving her company. He just wouldn’t want it right now. Still, if Mikasa asked to join them on their little
excursion, Armin wouldn’t be able to say no. I was banking on that fact. It might have been a little underhanded, but I wasn’t willing to drop Armin into the hands of a predator. I didn’t trust Erwin and I didn’t want to see Armin get hurt by this mistake.

“How is that going to indirectly hurt their relationship?” Mikasa asked, her brow furrowing.

“It won’t really,” I lied through my teeth, “I was just teasing with that part.”

Mikasa’s eyes were full of suspicion as she stared at me, scanning my expression for any hint that I was lying. “Fine. I’ll ask to go with, but I’m not going to push it if he says no.”

I shrugged as casually as I could, trying to seem indifferent, “Sounds good to me.”

Mikasa pursed her lips as she watched me for a moment more, her gaze speculative. I knew she could see the lie hiding in my eyes, but at the same time she wasn’t trying to call me on it. Either she wouldn’t actually talk to Armin at all, or she would genuinely try simply because I seemed so concerned. I could only hope that she would choose the latter.

“You better hope he doesn’t hate you for this, Eren,” she whispered at last.

I felt fear race through my veins like cold ice as the possibility that Armin could ever hate me sunk in. I was only trying to protect him, but there was a chance he would never see it that way. I started to wonder if letting him have this horrible mistake would be the best choice in the end. But even with the thoughts rushing through my mind, I couldn’t bring myself to stop Mikasa as she walked out the door. I sat on my bed in silence and tried to will myself to go after her, but I gave up when I heard the apartment door shut.

I groaned and thrust my face into my hands, pressing my palms flat against my eyes as my fingers twisted into my hair. I muttered a slew of curses, most of them directed at myself but a few choice ones meant especially for Erwin. That fucker was destroying everything and I didn’t even know if I should try to stop him anymore. Fighting it seemed pointless and turned out to be even more painful in the end.

“Stupid fucking…” I muttered in a low growl.

“Do you always speak to yourself, Jaeger?”

I jerked my hands away from my face and stared at Jean with wide eyes. How the fuck did he get in here?

“I mean, I can’t say that I’m surprised,” he continued, “You always did seem like you were off your rocker.”

“Why are you in my room?” I snapped, not bothering to hide my annoyance. This man would forever piss me off, I was sure of it. “Did you sneak in with Mikasa, or are you just some kind of genie that gets summoned to exactly where you’re not wanted?”

“Probably that second one,” he replied as he walked into the room. “Since I still don’t know why I’m even here.”

“If you don’t know why you came in my room in the first place, then why don’t you just leave?”

“Not your room, dumbass,” Jean remarked with a roll of his eyes. “I’m talking about Paris. Why did you invite me here? What was the point?”
“I didn’t invite you here,” I shot back, finally pushing out of my bed. I was determined to stay vertical this time. I had wasted too much of my vacation already. “Levi was the one who wanted you to come with.”

“That’s bullshit, and we both know it.”

Jean obviously wasn’t willing to drop the subject, and I wasn’t exactly thrilled to discuss it. Still, I didn’t mind talking about it if it got him out of my room quickly. Jean’s face was one of the last ones I wanted to stare at all day. As much as I wanted to use him as Armin’s escape, I still couldn’t bring myself to approve of him. He would always be the man that made Armin cry.

“Would you just tell me why I’m here?” he pressed. “I know that you two are together, and it’s not like I was invited on this business trip because I sorted the mail like a fucking pro. You had him invite me here for a reason, so what is it?”

“I figured you and Armin needed to talk,” I muttered with an indifferent shrug. I wasn’t about to tack on the fact that I was hoping they would get back together while they were here.

“Armin and I already talked,” Jean replied, a small frown tugging at his lips. “We talked a few days ago, and I think we sorted things out. So there’s no point to me being here just for that.”

I felt my eyebrows raise independent of me, unable to keep the surprise off my face. “Are you two together again?”

“No,” Jean answered a little too quickly and then sighed. He rubbed the back of his head and looked off in the direction of the balcony. “No, I don’t think that’s ever gonna happen again.”

“Don’t you still love him?”

“Well, yea. Of course I do, Jaeger,” Jean snapped back, fixing me with a small glare. “Not that I wanna get all touchy feely around you, but I’m always going to love Armin. I can’t change that, and I don’t want to.”

“Then why can’t you work it out?” I pushed. This asshole was my last hope, and it wasn’t working out at all.

“Because we both want different things,” Jean shrugged, “I love Armin, I really do. But I also love Marco. To be honest, I think I always have.”

I felt disgust take over my features and I turned away from him, grabbing the doors to the balcony and stepping out. My breath caught in my throat, momentarily taken away by the picturesque scene that was surrounding me. The balcony was enclosed by white marble carved into the most captivating designs. Potted plants holding various flowers decorated every corner, accented by bright green vines that weaved around the border.

But as beautiful as the balcony was, it didn’t compare to the sight of the Eiffel Tower standing proud in the distance. It made me feel as if I were experiencing the world through someone else’s eyes, as if I couldn’t possibly be there myself. It all felt so real that I had to assume it was imaginary. Two days ago, I had been staring at the familiar architecture of New York and now I was immersed in a land that was so foreign I could barely see it as real.

“Armin already knows how I feel, Eren,” Jean spoke from behind me. I tried to ignore the fact that he was there at all and leaned against the balcony to enjoy the view. He sighed and I heard his footsteps as he walked up to join me, leaning against the balcony as well.
“You were crying on the phone with him,” I muttered at last, “Weren’t you trying to get him to take you back?”

“No,” Jean spoke softly as he stared ahead of us. “I mean, at first I wanted to. That was all I wanted in the beginning, but he didn’t give me the time of day. Not that I blame him after what I did.”

“So what changed?”

“I was with Marco,” he said simply, and I caught him rolling his shoulders out of the corner of my eye. “And it actually felt right this time. After a while, I realized I couldn’t just go back to the way things were. He’s the one I want to spend my life with.”

I tried to keep the sneer off my face, but I didn’t manage. “Then why would you run crying to Armin? What was the point of that?”

“Because even if I don’t want him that way, it doesn’t mean I don’t want him at all.”

“He’s not going to be your fuck toy!” I snapped, finally turning to him with rage in my eyes.

Jean stared at me with a raised eyebrow, “Slow your roll, Jaeger. I didn’t mean it that way. I just meant that I want him in my life.”

“As what?” I scoffed, “A friend?”

“Is that so hard to imagine?” he asked, eyeing me closely, “You’re his best friend, so you should understand. Armin’s not the kind of person you want to live without. At least I don’t.”

I stared at him for a long moment and then looked away, my jaw tight. “You’re stupid for not wanting him.”

“Yea, I probably am,” Jean admitted, turning his attention back out to the city. “But I’m not going to hurt him again by trying for something that I know won’t work.”

“He’s interested in Erwin,” I blurted out, my hands clenching into fists as I pressed them against the white marble.

“I kinda got that feeling,” Jean murmured, but he didn’t sound upset like I wanted him to. “And I’m hoping it’s not a mistake. Who knows, maybe Erwin will actually be good to him.”

“Or he’ll break his heart and ruin his life.”

“That’s not your choice to make,” Jean shrugged and then pushed back from the balcony. “And you know what? It’s not mine either. It’s his.”

I turned to face him, my hands still clenched tight. “He’s making the wrong choice.”

“That’s not for you to decide,” Jean shot back, turning to press his finger against my chest. “Let him make his mistake if he wants to. If it’s even a mistake at all. Armin’s a smart kid and he deserves whatever happiness he wants. Don’t you dare try to take that choice away from him.”

Jean turned away and walked back into the apartment, and I didn’t bother to follow him. I heard the door slam shut and let a sigh rush through my teeth, closing my eyes and resting my forehead against the cool marble of the balcony. None of this had gone as planned, but I wasn’t surprised by that anymore. I thought I had allies in Jean and Mikasa, but everywhere I turned it seemed like everyone was telling me to let this happen. Either they were all indifferent to Armin’s pain or I really was
being a hard ass about this whole thing.

Maybe I should just let him go. But how could I bring myself to do that?

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“Does anything excite you, brat?”

I glanced over at Levi and smirked, “Do you count?”

He rolled his eyes and folded his arms, continuing to walk at my side. “I’m serious, kid. I practically had to drag you out of the apartment to get you to see anything.”

It was true. After Jean left, I stayed out on the balcony and drank in all of the sights around me. Levi returned about twenty minutes later and joined me outside, circling his arms around my waist and telling me about the day he’d had. It was so comfortable that when he finally asked me what I wanted to do with the rest of the day, I had no answer for him. I was more than happy to stay inside and break in the bed with him, but he wasn’t going to have that.

“You can’t come to Paris and not see Paris,” Levi drew my attention back to him by repeating the same words he had said to me up in the hotel hours ago. He looked at me and frowned, “And you’re not going to see Paris if you keep sulking around like that.”

“I’m not sulking,” I muttered defensively. “I’m just not into this stuff. History and sightseeing is Armin’s thing. He’s probably going to be up at the ass crack of dawn every morning just so he doesn’t miss anything.”

“That’s not a bad thing,” Levi countered, “How often are you in Paris, after all?”

“A lot more if I’m with you,” I pointed out.

“You think I’m going to drag your ass back here just so you can sit in the hotel again?” he asked, raising a brow, “Because you’re about to pretty fucking surprised, kid.”

I groaned and ran a hand down my face, “But we already went everywhere. We saw the Eiffel Tower and the Luge…”

“Luge is a winter sport, brat. The Louvre is a museum. How do you keep getting this mixed up?”

“It’s not my fault I’m not good at French.”

“Oh?” Levi grabbed my shirt and yanked me close, a smirk teasing his lips as they brushed against my ear, “Alors laissez-moi t’apprendre à parler français, mon amour…”

My knees went weak and my cheeks heated to a bright shade of red as my heart started to pound in my chest. I made some intelligible noise with my mouth that couldn’t pass as English and definitely wasn’t French. Levi chuckled softly, the sound low and deep with his lips still so close to my ear. He released the front of my shirt and pulled back, pausing only long enough to take my hand before he started walking again.

“So, what does interest you, then?” he asked as we walked past a shop that had little bakery treats lined up in the window.

“That,” I joked, pointing at one that looked like a tiny breaded swan held together with cream.

Levi glanced in the window and smirked, “That’s one of my favorites, actually. It’s called a Choux
pastry. Do you want one?”

I opened my mouth to agree and then stopped myself, realizing something. “I know what I want.”

Levi watched me with an unamused expression and frowned. “Is this supposed to be a guessing game, kid? Because I’ll buy you the whole fucking shop if you want. You don’t have to pick one.”

“No,” I shook my head, laughing softly. “I want the pastry, too. I just realized what I want to do while we’re here. I know what I want to see with you.”

“And what’s that?”

“I want to see you,” I said simply, trying to keep the blush out of my cheeks. I was more than aware of how cheesy that sounded, but I didn’t care. “I want to see all the things that you love about France. Not the big things that everyone likes, but the things that matter to you. Places you like to go, or food you like to eat. That’s what I want to know about France.”

Levi stared at me and for a long moment he said nothing at all. Then he cleared his throat and shook his head, touching the scarf I had given him. The one he never left without. “You really know what to say to catch me off guard, kid.”

“I didn’t mean to…”

“It’s a compliment,” he rolled his eyes and then looked up at me. “Fine. Tomorrow I’ll take you to my favorite place. It’s not exactly in Paris, but it’s close enough.”

I felt my heart hammering in my chest, but I kept the ecstatic joy to myself. We went inside the shop and Levi bought two of the same pastry, offering one to me as we stepped back out onto the street.

We walked back home in a comfortable silence, my arm wrapped firmly around Levi’s waist. He leaned into me and spoke occasionally of the sights that were familiar to him and entirely foreign to me. He had done the same earlier when we visited the popular tourist spots, but this time he was talking about the things that mattered to him. Little shops he enjoyed visiting or special places he had gone to as a boy while visiting with his mom.

I barely realized we had reached the hotel until we were walking up to it. The attendants held the doors open for us and we stepped inside the grand atrium. I hadn’t gotten the chance to appreciate the sight of it all until now, and now that it was nighttime it was even more spectacular. The lights of the chandelier were so bright that they filled the entire atmosphere with a sparkling wonder.

“Levi!”

Isabel shouted his name in a singsong voice that had me missing Hanji. She was sitting at a table near the bar, and I was shocked to find that Jean was with her. They both had half-finished drinks in front of them that made me wonder how long they had been there.

“Maggie,” Levi greeted her as we walked up to the table. He eyed Jean with speculative eyes, “And Jean… what are you doing here?”

“I remember being invited by you,” Jean smirked, lifting up his glass.

“Not one of my better choices,” Levi shot back, returning his attention to Isabel, “Where’s Farlan?”

Even I caught the underlying question in Levi’s comment. He wanted to know why she was wasting her time with Jean. Not that I could blame him, but I knew there was no harm in it. Everyone who
went to school with Jean had the vivid memory of our first Health class where he pushed away the picture of the female body and cried out, “Ew! No!”

I bit back a smirk and leaned into Levi, looking to the side to eye the elevators. I had been aching to get him up to the room and into our bed for the past few hours, and I wasn’t thrilled with the idea of waiting any longer.

“Oh, Farlan? He went out with Mikasa.”

“He what?” I snapped, turning my head so quickly that I knocked myself off balance. I swayed in place as my mind fought to keep up. “When? Why? Why is she with him?”

“I don’t know,” Isabel shrugged and then fixed me with a wide grin, wagging her eyebrows, “But I kind of got the feeling they were into each other.”

“Oh no,” I groaned, pressing a hand to my forehead, “No, no. Please tell me Armin at least went with them.”

“Armin?” Isabel blinked and pointed in the direction of the elevators, “He went up with Erwin about an hour ago now. They were looking pretty cozy together.”

All of the blood drained from my face and I pulled away from Levi before I even realized I was moving. I started towards the elevator with a determined stride, knowing exactly what I wanted to do and how stupid it was. Pointless, even. Erwin wouldn’t need an hour to get into Armin’s pants, and by the time I got there I would probably be walking in on their third round.

But that wasn’t going to stop me.

“Eren!” Levi caught me by the arm and spun me to around to face him. His eyes went wide when he saw my expression and he faltered for a moment, “Eren, you need to calm down.”

“He’s taking advantage of him!”

“Armin’s as old as you are, and he knows what he’s doing,” Levi pressed, keeping his grip on my arm. “Erwin’s not going to force him to do anything he doesn’t want to do.”

“He’ll make him think he wants to do it,” I shot back quickly. “He’ll manipulate him into thinking he wants it.”

“You know I’m not Erwin’s biggest fan, and I’m not about to waste my breath defending him when he doesn’t need it. But Eren, look at me.” Levi grabbed a hold of my chin and held my stare. “He’s not going to manipulate him. Erwin doesn’t do that. If Armin does anything with him, it’s because it’s what he wants and nothing else. Do you understand me? He’s not going to hurt your friend.”

“You’re just saying that so he’ll fuck him instead of me,” I snapped, ripping my arm out of his grip. Levi stared at me with a mixture of anger and shock on his features. “You just want to use him to finish your stupid, fucking revenge game! Well, I won’t let you hurt him like that!”

“Eren,” Levi’s voice was a soft warning, and it was obvious his anger was barely under control. He stood there trembling; his fists clenched tight at his sides as he took in a slow breath and let it out through his teeth. He closed his eyes and continued in the same dangerously soft voice. “Go to our room and wait for me there. We need to talk.”

I punched the button for the elevator and was grateful when the doors immediately swung open. I stepped inside and turned to glare at him, my voice shaking as I managed the words, “I won’t be
there. I’m going to get him out.”

Before the elevator doors slid shut, I saw pain fill Levi’s eyes and he turned away from me. Then I was alone, in this tiny unfamiliar box. I shook so hard that my legs could no longer hold me up on their own and I had to lean against the panel for support. I stared at the buttons for the various floors, knowing Erwin’s was one above mine. My finger hovered over the button, but my mind kept me from pressing it.

I hurt Levi. I said words that I didn’t even believe. I accused him of things I knew he would never do. The pain I saw in his eyes was all because of me, and if I continued down this path I would only make it worse. Part of me wanted to rush up there and save Armin, but the rest of me was wondering if this struggle was even worth it anymore. Maybe he really was happy. Maybe I was risking my own relationship over nothing at all. I could be destroying myself, and Armin in the process. I could destroy Levi, too, and I knew I didn’t want that.

But could I really stop myself now?

I shut my eyes tightly and took a deep breath.

And pushed down on the button.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

YAAAAAY! The Winmin chapter is here! ^___^ I really hope everyone enjoys this one - I'm excited to hear what you all think of it.

For those of you who are NOT Winmin shippers, Armin's POV is essential to the plot and there are only a few little Winminny moments in it. However, Erwin's POV is very Winmin-oriented (and of the smutty variety). If you do not want to read that part, please feel free to skip it - it is not essential to the storyline.

Oh! And a HUGE THANK YOU to blaqmarquet, ereri-amazing, arseniks (TWICE), and mindxcrash (who is one of my absolute favorite cosplayers and is planning a cosplay for The Intern!) Yes, I have been fangirling for the past few days. And will continue to do so. XD

Thank you all so much for your comments! Everyone seems thoroughly pissed off at Eren at the moment, but the boy will (hopefully) learn in time.

Please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr to let me know what you thought about the chapter update! ^___^ If you're not already following me on tumblr and would like to do so, you can find me at lootibles.

ENJOY!

Armin

Three sharp raps on the door.

“It’s open, Mikasa,” I called, a smile tugging at the corners of my mouth. I knew it had to be her, of course. Eren would have tried to come barreling into the room before he knew whether or not the door was locked, and Jean’s knock had been nothing but timid since we started talking again. Not that he’d really bothered to visit me much since we landed in Paris; it seemed to be an unspoken agreement that I wasn’t ready for a close friendship just yet.

Mikasa opened the door and fixed me with a perplexed stare, “Don’t the doors lock automatically?”

I pointed at the little brown stopper I had nudged into the corner of the door, “I wasn’t sure if Eren was going to try to follow me down here, so I figured I’d save him the trouble of running headfirst into a locked door.”

Mikasa rolled her eyes as she stepped inside the room, kicking the doorstop away as she did so. “I don’t think you have to worry about that one. I’m pretty sure he sent me here in his place.”

I took a deep breath and returned my attention back to the previous task of fretting over my outfit. As much as I hated to admit it, I wanted to look good for today’s trip. I was going to be alone with Erwin, the company’s president, so I had to make sure I dressed to impress. At least that was what I kept telling myself. I’d actually said it so many times already that I was almost starting to believe it.
I could have been convinced if it weren’t for the pesky voice in my head reminding me that I was doing this for the man and not the title.

“So,” I began with a sigh, glancing away from the mirror to look over at her, “What did Eren send you here to do?”

“He wanted me to ask if I could go with you today,” she stated warily, watching my expression.

I groaned and ran a hand down my face before I could stop myself from reacting, “Why am I not surprised?”

Of course he would ask that. Why wouldn’t he ask that? It wasn’t like he was actually planning to trust me, even if I thought he was going to. I had been ready to get down on my knees and beg for some freedom or leniency today, and he had duped me just long enough to send down the one person I wasn’t going to reject. Because how could I possibly reject the best friend I hadn’t seen in months?

“Okay, so I’m going to take that as a no,” Mikasa spoke up, filling the silence.

“No,” I shook my head quickly and waved one hand in front of myself. My other hand was still occupying my face because I knew I couldn’t get through any of this with a straight expression. Not with Mikasa. “No, I’d really like you to go with, actually. I haven’t gotten to spend any time with you.”

“You spent part of the plane ride with me,” she pointed out.

“Until you ran off to join Eren,” I sighed, still keeping my hand in its place. I couldn’t ignore the crushing disappointment I was feeling right now.

“No offense, but watching you snuggle Captain America wasn’t my idea of an in-flight movie,” Mikasa teased. “Now will you take your damn hand off your face? It feels weird talking to you like this.”

My hand was now partially hiding the blush that had taken over my face, but I knew she could see it anyway. Sighing through my teeth, I pushed my hand through my hair and turned back to the mirror. “Captain America will be going with us, just so you know.”

“Oh, I know,” Mikasa replied, “Why do you think Eren wanted me to go with in the first place?”

“To be my babysitter,” I muttered, fidgeting with my long grey sweater.

“I think I’d be more like a bodyguard,” Mikasa admitted, “I don’t think Eren wants me to watch what you do. He’s expecting me to break the beefcake’s hands if he tries to touch you.”

“Of course that’s what Eren would want,” I sighed, pausing to grab a black sleeveless cardigan from my suitcase. “Because Erwin touching me would be the worst thing in the world.”

“It might be to Eren.”

“Yea, well Eren’s not me,” I shot back, “Eren has a happy relationship, and he needs to keep his nose out of mine.”

Mikasa stared at me with surprise in her eyes, silent for a long moment as the words sunk in. I looked away from her and tried to distract myself by trying on the cardigan, but I couldn’t shake the sudden wave of shame that had come over me. I’d been snapping at Eren more and more, both verbally and
in my mind, and I hated it. Eren and I rarely fought and even when we did it was always over something stupid that didn’t last an hour. This, however, had lasted for days.

I was starting to miss my best friend.

“Do we need to talk about this?” Mikasa finally asked, her expression guarded. “It’s not like I want cut in on whatever’s going on between you two. I’m sure you both can handle this. It’s just that I’ve never seen you two act this tense before. At least not with each other.”

“I don’t know what’s going on,” I admitted, “With myself or him.”

“Well, what are you two fighting about? I mean obviously it has something to do with big, blonde, and handsome, but why? It’s not like Eren’s interested in him.”

“Oh, I’d say he’s the opposite of interested in him,” I informed her, snagging a thin black scarf and wrapping it twice around my neck. “That’s part of the problem, actually. He hates him so much that he doesn’t want to see me with him. Even if it’s what I want.”

“Is it?”

I let a sigh rush out of my mouth and shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe?”

Mikasa raised a brow and smirked, “Way to sound sure of yourself.”

“I’m not sure of myself at all,” I muttered, fidgeting with my hair. “Which is driving me nuts, because I always have a plan in mind. But I don’t know with this guy. I mean I’m attracted to him. Really, really attracted to him, actually. But I don’t know if I can trust him.”

“Because of the roses,” Mikasa filled in the blank, folding her arms. “I can’t say I blame you. That was a shitty move, whatever he was using it for.”

“He was using it to mark his territory,” I explained, “Meaning me. It was supposed to be a warning to Eren.”

“Eren’s not your boyfriend,” Mikasa snapped, “He doesn’t need to threaten him, and if he feels the need to do so then he can talk to me.”

I looked over at her and smiled, “Eren will be okay, don’t worry. Erwin doesn’t think he’s my boyfriend. He only sent the warning because apparently Eren is getting in the way of his attempts with me.”

“Which would be why Eren sent me here,” Mikasa confirmed with a nod. “One thing about that boy, he never gives up.”

“That’s because he never knows when to stop,” I pointed out. “Which isn’t a good thing in this scenario. He’s going to end up getting himself hurt, and I don’t want to see him losing something that’s so important to him.”

“What, Levi? Trust me, he’ll find another boyfriend.”

“I don’t think it’s going to be as simple as that,” I shook my head. “Their relationship has become so much more at this point. I just don’t think they’re aware of it yet.”

Mikasa pursed her lips and looked away, “So we pretty much have to keep Eren from fucking the whole thing up.”
“Essentially.”

“That’s not gonna be easy,” she muttered through a sigh. “But if he’s actually happy, then fine. I’ll do whatever it takes.”

“Well, what it’s going to take is getting Erwin off his ass.”

“Which means that blondie’s going to be focusing on yours instead, right?” Mikasa asked, fixing me with a knowing stare. The most I could do was nod. She sighed and rolled her eyes before looking away again. “I really hate the idea of you with him. Honestly, I don’t approve of either of the guys you two have chosen.”

“Mikasa…”

“Hey, it’s not like I’m going to change anything,” she said quickly, holding up her hands in defense. “It’s your life and your asshole. What goes into it is your business, not mine. If you’re happy, I’m happy.”

“Are you sure about that?” I pressed with a teasing smile, tilting my head. “Even if I’m interested in Captain America?”

“Honey, you could be interested in Betty White and I’d support you.”

“Well, as tempting as that might be, I think she’s a little too old for me,” I smiled, “And you know, the whole girl thing and all.”

She laughed and rolled her eyes again, “Like I said, if you’re happy then I’m happy.”

I felt my cheeks flush as a wave of gratitude washed over me. I had to admit that it was nice to have some support in all of this, even if it came from a reluctant source. “Thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” she shrugged, waving her hand dismissively, “You know I’d do anything for either of you.”

“Right back atcha,” I grinned. “So… about today…”

“I think we’ve pretty much established that I’m not going with.”

I nodded and then took a deep, shaky breath, turning once more to look at the mirror. I was fully dressed now and there was no delaying this any further. No matter how nervous I was, I was determined to go up to his room and enjoy this day. Despite everything that had tried to stop it from happening, it had somehow worked out. I was actually going to have the day alone with him.

“Nervous?”

“Only a lot,” I admitted, trying to calm myself with another trembling breath. “Do I look okay?”

“You look amazing, Armin,” Mikasa said, drawing my attention to her at the use of my name. “He’d be a fool not to want you.”

I hated to think that was a possibility.

I hated it even more that I wanted him to want me.

“Armin, breathe,” she urged, her voice bordering on concerned. She took my hands and squeezed them tight. “You get to explore Paris, and he’s just your tour guide. Just keep telling yourself that.”
I nodded and gripped her hands a little tighter, drawing strength from the support while I could. “Okay, I’m ready. I’m good.”

“You’re always good, Armin,” she assured me, keeping a hold of one of my hands as we walked out the door.

I took a little extra time in pocketing my room key and checking the handle before finally turning to her. “I’ll see you later tonight?”

“Of course,” she confirmed, and then paused before adding in a teasing voice, “Unless you’re doing something else.”

My cheeks went the deepest shade of red as I watched her walk away, and I was still trying to get the color to leave my face when I stepped onto the elevator. I pressed my hands against my cheeks and took a slow breath, closing my eyes and focusing on the rush as the small compartment lifted me upwards. It was a short trip, and I found myself standing outside of Erwin’s room before I was ready.

Not that I would ever be ready.

I stood in front of the door, fidgeting as I tried to get up the courage to knock. Unfortunately, the longer I waited the more excuses my mind was able to come up with. He could hate my outfit and laugh at my poor attempt at fashion. He could decide he wasn’t interested in going with me at all. He might’ve found someone else he would rather spend his time with while he was here in Europe. Maybe he ran into Jean earlier today and decided he would rather be with him instead.

I had to admit that last one was ridiculous, even if it stung like a thousand knives. Of course my mind would come up with that considering I was still getting over the betrayal I’d experienced with Jean. We’d talked about it a great deal during the days leading up to the trip, and even though we’d both amicably decided to remain separate the fact that he was now pursuing a relationship with Marco was killing me on the inside. He had cheated on me with him and it wasn’t just sexual. There was no denying that he loved Marco more than he ever loved me.

Maybe it would always be that way. Maybe I would always be second best.

My heart leapt into my throat when the door suddenly opened and Erwin jerked to a stop in front of me. My mind went blank and I didn’t even realize I had lost my balance until after his strong hands were gripping my shoulders to keep me steady. Time seemed to slow down to a crawl and I could have sworn I heard every single beat of my heart as my eyes lifted to meet his. He stared down at me with an intelligent blue gaze, a sly smirk curving that perfect mouth as he raised one thick eyebrow.

“Did I surprise you?” His voice was so husky that it had to be deliberate. But even if it was, it worked.

I was hopeless now. I couldn’t even form words if I wanted to. I opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

“Well then,” he continued with breathy chuckle, “I guess we’ll just have to go with shocked into silence.”

I cleared my throat as if that would actually help me find the words I wanted to say. It didn’t, so I settle for a nod instead.

“Well, it’s not like Paris hasn’t seen mimes before so I’m sure we’ll get around just fine,” he teased as he stepped out of the room. He paused to check the lock and then snaked an arm around my waist, “Besides, I’d like the chance to be your guide.”
I tried to keep my expression as neutral as possible despite the fact that I was a flurry of emotions on the inside. Part of me was thrilled to be in his arms, and yet at the same time I felt almost indignant that he assumed he had the right to touch me at all. Of course, it wasn’t like I would have refused him if he asked; I would have been happy to accept. I just wasn’t used to someone being so forward with me. It had been a rare occasion when Jean pulled me against him without any reason at all.

“I’m sorry,” Erwin spoke suddenly, his grip loosening on my waist before vanishing entirely, “I should ask before doing that, shouldn’t I?”

I couldn’t keep the surprise off my face when I looked up at him, “I wasn’t complaining.”

“You don’t have to with me,” he replied matter-of-factly, “It’s all in your body language. You were staring at my arm like it didn’t belong there, and maybe it doesn’t. At least not until you decide otherwise.”

I was dumbfounded, and angry because of it. No one caught me off guard like he did. No one had ever been able to read me as easily as he seemed to be able to. It made me feel like an open book that had never spread its pages before. Someone was looking in for the first time and I didn’t know how to handle it. Usually I was always five steps ahead, but with him I was fighting to keep up. He kept me on my toes and I both loved and hated it with a passion.

I took a deep breath and eyed his arm, which had been around me moments ago. I knew it would be so simple to just give in to what I wanted, and I could tell that he was just waiting for me to give him permission. But that was too easy, and there was no fun in that. I didn’t want to be someone that he could read. I wanted to surprise him at all costs, because I knew it was a challenge. And I rarely found a good challenge.

“If I decide otherwise, I’ll let you know.”

It was by sheer force of will that I was able to keep my voice from shaking, and it took a herculean effort to walk to the elevator without stumbling. I didn’t even check to see if he was following, because somehow I knew that he was. Because as strong as his pull was on me, it seemed that I was able to affect him as well. I had a lot of power if I was willing to exercise it, and I had to admit that it was a rush to act so confident in front of such an intimidating man.

I could only hope that I’d be able to keep it up.

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“It’s an incredible sight, isn’t it?” Erwin asked as we walked hand-in-hand towards the Eiffel Tower.

“I’m still having trouble convincing myself that I’m actually here,” I admitted, “It’s all so surreal.”

“It’s like that the first time,” Erwin replied, his thumb idly tracing the outside of mine. “No matter where you visit, it’s always so foreign. But you get used to it after a while.”

“I have no idea when I’ll be back here,” I shrugged, following along at his side. Letting him lead me and holding his hand were the two small things I’d given him since leaving the hotel. I was actually proud of myself. “It’s probably always going to be new to me.”

“It doesn’t have to be,” he offered, “You can come back here with me.”
“Are we back on that again?” I asked, glancing to him with a small, knowing smile.

We had somehow started a game of cat and mouse, and it seemed we were both winning. Once I had decided that I could actually control the situation, my confidence grew to the point that I was able to play with him. We had been teasing each other back and forth, each taking turns with suggestive words and little hints that our day in Paris could turn into something more. I had to admit, I wasn’t opposed to the idea.

I was comfortable with Erwin. I think deep down I knew that before agreeing to this little excursion, but having this time with him had made me certain of it. It had been weeks since I’d gone to his apartment and ended up in his lap with my lips on his, but rarely did a day pass when we didn’t talk. I was in his office every workday talking about everything that wasn’t work, and even on the weekends he usually found a way and reason to contact me. I knew so much about him now that it was hard to think of a time when I didn’t know him.

“It seems to be something we keep coming back to,” Erwin mused, “And yet you don’t want to talk about it.”

“Only because you’re so desperate to.”

“See, I knew you were a tease,” Erwin said with a soft laugh, “It just took you forever to show it. I’ve been waiting weeks for you to have some bite. What took so long?”

“I guess I didn’t know I had it in me.”

“Of course you do,” Erwin replied, his voice suddenly deep and serious. I met his eyes when he turned to look at me, “That’s why I like you, Armin. You’re incredibly smart and you’re not afraid to use that to your advantage.”

“Neither are you,” I shot back, “Which is why you did that to Eren.”

“I got bitched out by Levi for that,” he responded immediately. I was almost surprised that he didn’t try to make an excuse. “I hear Eren was pretty upset.”

“He practically had a break down,” I informed him, my voice growing cold. “You can’t do things like that to him. He’s insecure enough as it is, especially considering you’re Levi’s ex.”

“And yet that doesn’t seem to intimidate you.”

“You’re his ex for a reason,” I shrugged.

We came to a stop in front of the Eiffel Tower and I let silence wash over us as I stared up at it. I had seen it in hundreds of photos and movies, and I had always dreamed that I would see it in person. I just couldn’t convince myself that I was here now. It had been like that all day. I’d gaped at everything I saw, which meant that I’d spent most of the day with my mouth open. We had explored everything that we could get to, and yet I knew there would be plenty more to cover tomorrow. I didn’t think I would ever be able to get enough of this.

“I never meant to hurt Eren,” he broke the silence as he stared straight ahead. “I was just giving him a warning because he was trying to keep you from me.”

“You make it sound like I’m your possession.”

“You’re not,” he admitted, “But I’d like the chance to own you.”
I felt my mouth go dry and tried to clear my throat. “And what about Eren? Don’t you have something going on with him?”

“I think you know full and well what I have going on with him,” he replied, still staring at the tower, “And I think you know how badly it’s turning out.”

“You’re both doing it for Levi, right?”

“That’s the only reason we’re doing it,” he spoke matter-of-factly, “It’s not like either of us are interested in each other. We just know that Levi needs this to move on with his life.”

“So it’s all an act,” I confirmed, “You just need a convincing enough show with Eren to incriminate you, so that Levi can ultimately use it against you later.”

“Essentially,” Erwin shrugged, “Although to be convincing for Levi, we’ll actually have to have sex.”

I felt a sudden wave of jealousy crash over me as the air was forced from my lungs and my vision blurred. I hated the idea of Erwin doing anything with Eren, and I realized it wasn’t because I had an admitted crush on my friend. Erwin was mine. The possessive thought scared me, but I felt it all the way down into my bones. I didn’t want Eren to touch him. I didn’t want anyone to touch him. Not in the ways that I wanted to.

“Would it really make sense?” I bit out the words, hating the taste of them. “Having sex with Eren just to be convincing enough? Levi might want his revenge so much that he doesn’t even notice it’s not real.”

“Levi has an eye for detail. Trust me, he’ll notice.”

“His happiness means that much to you?” I couldn’t stop the question from leaving my mouth. It wasn’t that I was jealous, but I couldn’t understand why he was going to throw his whole life away. “He doesn’t just want you to lose your family, right? He wants to ruin you entirely, which means losing the company as well. He’ll make you give it up in the end.”

“I’m never going to give up the company,” Erwin answered quickly, his voice swift and resolute. “Because it’s not going to come to that. He’ll never push that far.”

“Are you sure that’s true?”

“I made a bad gamble once with his father,” Erwin spoke softly, “But I’m not wrong about this one. Once Levi thinks he’s destroyed my family, he’ll stop. He wants to hurt me, but he’s not about to take me out of his life to do it. Losing me from the company means losing me entirely, and that’s something he won’t do.”

It was still a risky gamble, even if Erwin didn’t see it that way. There was a chance that Levi could take this too far and make the information public. Eren wouldn’t be able to handle that kind of betrayal or the consequences that would follow. It would destroy him. He wasn’t strong enough for that.

But I was.

I couldn’t deny the fact that I wanted Erwin in more ways than I was willing to admit. I’d been drawn to him since the moment I saw him, and the pull had only gotten stronger with time. It wouldn’t even be a sacrifice to take this to the lengths that it needed to go. Granted, it was possible I’d be putting my head on the chopping block by risking public humiliation, but I was willing to do it
in Eren’s place. That’s what it came down to, after all. Either Eren would take the fall, or I could do it for him. I could save him from witnessing the end of his relationship and keep him from smearing his public name.

And I would. Even if it meant ruining my own reputation, I would do it. It wasn’t even a question of whether or not I was willing to risk everything for him. I already knew I would do anything for Eren.

“It’s romantic, isn’t it?” I whispered, finally breaking the silence.

“What is?”

“The Eiffel Tower,” I replied, my eyes remaining on the subject ahead of us. “It’s usually the first thing that comes to mind when people think about Paris, but it’s not for the history. They don’t think about its design or architecture, or whether or not it really is a work of art. Usually all they want is a romantic photo of a couple kissing in front of one of the most memorable structures in Paris.”

Erwin knew exactly what I was trying to do, but I knew he’d play along anyway. He wanted me too much to ignore the all too obvious hint I’d just thrown into the conversation.

“And is that what you want, Armin?” He spoke my name like it was a delicious sin. “Do you want me to kiss you here so you can have a picture of it?”

“I don’t need a picture,” I responded instantly, staring up at him as I wet my lips. Even if part of this was a game I still wanted it badly. “I just want to kiss you.”

That was all the incentive he needed. A pair of strong arms banded around my waist and my feet practically left the ground as he pulled my small frame against his firm chest. The air left my lungs in a rush and I knew I had no hope of taking another breath when his lips found mine. His probing tongue urged its way into my mouth and I welcomed it with a greedy moan, fisting my hands into his hair. For a brief moment I forgot where we were and what I was supposed to be doing. And I didn’t even care.

I wanted this so much that it couldn’t even be called manipulation. Of course, I wasn’t at that stage of the game yet. We would get there soon enough, but by the time we did he wouldn’t know I’d planned it all. It would happen seamlessly because I’d be using what was already there. There was a spark between us that had been growing since the moment we met, and I’d just decided to turn it into a wildfire. I was going to give into him, again and again. As many times as it took to get Levi what he needed. As many times as I had to in order to free Eren from all of this.

“I want you,” I gasped the words and hid a satisfied grin when his breath caught in his throat.

His lips parted from mine but his arms never left my waist. “Want me how?”

“You know how,” I replied as I searched his eyes. He was doing the same to me, but I knew he wouldn’t be able to see through my mask. Ultimately, I was doing this to take Eren’s place but that wasn’t the only reason. I wanted him more than I’d ever wanted anything before. There was an undeniable pull between us and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I would never be able to escape it. Eventually I would end up in his bed, and taking the plunge now meant helping Eren.

I could do this.

I wanted to.

I had to.
“Then let’s go back to my room.”

----------------------------------------------

Erwin

“Are you sure this is what you want?”

Armin stared up at me with his bright blue eyes and fidgeted on the sheets as he chewed at his lower lip. I suppressed a groan and urged myself to stay in place, which I had to admit was an incredible feat all its own. The little lip-biting trick was usually all it took to get me surging forward full speed ahead, but with him it was just too fucking innocent. He was actually considering my question, even as he wriggled those perfectly slender hips and slid his smooth ass against my sheets like some experienced whore.

I probably should have asked the question before getting him naked and in my bed. He was a scoop of perfection sitting on those sheets, and I couldn’t touch until he said otherwise. It was like waiting for the results of a diabetes test inside an ice cream shop.

“I’m sure,” he whispered, finally releasing his lip from the prison of his teeth. They were plump and red, with little marks that I wanted to replace with my own.

I tugged on the front of my belt and undid the buckle, letting it hit the floor with a heavy thud that made him jerk on the bed. He was nervous and trying his best to hide it, but that would never work with me. Over the years I had become very adept at understanding my partner’s needs, and I made sure to take it slow whenever I had a newcomer in my bed. I noticed everything about them, from the tiniest jumps to smallest gasps. They could hide nothing from me, and Armin would be no different.

“Relax yourself,” I murmured, eyeing his hips for a moment before meeting his gaze. He was already hardening and I hadn’t even touched him yet. It made me wonder what perverted thoughts were going on inside that intelligent little mind of his.

“I can’t help it,” he breathed, his gaze drifting down to the front of my pants. “I’ve been thinking about this for a long time.”

A deep, throaty chuckle left my lips and I decided to take my fair share of time with getting undressed. I rolled the zipper down and watched as he bit his lip once more, this time chewing in anticipation. It was exhilarating, to be honest. I couldn’t remember the last time I had a man stare at me as if I was some tasty treat. Most of my partners knew the routine by now, and foreplay had become a thing of the past. None of them stared at me as if they were doing it for the first time.

I let the weight of my jeans carry them to the floor and then gripped the front of my briefs, closing my hand around the stiffened member that would wait for no one. I gave it a firm stroke and watched as Armin’s lips parted, his breath catching on the way in. That was exactly what I wanted from him. The desire burning in his eyes was all I needed. He wanted this as badly as I did, and seeing the confirmation in his expression made me certain that I could continue.

“Oh my god,” he moaned, his arms going weak as he dropped back onto his elbows. His eyes were fixated on my thick cock, which I’d just freed from the confines of my thin black briefs. I gave it another good stroke and ran my thumb across the tip, smearing the small bit of moisture that was waiting for me there.
“See what you’ve done to me?” I spoke in a deep, husky whisper. “You’ve made me so hard it hurts.”

He chewed his lip again and stared at the heavy throb of my tip, watching it pulse before rasping, “I’m sorry…”

“Stop apologizing and tell me how you’re going to fix it.”

I tried to suppress the demanding edge of my voice, but it was impossible with him. There was something about the way he stared at me, so open and inviting, that made me want to claim him for more than just one night. I wanted to slap a collar around that beautifully pale neck and watch him crawl across the floor to me when I called for him. But I couldn’t do that right now. Not on our first night together when he was still so unsure. I didn’t want to scare him away, and that meant I would have to take things slow.

“How do you want me to fix it, master?”

This time it was my breath that hitched. I stared into those wide blue eyes; so deceptively innocent that one would never guess he had just asked such a thing. He was trying to play with me when he had no idea just how far I could take our little game. I felt a smirk tug at the corner of my mouth and my voice lowered an octave, carrying a dangerous warning that I was certain he would understand.

“When we play that game, you’ll call me Commander.”

Armin’s cheeks flushed bright red and a soft sound caught in the back of his throat as he stared at me. His mouth remained open and then he snapped it shut, jerking his head up and down in a quick little nod.

He was going to make a wonderful pet.

“Are you experienced?” I asked even though I knew the answer.

“Experienced?” he blinked at me once and then his eyebrows lifted with understanding. “Oh. Yea, Jean and I…”

“I don’t need to hear about what you did with him,” I cut him off. I was not at all thrilled with the idea of hearing about his prior experiences, especially when I knew they’d happened recently. “I plan to replace those memories soon enough anyway.”

Armin’s gaze fell to my hips before lifting to my eyes once more. “And you’re going to do that now?”

“Not without preparing you, first.”

His attention drifted over to the nightstand and he leaned in its direction. “Do you have lube? And condoms?”

“I have both,” I paused and then smirked, continuing in a husky purr, “But I don’t plan on using the lube.”

His eyes grew wide with fear and he slowly turned his head to stare at me. “I… I don’t think I can do that.”

“Calm down,” I spoke through a laugh, moving onto the bed and grabbing him by the hips. “It’s not like I’m going to slap a condom on my dick and thrust into you dry. I already told you I’m going to
prepare you first.”

My nails dug into the soft flesh of his hips and I jerked suddenly, pulling him forward until he was flat on his back with his ass held up by my hands. He let out a yelp of surprise and then stared up at me with the same wide eyes, a little bit of fear still lingering in his gaze.

“How are you going to do that without…” Armin trailed off as he stared at my mouth, watching as I deliberately licked my lips. “Oh.”

I chuckled softly, the sound low and deep as I turned my attention to the perfectly firm ass that would be mine for at least the next hour. And that was if I didn’t keep him in my room for the entire night. I had to admit that I was completely willing to chain him down to the bed if it meant I could explore his body to my satisfaction. I slid my fingers over the soft plump surface, digging my nails in as I gripped those irresistible mounds of flesh and spread them apart to reveal a molten pink puckered center.

I couldn’t resist him any longer.

My mouth found the way to his delicious little asshole as if it belonged there, and I skimmed the outside of his firm flesh and felt it contract beneath my probing tongue. A moan fell from his lips, tinged with surprise and even a hint of curiosity. His hips squirmed, almost instinctively as he tried to push forward into my waiting tongue. There was no denying that he was enjoying this and it was obvious that he wanted more.

I flattened my tongue against him and drew it across the puckered flesh in a long, slow lick. Sliding it back down, I paused to tease the area with a few quick pushes that hinted at where it would be going next. When he barely let out a muffled cry, I realized he was biting into his lip to prevent himself from making any sound. Without thinking, my hand struck hard and fast across his ass cheek and I heard his sharp inhale loud and clear.

“If you hold back with me, I’m going to try to make you scream,” I warned him, teasing his slick asshole with the tip of my finger. “You may or may not like that.”

“I’ll be too loud,” he moaned, “Everyone will hear.”

“Good,” I replied, smirking. “I want them to hear you. I want you screaming my name. I want every person in this goddamn hotel to know who’s fucking your tight little ass.”

I didn’t give him the time to respond; I didn’t have the patience to. I had been distracted from my goal and now I couldn’t be taken away from it. I split those perfect ass cheeks apart and plunged my tongue into the waiting center, feeling a moment of tight protest before it began to open up. I worked my tongue in and out of the tight heat, taking my time in licking little circles around the rim before plunging back in again.

He was loud now, as I wanted him to be. His hips squirmed to the point that I had to keep a tight grip on them to stop him from wriggling away. Soft little cries fell from his lips as his nails slid across the silk fabric of my sheets, trying to take purchase of anything that would hold him down.

And I was more than happy to oblige.

I pulled my tongue out of his ass and grabbed his waist, flipping him over quickly and using the smooth silk of the sheets to force him onto all fours. I thrust one finger into the slick heat of his body and began pumping it quickly until I was certain I could add another. I leaned over him and fumbled with one hand, removing a condom from the nightstand. I had put it there earlier in the vain hope that
I would actually manage to get this beautiful blonde into my bed, but I’d given myself no hope at the
time.

“E-Erwin,” his broken moan stuttered over my name as his hips squirmed back against me, urging
my fingers deeper. He was ready.

I slid my fingers out of him and watched his captivating asshole pulse as I rolled the pre-lubed
condom onto my stiff member. I couldn’t get into him fast enough. It took a great effort to manage
any words at all, and when I did my voice was nothing but a breathless demand.

“Grip the headboard tight and don’t let go.”

I watched his fingers curl around the black metal bars until his knuckles turned white with the
strength of his grip. He hung his head and squared his shoulders, the muscles in his back rolling with
the movement and reminding me how strong that slender body of his really was. His hips pressed
back into mine, as if to remind me of what we were doing, and he gasped.

“Make me feel it.”

The command in his voice caught me by surprise and I found my nails digging deeper into his hips
as if I had some instinctive need to comply. No one had ever ordered me to do anything, especially
not in the bedroom, but I wanted to obey this time. I was going to make him feel it all the way down
into his core. I wanted him to remember my body as if it were his own.

A sharp cry tore from Armin’s lips and accompanied my own as I thrust into the delicious heat of his
body. He was still slick and ready for me, but I felt his body protest nonetheless as it gripped me
tight. The air rushed out of my lungs and I growled, raking my nails down his back as I gave him a
fleeting moment to adjust to the sudden invasion. He whimpered around a second cry of pleasure and
shoved back against me, forcing me deeper.

“You demanding little…”

The words caught in my throat as he purposely squeezed the muscles of his ass around me, causing
me to forget what I’d wanted to say. It couldn’t have been as important as this.

My nails took purchase of his hips once more and I used a demanding jerk to pull him back against
me as I thrust forward. We were finding a rhythm now and the loud moans spilling from his lips
were exquisite, but I was craving far more than that. I curved my hips and rolled them purposely on
the next thrust, letting my cock brush against a spot I knew all too well. Satisfaction blazed hot in my
chest as he let out a scream, his head kicking back and his arms straining as he pulled on the
headboard.

“Louder,” I commanded, repeating the same thrust with a confident determination this time.

The scream that ripped from his throat echoed off the walls and I felt my cock give a hard jerk as it
was nearly pulled over the edge. A sharp cry left my own throat when he screamed again, the sounds
coming quicker now as our bodies moved in a rhythm that should have been foreign but was
somehow second nature. I felt the tension coiling in my core as each thrust became far more erratic,
driven purely by the urge to feel.

“Erwin!” Armin’s voice was raspy, a scream strangled around a desperate moan. “Oh god, Erwin!”

The rising pitch in his voice was more than enough to tell me that he was teetering over his edge. My
hand shot out and grabbed a hold of his throbbing member, stroking it as if it were my own. My
thumb teased the tip in quick little circles with each hard pump of my hand, feeling his pulse increase
as quickly as mine. My other hand held fast to his hips, nails digging in until they were peppered with blood.

A ragged scream tore from my throat, garbled around his name but forming no real word at all. I could hear him screaming for me, but the sound seemed so distant as my body gave into the release. My thick cock jerked inside him as he pulsed in my hand, his juices dripping off of my fingers and onto the silk sheets. His arms were trembling as he fought to keep a hold of the metal bars; still obeying the command I’d given him.

“You can let go now.”

He did, and I moved quickly to wrap my arms around him, pulling his body up until his back was pressed tight against my chest. We were both panting; fighting for some form of air as our minds slowly came back to us. I became faintly aware of the fact that I was still buried deep inside of him, and a small laugh parted my lips as I pressed them in a soft kiss against his shoulder.

“So,” I murmured softly, my voice breathless and husky, “Are you ready for round two?”
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

YAAAAAAY! Thursday update! ^___^

I'm so happy that most of you enjoyed the Winmin chapter! This chapter is back to our main boys, and it pretty much picks up right where it left off on Chapter 30.

Thank you so much to kidofmischief for posting the awesome gif set of The Corporal on tumblr! If you haven't seen the gifs yet, definitely check them out! ^___^

Oh, and thank you all so much for the comments you left for the Winmin chapter! ^_^ I really appreciate it and it's just so great to hear from all of you! To be honest, I'm really looking forward to hearing what you all think about this chapter. Although I fear what you're all going to say at the same time. XD

As always, feel free to leave comments on here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern'.

ENJOY! ^____^

What the fuck was I thinking?

That was the only thought running through my head as I pushed through the doors and out into the lobby. As I searched the space I realized that some hopeful part of me actually expected to find Levi still standing there, but he was already gone. Not that it really mattered. I'd already come out of that elevator with the plan to run blindly through the streets in search of him. Even if it took me all night, I was going to find him. And when I did, I was ready and willing to get on my knees and beg for his forgiveness. Not that I deserved it. Not when I'd been such an…

“Asshole!”

I spun in the direction of the voice and came face to face with the murderous eyes of Isabel. Her expression was pure rage and one of the most intimidating I'd ever seen, which was strange coming from a pint-sized girl sporting pigtails. But despite her small size, I was suddenly very aware of how easily she could crush my nut sack into oblivion and how happy she would be to do so. Given the circumstances, I might have actually agreed to the punishment if I weren’t so intent on finding Levi.

“Where is he?” I demanded.

She drew back in surprise and then her eyes narrowed. “Why the hell would I tell you that?”

“Because I’m his boyfriend,” I spat, the word tasting weird on my tongue for the first time. Could I even call him that anymore?

“You were his boyfriend,” she snapped, “But boyfriends don’t do shit like that. You accused him and left him in the middle of the lobby when he was only trying to help you. You treated him as less than a friend, when he’s supposed to be so much more than that.”
“I fucked up!” I yelled, the anger rising in me like a hot flame. A few people stopped and stared at me as if I had just grown three heads, but I couldn’t bring myself to care. Not when she’d just confirmed the one fear that was occupying my mind. I might have lost him after all.

“Yes, you did,” she responded coolly, ignoring the people around us. “You hurt him, and he deserves better than that. He deserves someone who is going to trust him.”

“I do trust him!” I snapped quickly, giving up on the effort of keeping my anger in check. I knew I had no hope of that right now. She was the only thing that was stopping me from leaving, and the only chance I had of finding him.

“No, you don’t. Everything you just did proves that you don’t.”

“But I do,” I insisted through gritted teeth. “I swear that I do. Just because I said one stupid thing doesn’t mean I don’t trust him. Haven’t you ever said anything stupid?”

“It’s wasn’t one stupid thing,” she shot back, ignoring my question. “You’ve said plenty of stupid shit that’s hurt him, and don’t think I don’t know about it. Just because there’s an ocean between us doesn’t mean we don’t talk every fucking day.”

I felt a tremor run through my body as the blood in my veins went ice cold, the room seeming to fall away completely as my mind tried to process that little fact. I’d done this more than once and it was ridiculous that I needed someone to remind me of it. Every single time I’d seen pain on his face, pain that I put there, was a moment that had been carved agonizingly deep into my mind. I was scarred at this point, and yet somehow I kept forgetting.

“What other things?” I whispered. I wanted it to be a yell, but that was all I could manage. It was as if the entire room had been cleared of oxygen and I could no longer breathe. I’d hurt him more than once.

“Don’t act stupid, Eren,” she sighed, shaking her head. “You should know the shit you’ve said better than anyone else. You’re acting like he’s been planning to leave or betray you all this time. Do you think that doesn’t hurt him? To know that you don’t trust him?”

“But I—”

“But don’t say that you do,” she cut me off, “When you have done nothing to prove it.”

I wanted desperately to say that she was wrong, but I knew that I couldn’t. I had proven time and again that I wasn’t secure in my relationship with Levi, and it had only gotten worse after the night Erwin sent the roses. Since then I’d barely been able to make it through a day when I didn’t doubt him in some way. And even though I didn’t vocalize most of my doubts, I knew they were still putting a strain on our relationship.

Maybe she was right. Maybe I didn’t trust him. But I still couldn’t get myself to agree with the thought. Not when I knew that all of my anger and doubts stemmed from the threat of the lie that was hanging over my head. It was ready to crush me and I knew that Erwin could cut the thread at any moment. He could ruin everything so quickly, and that was what made our relationship so fragile.

I couldn’t bring myself to trust in something that was bound to break.

But I had to try.

“Then let me prove it,” I whispered, searching her eyes, “Let me prove that I trust him.”
Isabel pursed her lips and folded her arms, watching me carefully as she considered my plea. After what seemed like forever she sighed and muttered, “I don’t like that you’ve hurt him this way.”

“Neither do I.”

“Then you need to stop,” she warned me, holding my stare with insistent eyes. “Because Levi doesn’t deserve this. He’s had so much pain in his life, and he doesn’t need anymore. Especially not from someone he cares about.”

“I’m not going to hurt him,” I promised, both to her and myself, “Not again. Levi means too much to me, and I can’t lose him. I don’t care what I have to do, I will find some way to fix this. I’ll prove to him that I trust him.”

“Prove to me that you deserve him,” she countered, pointing at me and narrowing her eyes, “That’s what I want you to prove, got it? And trust me, jackass, it’s a hell of a lot harder than proving anything to him.”

If I didn’t currently feel as if the world were crashing in around me, I might have actually smiled at that. Levi was lucky to have such caring friends, and I had to wonder why he didn’t just decide to live in Paris to stay close to them. He was choosing a life without them, and I couldn’t imagine doing it myself. It would be like putting an ocean between Armin and me.

“I’ll prove it to you,” I assured her, “Whatever it takes.”

“Fine,” she replied and then pointed in the direction of the doors leading to the streets. “He left when you got on the elevator. But lucky for you, I know him enough to know where he went.”

“Where?”

She snapped her fingers and then wagged one in a beckoning motion, “Give me your phone. You’ll get lost otherwise.”

She snagged it out of my hand when I offered it to her and brought up the map program, typing as she talked, “There’s a fountain nearby that he loves to go to. It’s his favorite place to be when he needs to get his mind off of something.”

I had to stop myself from running out the doors because I knew exactly where she was talking about. Levi had pointed to it earlier when we were walking the streets and mentioned that it was one of his favorite places to sit and people watch. I could pinpoint it exactly in my mind and I was almost confident that I’d be able to find it without my phone. At least during the day. It was nighttime now, and I was bound to get lost on the unfamiliar streets of Paris.

She spun the phone back around and tapped the screen, pointing to the address. “There.”

“Thanks,” I said quickly, taking the phone from her. It took all I had not to dash out the door, but I managed it because I needed her to understand how grateful I was. I knew it wasn’t easy for her to trust me, but she was doing it anyway. Coming from what was probably his best friend, it meant something. “Really, Isabel, thank you.”

She rolled her eyes and waved her hand at me, looking away as she spoke, “Hurry up and find him. Don’t make me regret it.”

I ran out the door without a second thought, my phone clutched tight in my hand with its screen still shining bright. It was tracking my location the whole time, but I only spared it quick glances as I made my way through the streets. There were still so many people walking around, enjoying the
glow of the city and the light show put on by the Eiffel Tower. It was possible that Mikasa was among them, walking side by side with Farlan, but I couldn’t search for her now.

Not when I was looking for him.

I stumbled across the sidewalk as I stared at the screen; trying to point myself into the direction it wanted me to go. It wasn’t far but it hadn’t been long since Levi left, so there was a good chance that he was still there. Of course, that was if he’d even gone there at all. I honestly didn’t know what I would do if I didn’t see him sitting at the fountain. I was willing to bet that he wouldn’t pick up the phone if I called, so it wasn’t like I could get a location from him. But that didn’t matter. I’d already decided that I was prepared to wander the streets for as long as it took.

Not that it took me very long.

Levi was sitting by the fountain; a lone figure outlined by flowing water and soft lights. Even from this distance, I knew that it was him. He was staring off at nothing with his hand clutched tight around the white scarf hanging from his neck. As I drew closer, I saw his lips move with words that didn’t carry over to me. His brow furrowed and his expression grew pained right before he shut his eyes, as if doing so would lock out the emotions he was feeling. He hung his head and I watched as his shoulders began to tremble, and I felt myself die inside.

“Levi?”

The word was only a whisper, but my voice was enough to carry it to him. His head snapped up and he turned to stare at me with wide eyes that glistened far more than they should. I had made him cry, and there was no escaping the guilt I felt from that knowledge. I’d been ruining everything and I wasn’t even sure I could fix it at this point. In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to take him into my arms and yet my legs were telling me to run.

Somehow they seemed to know that everything was ending.

“What are you doing here?” Levi spoke the words just loudly enough for me to hear him. His voice was cold and dismissive, as if he wasn’t interested in talking to me at all. Which he probably wasn’t.

“I didn’t do it,” I blurted out the first thing that came to my mind. “I didn’t go after Armin. After the elevator doors closed, I realized how stupid I was acting. I didn’t even go upstairs, Levi. I just went after you.”

“You wouldn’t be here if you’d gone after Armin,” Levi replied, stating it as a simple fact and nothing more. “Erwin wouldn’t have let you out of the room so easily.”

He was dismissing my explanation as if I was telling him boring facts that he already knew. And even if that was the case, he had never spoken to me in a way that made me feel like I was unimportant. Like I was wasting his time. But I felt that way now, and it terrified me. He was already shutting me out, before I’d even had the chance to explain.

“Levi, I…”

“But what would I care anyway, right?” Levi cut me off, leaning back as he fixed me with a cold stare. “I should be happy, according to you. Your little blond friend is fucking the brains out of Erwin, which means I get my way, doesn’t it? I can use that against him, even if it hurts you and Armin. Even if it ruins everything we have. Because that’s the type of person I am, right Eren?”

“Levi,” I tried not to let his name tremble on my lips, but it did, “I’m so sorry.”
He looked away from me and stared off into the distance, his jaw tightening. He remained silent for so long that I became certain he wasn’t going to talk at all. His fingers brushed against the scarf I’d given him and he clutched it once more, holding it tight as he swallowed. When he finally looked at me, his expression held more pain than I would ever want to see in it. Pain that I had put there.

“Why am I not enough for you?”

His voice trembled and I felt the ground open up beneath me. I’d never seen so much emotion in him, and it was the one emotion that I didn’t want to see at all. He was hurting, and I didn’t know how to make it better. I didn’t know how to make things right again. All I knew was that the entire city was spinning around me and I couldn’t bring myself to stand anymore.

Not enough for me…

I had made him think that he wasn’t enough for me when I was the one who didn’t deserve him. I tried to walk over to him, but my body wouldn’t allow it without making me stumble like a fool. My legs were jelly now. I dropped to my knees in front of Levi and reached out to touch his face, but he leaned away before my fingers could feel the warmth of his skin.

He was leaving me.

“You are enough for me,” I whispered in a broken voice, “You’ve always been enough.”

“Then what did I do?”

I felt my brow furrow as I gazed up at him, “What do you mean?”

“What did I do to make you doubt me?” Levi answered, meeting my eyes and holding my stare. “Tell me, which part was it?”

“You didn’t make me…”

“Was it letting you into my apartment when I barely knew you?” he snapped, cutting me off before I could continue.

“No, Levi, I—”

“Or was it when I let you into The Wall so that you could see The Corporal?” he continued, his voice rising quickly.

“Levi, please…”

I moved to grip his thighs but he shot up and walked away from the fountain, taking a few steps before he turned to glare at me. There was a thick layer of ice in his eyes that I couldn’t break though; more rage than I had ever seen there before. This had all been building up and my accusation over Armin had been enough to snap the thin line of patience he had left.

“Was it when I begged you to stay?” he continued, his voice carrying a tremor of anger, “When you left me on the streets even though I begged you not to? Was it then?”

“Levi!” I shouted his name as I pushed to my feet, stumbling forward to grab his wrist. He pulled away before I could.

“Or maybe,” he spoke over me, his voice as sharp as his eyes, “Maybe it was when I let you into my mother’s room. Was that it, Eren? Is that when you stopped trusting me?”
I shook my head slowly as I stared at him, tears stinging my eyes, “Levi, please…”

My legs were refusing to hold me up again, and I stepped away until the back of my calves met the rim of the fountain. The coolness of the seat sent an unfriendly shock up my spine, but I was actually grateful for the physical pain. It was so much easier to identify compared to everything else I was feeling.

“I let you into every part of my life, Eren,” Levi growled, his voice still shaking, “I showed you exactly who I am. I gave you more than I’ve ever given anyone, and it’s still not enough for you. So tell me what you think you’re missing.”

“I don’t—”

“Tell me!” Levi snapped, “Tell me what more I need to give you, so I can tell you to leave. Because there’s nothing more I can give you, Eren. You already have everything.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but no words were coming out anymore. Tears were flooding my eyes and blurring my vision, tightening my throat to the point where I had no hope of speaking without breaking down. Our entire relationship was dissolving around me and I didn’t know how to stop it.

Levi stared down at me, and I realized he was waiting for a response that I couldn’t give him. Even if I could speak, there was nothing I could say because I didn’t need anything other than him. He was expecting an answer I didn’t have, and I could only hope that silence was the correct response.

“I see,” he muttered softly, and for a moment I thought it was enough. I heard his footsteps move until he came to a stop in front of me, and then I felt the soft weight of his hands as he set them on my shoulders. My heart seized up when his lips pressed softly against my forehead in a chaste kiss. Lacking any romance or love. Holding only farewells. “Goodbye, Eren.”

The tears spilled from my eyes as they widened and my entire body went rigid with shock and panic. Levi was walking away from me, and I couldn’t convince my limbs to move. It was like someone had nailed me down onto the fountain and was forcing me to live through the nightmare I had created. This was my fault and there was no escaping that fact, but I wanted to fix it. I wanted so desperately to stop him from leaving. But I was losing him.

I was losing everything.

“Levi,” I gasped his name and suddenly I felt as if a bucket of ice water had been dumped over my head.

I shot up from the fountain and moved so quickly that I stumbled and had to reach out for the only thing close by. My hand latched tight around his wrist and I pulled with all of the strength that I had left to turn him around. I couldn’t let him go like this. I wouldn’t sit on the ground and watch him walk away from me. I wouldn’t lose him. Not without a fight. My heart skipped when I felt him stop, and the words came rushing out of my mouth.

“There’s nothing missing, Levi. That’s not the problem. You’ve given me more than anyone else ever has, and it’s terrifying me because I have so much to lose.” My voice shook violently, threatening to break, but I continued on. “I’ve never had anyone in my life that I couldn’t survive without. I even managed to go on without Mikasa, but with you I just… Levi, I can’t imagine losing you. I couldn’t come back from that. It’s not that I don’t trust you—”

“Yes, it is,” Levi cut me off, jerking his wrist free of my grip. “Don’t brag about your emotions to me as if they’re some sort of an excuse. I can’t imagine losing you either, but that doesn’t mean I’m
going to be insecure in our relationship. It doesn’t mean I don’t trust you. The depth of your emotions has nothing to do with how you’ve been acting. You’re scared you’re going to lose me because you don’t trust me.

“But I do trust you!” I cried out, angry tears blurring my vision. Why couldn’t I get him to believe that?

“Well you don’t fucking act like it,” Levi snapped, “And even if that’s true and you do trust me, I know for a goddamn fact that you don’t trust how I’m going to react. And maybe that’s the reason you’ve been acting like this, but I have no idea why it’s gone this far. The only thing that I can imagine is that you’re keeping something from me.”

The blood ran cold in my veins and I fought to keep my expression from giving anything away. He was right. That was exactly why I’d been experiencing so much doubt in our relationship. I knew that Erwin could ruin it at any moment, and it set me in a constant state of insecurity when it came to Levi. I knew what had brought us to this point, and I couldn’t say a word about it.

“Is there something you want to tell me?”

“No,” I whispered automatically, shaking my head in the same moment. “No, there’s nothing.”

Levi stared at me for a long moment and then looked down between us, keeping his eyes from me as he spoke, “Eren, I can’t be with someone who doesn’t trust me.”

My heart stopped in my chest and the words rushed out, “I trust you.”

“I don’t think you do,” he replied, lifting his gaze back to mine. “Eren, I already had a relationship that was nothing but lies and I don’t plan on having another. The first one hurt me enough, and I honestly don’t think I could survive you.”

“I’m not lying,” I managed to say in a voice that was breaking on tears. I was lying even as I said it, but I could see no other way. He’d never forgive me if I told the truth now. “I wouldn’t lie to you. I know I’ve been stupid, but please, Levi… please…”

“Eren, I can’t…”

“Erwin can have Armin,” I cut him off by saying the one thing I never thought I would allow. Even after saying it I wasn’t sure I could actually keep that promise, but at the moment I was willing to try anything. I had no point that I could argue, nowhere that he was wrong. All I could do was grovel. “I’m not going to fight it anymore. So please, just don’t… don’t do this…”

“This doesn’t have anything to do with them,” Levi muttered, “You could drag Armin out by his hair and flip Erwin the bird, and I wouldn’t give two shits. Erwin would try to make you suffer, but it wouldn’t fucking matter. You know why? Because I wouldn’t leave you over the shit he says or does.”

“I don’t know what he’s capable of,” I shot back, “I don’t trust him with you or Armin or anyone else.”

“You don’t have to,” Levi snapped, his eyes narrowing, “You don’t have to trust him. You don’t have to talk to him. Hell, you don’t even have to look at him.”

“How the hell can I do what you want if I don’t even look at him?” I spoke in a rush, “How are you ever going to get your revenge if I never talk to him?”
“Fuck my revenge!” Levi shot back, his voice sharp, “Stop bringing it up, especially now. It doesn’t matter.”

I had to take a step back because I felt as if I’d been physically slapped in the face. “Do you not want me to do it anymore?”

“The thought of his hands on your body makes me sick,” Levi spat, “You’re mine, not his. I’m not going to give up the one thing I want for something that shouldn’t even matter anymore.”

I stared at him with wide eyes, my mind going blank for an instant. It sounded as if he’d just freed me from everything I had to do, and yet somehow I was still losing him in the process. Even if he didn’t want me to pursue Erwin anymore, there was a chance he wasn’t keeping me anyway. At least I had assumed that was the case. Maybe he had never intended to let me go at all. Maybe this wasn’t going to fall apart entirely. Maybe I still had a chance of keeping him.

“So stop worrying about it, brat,” Levi continued, “I’ll figure something out as far as Erwin goes, even if it doesn’t involve you. Forget that he exists if you have to. He can’t do anything to you. There’s nothing he can say or do to make me leave you. That’s just not the kind of person I am. If you lose me, it’ll be because of you.”

Hope burned like a bright flame in my chest and I choked out the word, “If?”

Levi opened his mouth as he stared at me, silent for a long moment before he let out a heavy sigh. “I don’t want to lose you, brat.”

The flame turned into a fucking forest fire of hope and I felt my heart begin to pound against my chest. I’d been so certain that this entire thing was going to end right here and now, but it wasn’t. He didn’t want to lose me either, and I knew I could get him back as long as I had that much. I hadn’t destroyed everything.

“And I don’t want to lose you,” I breathed, “So tell me what I have to do. Honestly, Levi, anything. Just name it.”

“I want you to get out of my room,” he replied. “You can stay with Armin or Mikasa.”

The city started to spin again and I felt my stomach turn. That was the last thing I expected to hear out of his mouth, and suddenly I wasn’t so confident anymore.

“You don’t want me to stay with you?”

“I just think it would be better if you didn’t spend the night in my room.” Levi muttered, watching me with wary eyes. It was obvious how upset I was. “At least not with things the way they are right now.”

As much as I wanted to argue against that, I knew I wouldn’t be able to win with him. It wasn’t worth the risk involved. If I tried to push back too hard, I could end up losing him completely and I wasn’t willing to let that happen. If spending a few nights in Armin’s bed meant that we could get over this whole mess, I was willing to do it without complaint.

But even if we didn’t have the night, it didn’t mean I couldn’t try for the day.

“Yea, I can do that,” I shrugged as nonchalantly as I could. I was willing to give him anything, and I wanted to show him that. “Will I still see you during the day?”

“I don’t know.”
His blunt answer stung in my chest like someone had stabbed me with a needle, but I managed to keep my expression from showing any pain. I cleared my throat twice and tried to act like it didn’t bother me.

“We were going to go on the trip tomorrow,” I reminded him, but I was positive he hadn’t forgotten. “You wanted to take me to see your favorite place in France.”

He watched me for a moment and then shook his head. “I don’t think that’s a good idea anymore.”

I closed my eyes and focused on the next breath, trying to keep my mind from slipping into a complete panic. He didn’t want to lose me and yet he didn’t want to see me. How was that supposed to work?

“Why not?”

Levi took a deep breath and let it out in a rush, “Because we need some time apart.”

I felt the world fracture around me. “So it is over?”

“Is that what I said? No, it’s not. Damn it, Eren, would you just fucking listen for two seconds?” Levi snapped quickly and then fell silent, looking away as his jaw tightened. He was still angry and he was barely controlling it even now, but he was managing it for me. He took a deep breath and continued. “No, it’s not over. That’s not what I’m saying.”

“Then what are you saying?”

“I’m saying that I need some time to think about what I’m going to do,” he sighed, looking down between us. “I need some time away from you.”

So you can decide if you’ll be fine without me.

I desperately wanted to say the words, but I bit my cheek and stopped them in my throat. They wouldn’t help me right now. So I used the only words I had.

“For how long?”

“For as long as it takes,” Levi muttered. “For as long as you need to decide that you actually trust me. Because that’s a requirement for us, kid. I’m not going to have you ripping out my goddamn heart every fucking time you feel insecure, you understand? So take as long as you need.”

I shut my eyes tightly and clenched my teeth, rubbing at the pain in my chest, “Damn it, Levi… I…”

“I know you’re sorry,” he interjected, “I am, too. I don’t want things to be like this, but they are.”

I felt my body shaking as I tried to keep my emotions in check, but I had no hope of doing that anymore. The world was spinning and breaking apart, and I could do nothing to stop it. Every time we’d fought before, I’d had a good reason to chase him down. I had something I could argue with, but I had nothing now. He was right in everything he was doing, and I could only watch us dissolve. I had no way of fighting this one, and no idea how to prove myself to him.

“Eren.”

I suddenly felt his hands on my face and my eyes lowered to meet his gaze, tears spilling freely down my cheeks now. He brushed them away with the tips of his fingers and stared at me with the most beautiful blue eyes I would ever see. A sad smile touched his perfect mouth, but it was still
breathtaking. Everything about him was. And for that fleeting moment, I could remember the warmth of his touch and the scent of his skin.

And the way it felt to be wanted by him.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Wow! o____o So many comments for Chapter 32 - you made me all so happy! Thank you so much for letting me know what you thought of the chapter - even if you weren't thrilled with the angst. XD And yea, it was pretty angsty... but it was necessary. You'll see.

Hopefully everyone will enjoy this chapter! ^__^ I'm personally really excited about the next chapter, but it's another week until that one.

A HUGE thank you to fufucuddlypuffs, arseniks, and puppybrateren for the amazing art they drew for The Intern this week! If you haven't seen it already, you can find it in the 'Intern Art' tab on my blog.

As always, please feel free to leave comments both here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me, you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to add anything there! ^__^

ENJOY!

I let him go.

I actually let him go.

Everything in my body had screamed for me to hold him down and beg him to stay, but instead I watched him walk away. Even now I couldn’t be sure of how I’d managed to keep myself rooted in place, but I did. I let him leave me as nothing but an empty statue standing beside an unfamiliar fountain, ripped apart at the seams. It was a wonder I’d been able to move away from that spot after only a handful of minutes. At least I told myself it was only that long. It could have been longer. It could have been days since he left.

It wouldn’t really matter. It couldn’t possibly hurt any more than it already did.

I found myself standing outside the glass doors to our luxurious hotel, trying to wrap my mind around the possible ways I could have gotten there. I could recall staring at the fountain and screaming on the inside, or maybe it was the outside, but I couldn’t remember anything past that. I must have walked in a daze, letting my body run on autopilot as my mind brought me back to where I needed to be. Even if it wasn’t where I wanted to be. I wanted to be anywhere but here right now, but I lacked the funds and means necessary to get away.

So here I was.

I walked through the doors and fixed my stare on the golden elevator that seemed to be miles away. One quick ride up and I could bury myself in Armin’s bed and forget that the rest of the world even existed. At least for one night. One night was all I would need to gather my thoughts and figure out a plan that would fix this fucked up mess I’d made. Of course, that wouldn’t be without Armin’s help. I would be counting on him to both talk me down and work out something to keep this from falling
apart. Levi and I were hanging by a thread now, and one wrong move could snap the last tie we had.

As much as I hated to admit it, I knew I would have to take things slow. It was a fool’s dream to imagine I’d be back in his bed tomorrow.

“Eren?”

Mikasa’s worried voice easily carried over the small distance, but I tried to act as if I hadn’t heard her at all. Not that ignoring her would keep her from following me, but I was willing to make the attempt if it meant I could go upstairs without talking to anyone else. I had endured enough talking for one night.

“Eren!” Mikasa’s voice was sharp now, tinged with annoyance, “I know you can hear me, and I know which room you’re in. Don’t think you can just avoid me.”

Technically I could, because she wouldn’t be finding me in Levi’s room.

I tried to ignore how much that stung and pressed the button for the elevator.

“Eren,” Mikasa stood beside me and folded her arms, fixing me with a stern stare that I refused to meet. “What happened? You’ve been crying, haven’t you?”

I flinched and rubbed angrily at my eyes, knowing they had already betrayed me. Of course she would see that I was crying. I was stupid to think she wouldn’t notice, and even more of a fool to attempt speech.

“I’m fine.” My voice cracked instantly.

“That’s a load of bullshit. Who hurt you?” Mikasa held up her hand immediately after speaking and her eyes narrowed. “No, never mind. Don’t answer that. I know exactly who hurt you. Where the fuck is that short ass dominatrix queen?”

“I don’t know where he is,” I admitted, my jaw tightening, “And even if I did, it wouldn’t matter. None of this is his fault.”

“Of course it’s his fault,” Mikasa snapped, “He made you cry. How the fuck is that not his fault?”

“I made him cry, too,” I muttered, my voice cracking again, “I really fucked up this time, Mikasa. I really, really fucked up.”

She fell silent for a moment, her eyes filling with a worried concern as she scanned my expression. Finally she took a deep breath and then spoke in a controlled voice, “Tell me what happened.”

I shook my head as I wiped at my eyes, looking over at the elevator when it gave a happy chime. I hated it for that sound. “I can’t talk about this right now.”

“Eren, I’ve seen you cry a million times,” Mikasa started, earning an annoyed glare from me. “What? It’s true. You’re an emotional guy. Get over it.”

“Whatever. If you’ve seen this a million times, then it’s nothing new. Let me go.”

I rolled my eyes and looked away from her, stepping into the elevator. She caught me by the arm.

“It is something new this time,” she continued, her voice strained with worry. “I’ve never seen you look this hurt. Upset, sure, but not like this. It’s like he broke you.”
I jerked my arm free of her hold and pushed the button for the elevator, glancing to her as the doors slid shut. “I’m not broken. I’ve just realized I actually have something to lose, and it hurts like a bitch.”

Mikasa opened her mouth to speak, but the doors blocked whatever it was she wanted to say. Not that she let it go for long. I was halfway up to Armin’s floor when I felt the phone buzz in my pocket. I dug it out and stared at the screen.

If it hurts that much to lose him, then you better find a way to get him back.

I let out a soft, humorless laugh and shook my head before typing out my reply, muttering the words as I wrote them, “I wasn’t planning on letting him get away.”

And I wouldn’t.

I wasn’t going to lose him.

I just had to figure out how I was going to fix this, and to do that I knew I needed Armin. He would be able to see a solution even when I couldn’t. My mind was too muddled by all the pain and regret, and Armin always had a way of keeping a steady mind, even in a dire situation. I was lost in the darkness of my emotions and he would show me the way out. I knew I could rely on him to be there for me.

Except for maybe right now.

I stared at the empty room and let a sigh rush out of my lungs, leaning into the doorframe. I couldn’t even bring myself to be surprised that he wasn’t here, although I was at least grateful that they had gone to Erwin’s room instead. It was by some miracle that Levi had been bright enough to give me keys to both Mikasa and Armin’s rooms, so at least I knew I wouldn’t be stuck out in the hall for the night.

I had a room to myself and the freedom to agonize over the loss of my only relationship, but right now the only thing I wanted was sleep.

Which, amazingly, happened the instant my head hit the pillow.

--------------------------------------------

The sound of the heavy door slamming shut pulled me out of the deepest of nightmares, and I sat up straight as a rod with my hand pressed firm against my chest. My heart was hammering beneath it, although it was mostly due to the dream and not the rude awakening. I had suffered through our painful goodbye more times than I wanted to count, and I was positive that my mind had now permanently scarred the memory into my soul. I would always remember him walking away.

“Eren?”

Armin’s surprised voice drew my attention away from the nightmares, and I stared at him in confusion as my eyes began to focus. He was wearing a large white button-up that was more than a few sizes too big for him. It was mostly buttoned, although haphazardly, and the sleeves were pushed up just enough for the tips of his fingers to poke through. The length of the shirt just barely cleared the middle of his thighs, and if he was wearing anything underneath it certainly didn’t show.
His hair was a mess that looked as if it had been pulled in every direction throughout the night, and there were little red marks all along the column of his throat.

I didn’t even have to ask.

“Well, someone got fucked last night.”

Armin smiled sheepishly and looked down at the carpet as his cheeks flushed red. He fidgeted with the end of the shirt and then cleared his throat, speaking in a small squeak, “Is it that obvious?”

“Well, your hair looks like you walked through a wind tunnel. You’re wearing another man’s shirt,” I listed off, tilting my head as I eyed his neck. “And I’m pretty fucking sure he spelled out ‘mine’ with all those hickeys.”

Armin’s eyes went wide and his hands snapped to his neck, holding either side, “He gave me a hickey?”

“Oh, he gave you more than just a hickey,” I remarked, leaning back into the mound of pillows. “I’d say he’s trying to make it obvious that he’s claimed you.”

Triumphant satisfaction crossed Armin’s features before he could hide the reaction, and he quickly looked away from me as he tried to compose his expression. “It doesn’t really matter, right? I can just wear a scarf.”

The image of Levi wearing his mother’s scarf flashed to the front of my mind and I flinched, looking away. “Yea, I guess.”

“You’re acting really calm about this,” Armin said softly, watching me with wary eyes. “Are you really okay, or are you just getting ready to explode?”

“I want to,” I admitted with a shrug. “You know how I feel about him, and you promised to stay away from him.”

Armin opened his mouth to retort, but there was no getting around the fact that he’d lied. Instead he frowned and turned his gaze back to the ground, “I’m sorry.”

“You’re not.”

He opened his mouth again and then sighed in a rush, “I’m not sorry that I did it, but I’m sorry I broke my promise to you.”

“It’s your decision in the end, isn’t it?” I muttered and grabbed one of the pillows to pull it to the front, tucking it close to my chest as I hugged it tight. “You’re the one who knows what you want, and you can take care of yourself, so…”

I trailed off and shut my eyes, suppressing a groan as I pressed my head into the top of the pillow. It was taking all of my effort to say the words with a straight face when all I wanted to do was scream. I hated that Armin spent the night with him. I couldn’t stand the thought of them together and all the things they must have done last night. I hated knowing that Levi’s ex was now boning my best friend, probably on what would be a consistent basis.

But what could I do?

I’d had enough fighting the night before and the last thing I needed was a screaming match with Armin. He was the only person I was counting on to understand me; the only other person who
knew all the details of the mess I’d gotten myself into. And part of that mess was caused mainly by my reaction to Erwin and Armin. If I’d just let them do what they wanted and didn’t interfere, I wouldn’t have spent the night without Levi. We wouldn’t have had a pointless fight, and I wouldn’t be left panicking over the potential destruction of my relationship.

As much as I hated to admit it, the struggle just wasn’t worth the loss. I was ruining everything and making Armin miserable in the process, which was the exact opposite of what I wanted to do. So even if I hated every second of their romance, I was going to suck it up and bite my tongue. I wasn’t going to lose Levi over this and I wasn’t going to risk ending my friendship with Armin. If Armin wanted Erwin, which it was clear that he did, then I would back off.

It just really fucking sucked.

I felt the weight of the bed shift as Armin took a seat beside me, and all of a sudden the pillow was pulled free of my arms and he was replacing it. His arms went tight around my waist and he hugged me as if he knew how much I needed it. And maybe he did. I let out a trembling breath and my arms banded around him in return as I hid my face in his hair. I tried to suppress the tremor that went through my body, but he felt it anyway and squeezed tighter in response.

“We’ll talk later about how you’re my best friend for letting this go,” he spoke softly against my shirt. He knew there was something more important going on. “What happened last night? Why didn’t you stay with Levi?”

I took a deep breath, certain that it would be enough to keep my voice stable. But it wasn’t. Not even close.

“He said that he wants…” I strained to speak through a voice that cracked with every other word. “That he wants…”

My stomach gave an uncomfortable twist and I went silent, unable to finish the sentence without breaking. I gave a slow shake of my head and gritted my teeth together, breathing slowly. I would have been able to get through this with anyone else by putting on a façade, but Armin was different. I knew he would see right though it. He would see right to the pain and he would point it out to me faster than anyone.

“Did he break up with you?”

“No!” I had to keep myself from shouting out with the force of rejection I felt at the thought. I shook my head quickly and took a brief moment to gather my thoughts before forcing my way through the rest of it. “No, he wants to take a break.”

Armin’s expression filled with concern and confusion, just as I knew it would. “Why?”

“Because he thinks I don’t trust him.”

“Why would he think that?” Armin frowned, “Did you say something? Do something?”

“A little of both,” I muttered before falling back against the sheets, quickly yanking a pillow over my head. I held it down and groaned into it, “Armin, I fucked up so bad.”

I heard him sigh and then felt the pillow moving as he gripped it. “When did you have the fight?”

“Last night.”

Armin stared at me with that intelligent blue gaze, unraveling the puzzle as if he had been there
himself. “You fought about me, didn’t you?”

I wanted to deny it because I had a feeling it was going to lead to another fight, but there was no other way. “It wasn’t all about you.”

He let a sigh rush through of his teeth and flopped down beside me, grabbing his own pillow and crushing it to his chest in a tight hug. He fell silent as he stared up at the ceiling, remaining that way for so long that I was almost convinced he was sleeping with his eyes open. But his jaw was tight and there was a touch of anger that was unsettling on his normally calm features. I’d rarely seen him look angry, and it was uncommon that I was on the receiving end of it.

“Why can’t you just let things go?” Armin whispered at last.

“Because I can’t stand the idea of you with him.”

Armin turned his head and stared at me, searching my expression. He opened his mouth several times but never seemed to find the words he wanted to say. His jaw went rigid and he clenched his hands tight, gripping the pillow with his fists. He closed his eyes for a long moment and let out a slow, controlled breath as he tried to calm himself. Finally he sat up and threw the pillow across the bed, watching it slide off of the edge and onto the floor.

He kept his attention focused in front of him.

“Do you want me?”

I stared at him in a shocked silence, my mouth dropping open as the word slipped out, “What?”

He took a deep breath, still staring straight ahead. “I asked you if you want me.”

“I… you…” I stammered over the words, my mind fighting to keep up. “You… you’re my best friend, Armin.”

“And what if I wanted to be more?” he asked, finally turning to look at me. He set his hands on either side of my hips and leaned close; staring into my eyes with a gaze that was so intense it took away my ability to think. “What if I wanted to be with you? What would you say then?”

“I…” I shook my head slowly and leaned back, letting out a trembling breath, “I’m with Levi.”

“Not right now,” he persisted, “Not really. Not if you keep doing things like this.”

“I’m not going to keep doing shit like this!” I snapped quickly, scooting back a little further. He followed me anyway, closing the distance between us. “Damn it, Armin! Stop!”

“Why?” The word was harsh on his lips, demanding and angry. “Why should I stop when you haven’t? You were like this with Jean, too. So tell me why.”

“Because no one is ever going to be good enough for you!” I shouted, fisting my hands in the sheets. “Not where I’m concerned, at least.”

“I’m not going to spend my life alone just because you don’t approve of who I’m with,” Armin spoke quickly. “So unless you plan on being that person, you’re going to have to back off. I’m not going to have you ruining your relationship and mine just because you don’t like Erwin.”

I searched Armin’s eyes and leaned back a little further, feeling my heart pound in my chest. “Are you trying to fuck with me, or are you being serious right now? Because you’re really starting to
freak me out.”

Armin’s expression softened and he leaned back until there was plenty of distance between us. I pulled myself into a seated position and watched him with wary eyes, trying to decide just how messed up this was. I had a feeling he was purposely trying to scare me into realizing how ridiculous I was being, but another part of me wondered if it was about more than this.

“It’s a little of both,” he admitted, “I already told you how I feel about you, so if you asked me… Well, I don’t think I’d say no.”

“Armin, I don’t see you that way…”

“I know you don’t,” he answered quickly, “That’s not what this is about.”

“Then what is it?”

“You’re ruining your relationship because you’re not happy with my choice,” Armin explained, holding my stare. “But you’re not going to be happy with any choice I make, so why should I give up the one thing I actually want?”

“I’m not asking you to,” I muttered, but it wasn’t the truth. Even I knew that.

“Yes, you are,” Armin sighed, grabbing another pillow and pulling it into his lap. “Even if you’re not asking it directly, everything you’re doing is just begging me to give him up. Because I can’t watch you fall apart, Eren. Not over me. Not when I know I can fix things.”

“I’m not falling apart over you,” I rolled my eyes, “Don’t give yourself so much credit.”

“Then tell me what you said to make Levi so angry,” Armin countered.

I took a deep breath and shut my eyes, saying the words as quickly and quietly as possible, “I was going to go up after you, and he stopped me. I was angry and I felt like he wasn’t on my side, so I accused him of wanting to use you to get back at Erwin.”

Armin remained silent until I finally opened my eyes to look at him. He was staring at me with a sad expression, shaking his head slowly, “Oh, Eren… why did you do that?”

“Like I said, I was angry.”

“He wouldn’t do that to you,” Armin murmured, “You know that, right?”

The most I could do was shrug, but deep down I knew that Levi would never use Armin that way. Even if he weren’t with me, Levi wouldn’t use an unwilling participant in his little revenge plot. He didn’t like to hurt people and he wasn’t about to create unnecessary causalities. I knew all this, and yet there was a nagging voice in the back of my mind that tried to deny everything.

It was ruining me, one thought at a time.

“Eren, he’s not going to use me,” Armin continued, “And even if he did, it would be because he asked me first and I said yes. But you don’t need to worry about that because he’s never going to ask. He knows how much that would hurt you and he loves you too much to—”

Armin put a hand over his mouth and stared down, falling silent. I felt my heart twist painfully in my chest and looked away from him, trying to deny the fact that I had heard the word slip out of his mouth. Levi had never said it to me, although I was sure I had said it to him while in a state of
unconsciousness. I had no idea if his feelings ran that deep, even if mine certainly did.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do if I lose him,” I whispered, still staring at the wall across the room.

“You’re not going to,” Armin assured me, “Not if I’m helping you. I mean, you’re bound to say some stupid things but I’m sure he already knows that. And if you were so close to losing him, he wouldn’t have wanted a break. He would have just left.”

“Maybe he’s waiting until we get home to do that.”

“I don’t think you have any idea just how much you mean to him.”

My heart skipped a beat and I closed my eyes, rubbing at my chest. “I hope you’re right.”

“I am,” Armin replied, and I could hear the smile in his voice. “Now calm down, okay? Let’s go get some breakfast.”

I felt the weight of the bed shift as he hopped off, and I opened my eyes to watch him fiddle around in his suitcase. “Where do you want to eat?”

“Oh,” Armin paused and then turned to face me, smiling sheepishly, “I kinda told Erwin I would eat breakfast with him in his room. He was going to order room service.”

“I’ll just leave you two alone then,” I muttered, leaning back into the pillows. I had zero interest in seeing Erwin’s ugly mug.

Armin frowned as he unbuttoned the shirt, “But I want you to eat with us.”

I raised one eyebrow and then held my hand in front of my eyes to give Armin some privacy while he changed. “And what is your six ton boyfriend going to think of that?”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Armin squeaked, and I could practically see the blush forming on his cheeks even if I wasn’t looking at him. “And he’s not going to care. He already told me to invite you, and Jean’s going to be there.”

“Oh, great, my second favorite person in the world,” I muttered before the words actually clicked in my brain, “Wait, what? What the hell do you mean, Jean’s going to be there?”

“Well, I feel kind of shitty that Jean came all this way,” Armin sighed, “And I’m the only one here that he really talks to. I mentioned that to Erwin and…”

“And he just invited him up? Just like that?”

“What’s wrong with him inviting Jean?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” I rolled my eyes, “Maybe the fact that Jean’s your ex? That might have something to do with it. Doesn’t that matter to him?”

“Not everyone is as jealous as you are.”

“Ouch,” I muttered, lowering my hand and fixing him with a small glare.

“Well, I’m sorry, but it’s true,” Armin replied, glancing over at me as he tugged on a black sweater. “That’s kind of what got you into this mess, isn’t it?”
“It wasn’t about jealousy,” I frowned, “It was because I wasn’t trusting him.”

“And Erwin is trusting me by inviting Jean,” Armin pointed out, “Which isn’t actually weird in a relationship. You’re supposed to trust each other, Eren. That’s the whole point.”

“So you’re admitting you’re in a relationship now.”

“So you’re trying to change the conversation now,” Armin teased, manipulating my words. “Fine, we don’t have to talk about it yet. Not until you’re ready.”

“Armin,” I spoke his name in a way that had his eyes on me instantly. “Are you really with him?”

Armin hedged, looking down and fiddling with his pants, checking on a zipper that was already zipped and a button that was already buttoned. “Are you going to hate me if I say yes?”

“I would never hate you for anything, Armin. You know that.”

“Then,” he paused and took a deep breath, nodding, “Yes. I’m with him.”

I held his gaze for a long moment, watching him fidget as he tried to decipher whether or not I was angry. He genuinely wanted me to approve of his relationship, and as much as I hated Erwin I just couldn’t deny my friend his happiness. It just wasn’t worth it anymore. I had to stop fighting this.

“I don’t give a shit if that man is a walking wall,” I warned him, “I will find a way to rip him apart if he breaks your heart.”

Armin’s expression softened and a small smile tugged at his lips, “You’re not going to ask me to let him go?”

“Are you happy?”

“I am.”

“Then that’s all I give a shit about anymore,” I shrugged, “I’m tired of ruining relationships just because I don’t want to accept who you’re with. So there you go. Do what makes you happy. That’s all I—”

The rest of the words left along with the air in my lungs when Armin threw his arms around me and tackled me down onto the bed. His words were muffled in my shirt as he held me tight, but the repetitive ‘thank you’ was hard to miss. I rolled my eyes and wound my arms around his waist, squeezing him in a tight hug as I smiled. As much as I hated that oversized asshole, it was worth it to see Armin this happy again.

“Yea, okay. I get it,” I laughed, pulling away from the hug, “I’m great. Now can we hurry up and go to breakfast? My stomach’s going to eat itself if I don’t get something in it soon.”

“Mine too,” Armin agreed with a smile, scooting off the bed. “Oh! Did you wanna invite Le—”

Armin’s eyes went wide and he slapped his hand over his mouth, muttering into it, “I’m sorry.”

I looked away in an attempt to hide just how much that hurt me. I couldn’t blame Armin, of course. In that brief moment of laughter, it was almost possible for me to forget the overwhelming pain and worry that was coursing inside. It was natural that Armin would forget it, too.

“It’s okay,” I muttered, moving out of the bed as well, “It just happened last night, so it’s hard to get used to. Even I keep forgetting that I can’t just go to his room and see him.”
“Are you going to be okay?”

“Not yet,” I admitted, shaking my head, “But it’s not going to stay like that. I won’t let it. I’m going to prove to him that I trust him.”

Armin gave my hand a reassuring squeeze as we walked out of the room. The heavy door shut behind us and Armin pressed the button for the elevator. He was silent for a long moment before finally looking at me, chewing his lip as if he was considering something.

“What is it?” I prompted him, raising an eyebrow.

“I know you really don’t like him,” Armin sighed once we were in the elevator, “But he might be able to help. He’s known Levi for a long time.”

“I don’t think he’d want to help me.”

“He might,” Armin offered, “If you asked him.”

I’d rather cut out my own tongue.

“We don’t get along, Armin. At all. He’s not going to do anything for me,” I paused and shook my head, “Especially not where Levi’s concerned.”

Armin opened his mouth and I knew he had more to say, but he dropped the subject there. He pursed his lips together and gave a little nod. I was grateful for that, at least. I knew Erwin wouldn’t be interested in helping, and I wasn’t about to demean myself by asking. I would find a way to prove my trust to Levi without Erwin’s input. He barely knew Levi anyway.

Armin practically bounced off the elevator as he walked over to Erwin’s room, knocking on the door. He looked over at me and tried to suppress the beaming smile that was threatening to take over his mouth. But it won out as soon as Erwin opened the door.

“Just the person I wanted to see,” Erwin smirked, leaning to the side so that Armin could walk in, “Both the food and Jean are already waiting on the balcony.”

Armin glanced over his shoulder at me, and Erwin’s attention immediately followed.

“Eren.” The surprise in his voice was obvious. “Well, I wasn’t expecting you to actually come, but we have plenty of food.”

I fought back the urge to glare at him and forced the most unconvincing smile on my face. “Great. I’m starving.”

I walked past him and tried to ignore how easy it would be to ram my elbow into his stomach on the way by. Armin was watching me with a wary expression, clearly waiting for me to do something aggressive. I gave him a reassuring smile, this time genuine, and he seemed to relax.

“I’ll need to speak with Eren alone.”

Armin stalled at the door and caught my gaze, silently asking if I would be okay. In truth, I wanted to ask him to stay but I wasn’t in the mood for an argument. Whatever the brick shithouse wanted to say to me, I would listen. Or at least pretend to listen. As long as it was over with quickly, I couldn’t bring myself to care. I had so many other concerns right now and Erwin was ranking at the bottom of that list.
When Armin left the room, I turned to face Erwin and folded my arms. “Well, what is it?”

“I’m guessing you’re already aware of what happened last night. Am I right?”

I felt my stomach twist uncomfortably and tried to ignore the pain. Rolling my eyes, I looked away and gave him a short, indifferent shrug. “Yea, it was kind of hard to miss when Armin walked in wearing nothing but your shirt.”

“What were you doing in his room?” Erwin asked immediately, his keen senses wasting no time in picking up on that little slip.

“I…” Shit. What the fuck was I supposed to say to that? “Was looking for him. That’s all.”

Erwin watched me for a moment, scanning my expression and making me realize what it must be like to be shoved under a microscope. Finally, a small smirk curved on the corner of his mouth and he reached into his pocket, digging out his phone.

“Well, since you’re here anyway,” he started as he ran his thumb across the screen, “I’ll give Levi a call and have him join us.”

“No!” I held out my hand to stop him, shaking my head quickly, “No, he won’t want to join us.”

Erwin paused with his thumb on the screen and eyed me suspiciously, “Why not?”

“Because,” I hedged, trying to figure out anything I could say aside from the truth. I didn’t want Erwin to know about what happened. “He’s not feeling well. He decided to sleep in today.”

“Well, now I know you’re lying,” Erwin replied, tapping the screen. “Levi just texted me a few minutes ago to tell me he’d be going to the meeting today. Which is surprising, because yesterday he told me that he’d be spending the day with you.”

I tried not to flinch and failed miserably.

“So, do you want to tell me why he can’t come up,” Erwin continued, wiggling his phone to catch my attention, “Or should I just ask him myself?”

“Well, now I know you’re lying,” Erwin replied, tapping the screen. “Levi just texted me a few minutes ago to tell me he’d be going to the meeting today. Which is surprising, because yesterday he told me that he’d be spending the day with you.”

I tried not to flinch and failed miserably.

“So, do you want to tell me why he can’t come up,” Erwin continued, wiggling his phone to catch my attention, “Or should I just ask him myself?”

“We’re not together right now,” I blurted out, “Okay? That’s why he can’t come up. Because I’m here and he doesn’t want to see me.”

Erwin stared at me for a long moment with a passive expression, only his eyes betraying just how surprised he was. They widened slightly, enough for me to catch but not enough for me to be sure if he’d expected this. He pocketed his phone quickly and crossed the short distance between us, coming to a stop in front of me. I didn’t even have time to react before his hand was on my chin, angling my head up and forcing me to meet his stare.

I felt the blood drain from my face as I stared up at him, trying to comprehend what was happening. Any calm façade he had managed to maintain before was gone now; all of the layers peeled back to reveal the true man underneath. A man that was prepared to do whatever he must to protect the things he treasured. Ready and willing to sacrifice anything.

I realized then, perhaps for the first time, that he truly loved Levi. And it didn’t matter if it was romantic or platonic, because he would defend him just the same. He had allowed me the chance to be close to someone he held dear, and now I was public enemy number one. I had hurt a person he loved.
And that was a very dangerous thing.

His eyes were livid and his voice was cold and demanding.

“What did you do to him?”
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

YAY CHAPTER 34! I have been looking forward to this chapter. There is a lot about Erwin in this chapter and I'm excited to see what everyone thinks of him now. He's been kind of a mysterious guy and I know that's shaped a lot of people's opinions of him, but you'll really get to see who he is in this chapter.

A huge thank you to aaapple-jax and puppybrateren, who both shared their art of The Intern this week! ^__^ There are some awesome drawings of Armin (the morning after), so if you haven't already seen them then please check out the Intern Art tab on my blog! ^__^

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr! I look forward to hearing what you all thought about the chapter, and I am especially excited about this one. ^_^ If you're not already following me on tumblr, you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to post anything there.

ENJOY!

I should run.

That was the only thought churning through my mind and it wasn’t even remotely logical. Erwin was only inches from me and I had no doubt that he would be able to catch me in an instant if I so much as attempted to get away. Still, it was tempting to at least try. I had never seen so much anger in anyone’s eyes, and it was infinitely more deadly when it was coming from a man that could dwarf anyone in size. He could probably crush a car with those arms, and I didn’t even want to think about what he could do to me.

“Eren,” his voice struck across my name like a whip and his eyes narrowed, “Answer the question.”

“I didn’t mean to hurt him,” I blurted out, “I wasn’t even the one who asked for a break. He was.”

“And with good reason, I’m sure,” Erwin countered. “You can’t expect me to believe that this is his fault.”

“I’m not trying to say that.” I shook my head quickly and took a step back. “Trust me, I know it’s my fault. This is all my fault.”

“Yes, it is,” Erwin agreed, “So explain to me what brought it to this point. Because he seemed pretty fucking happy about your relationship a day ago.”

“He still would be if you hadn’t moved in on Armin!”

That was a mistake. That was a huge mistake and I knew it, yet it came out anyway. Erwin’s jaw tensed and his hands clenched at his sides, the muscles of his arms tightening until I could see the veins running through them. I almost expected him to hit me, but somehow I knew he wouldn’t do that. At least not with Armin waiting for us in the other room.
“So this is my fault?” he spoke carefully, his voice cold as ice, “Is that what you’re trying to say? That I ruined your relationship because you couldn’t learn to back the fuck off of mine?”

“You don’t have a relationship with Armin.”

“Every inch of his body says I do.”

I cringed at the thought and looked away from him, “I don’t want to hear about what you two do in the bedroom.”

“Good, because I don’t want to share it with you. That’s for him alone.”

I opened my mouth and then shut it just as quickly, not even sure of what I was going to say. I had so many conflicting emotions and I couldn’t seem to keep track of a single one of them. I wanted to tell him to stay away from Armin, and yet I knew that wasn’t an option anymore. I had convinced myself to back off and allow them to do what they wanted, even if I hated it to the very end. None of this was worth losing Levi over. I knew that now.

But still…

“If you hurt him,” I spoke softly, barely keeping my voice under control, “I will find a way to destroy you.”

Erwin reached out and grasped my chin before I could pull away, turning my gaze to his. “If I hurt him, I’ll let you destroy me. That much I can promise.”

“No, you can’t,” I retorted, swatting at his hand, “If you hurt him, it’s because you don’t care anymore. So why let yourself be ruined over something that doesn’t matter?”

“What did I do to you?”

The question caught me completely off-guard and I stared at him, blinking, “Huh?”

“I’ve never lied to you, Eren. I’ve never tried to manipulate you, and I’ve never been unclear with what I want.” Erwin explained as he held my stare, his eyes sincere, “I’ve been up front with you this entire time, and yet you’re acting as if I’ve been lying to you every step of the way. What is it that’s making me the bad guy here?”

“You have no proof that you haven’t been lying, and you have no reason to tell the truth.”

“I have every reason!” Erwin spoke sharply, his voice rising for an instant. He paused and glanced over at the balcony before continuing in a softer tone. “The only thing I want out of this is Levi’s peace of mind. Lying isn’t going to get me that.”

“He says you’re the master of manipulation,” I muttered, “I told him to talk to you. I tried that at first, but he said he already did it. He told me you hurt and manipulated him on purpose.”

“If Levi really thought that, he wouldn’t be near me anymore,” Erwin replied. “I’ve offered him the company numerous times and he always rejects it. And if you think you’re the first person he’s tried to use against me, you’re wrong.”

“He’s tried to use others?” I frowned, my brow furrowing. Levi had never mentioned that.

“Not to the extent you’ve gone,” Erwin shrugged, “Just pretty little secretary boys he stuck in my room. None of them lasted, of course. The second I had them against the desk, he was firing them
out of jealousy.”

My head was spinning. I couldn’t even bring myself to accept the thought that Levi had tried this before. Hell, he had even succeeded before, but he never used the material against Erwin. What if he was right after all? Erwin told me once that Levi couldn’t bring himself to cause unnecessary pain. What if Levi didn’t need his revenge after all? Or worse, what if he was too in love with Erwin to ever cause him any pain at all?

“He loves you,” I whispered, the pain of the realization cracking my voice.

“In his own way, I’m sure he does. And I’ll always love him. But Eren,” Erwin pressed his finger beneath my chin and lifted my eyes to his, “No matter what place I hold in his heart, it doesn’t compare to you. I’ve never seen Levi act this way with anyone. You’ve made him happier than anyone else ever has.”

And now I’d hurt him worse than anyone else ever could.

I shut my eyes and hung my head, Erwin’s finger slipping away from my chin. I took a deep breath and then spoke in a soft voice, “I hurt him.”

“I know you did,” Erwin answered, his voice cold. “And I want to break your arms for doing it, but that won’t solve anything. That won’t make his pain go away.”

I probably should have been scared of his threat, but I couldn’t bring myself to care right now. He was so concerned over Levi’s well being that I couldn’t deny the fact that he actually cared for him. Everything was already a great mess and it was only going to continue to get worse. And it was all because no one was communicating with each other. Levi was angry with Erwin for a mistake that was years old, and I had become biased to the point that I hurt my best friend and Levi.

At this point, the only thing I could do was communicate. And even though I still hated Erwin, I knew that he was my best shot. Aside from myself, he was one of the closest people to Levi and he knew him in ways that even I didn’t.

I hated to admit it, but he could help me.

“I don’t know how to fix things,” I whispered.

“Well, lucky for you, I’m going to help you figure that out. Because losing you isn’t an option for him. I’m not going to see him fall apart yet again when I have the ability to fix it this time.”

For the first time in twenty-four hours I felt relieved, and it came from the most unlikely source. I never would have expected Erwin to help me. Then again, I never expected to ask him for help in the first place.

“What can I do?”

“Well, first I need to know what your fight was about,” Erwin replied, glancing over at the balcony. Armin and Jean were laughing about something between bites of scones. I watched Erwin’s expression soften as his eyes lingered on Armin, and tried to deny the fact that maybe he wasn’t a bad match for him. Maybe he really could keep Armin happy.

But he still didn’t deserve him.

“He tried to stop me from going upstairs after Armin,” I muttered, knowing this was the last thing Erwin would want to hear. “And I accused him of wanting it to happen so that he could use Armin
against you.”

Erwin’s eyes snapped back to mine and he growled, “You what?”

“I was angry,” I said quickly, “I wasn’t thinking. I just wanted to get Armin out of that room.”

“Well, obviously you didn’t.”

“I didn’t even try,” I shrugged, “As soon as I said it, I knew it was a mistake. I went after him instead.”

“And that’s why he ended things?” Erwin continued, “Because you accused him?”

“Not exactly,” I muttered, looking over at the balcony, “We had a few small fights before that, and each one had to do with me not trusting him.”

“Well then, it’s no wonder he’s so angry.” Erwin folded his arms and angled his head to the side. “Trust is a very important thing to Levi. Although I’m sure you realize that now, even if it’s too late.”

“It’s not too late,” I snapped back, my hands clenching into fists, “He just wants a break, that’s all.”

“To see if he can survive without you.”

I could have been given a million years and it still wouldn’t be enough time to describe all the pain I felt in that moment. I turned away from Erwin entirely, wanting to hide my reaction from him and the rest of the world. But even with my back to him, I was trembling uncontrollably. That had been my worst fear and hearing it from Erwin, someone who knew Levi so well, was like having it set in stone. An unchangeable fact. Levi was trying to see if he could live without me, and if he could then it was all over.

“If it makes you feel any better,” Erwin continued, his voice actually holding a note of sympathy, “I don’t think he can be without you. Not without being miserable, anyway.”

“What if he decides he’d rather be miserable?”

“I won’t lie to you, Eren. That’s a possibility.”

I shut my eyes and tried to breathe. “So is there any point in trying?”

“Of course there is. You just have to prove to him that you trust him.”

“How the hell am I supposed to do that when you’re holding something over my head?” I muttered, pinching the bridge of my nose. This was all so fucked up.

“What am I holding over your head?”

He sounded so confused that it was almost convincing, even to me. I turned to face him and rolled my eyes, fixing him with a ‘don’t pull that shit’ stare. “Don’t act like you don’t know exactly what I’m talking about.”

Erwin raised one eyebrow and cocked his head to the side, “Enlighten me.”

I stared at him, blinking as I tried to figure out just how much he was fucking with me. He had to be kidding with this.

“You’re not with your wife anymore,” I explained in an exasperated voice, convinced I was wasting
my time. “You told me that and you know I’ve been keeping it from Levi. You could destroy everything we have just by telling him that. So how can I ever be secure if—”

Erwin held up his hand to silence me, staring at me as if I’d lost my mind. “I wouldn’t tell him that. I’m not going to use that against you.”

“You’ve already threatened it,” I pointed out, “You’ve made it very clear that you can end everything.”

“Yea,” he admitted, a small smirk touching his lips, “I can be an ass when I’m not getting what I want.”

“So you would do it to get Armin.”

“No, not even then,” Erwin spoke softly, his gaze drifting once more over to the balcony. “Telling Levi that would devastate him. Even if I was doing it to threaten you, it would hurt him in the end and I refuse to do that. I won’t hurt Levi anymore. Not for Armin. Not for anyone.”

“So you’re not going to tell him?” I whispered the words because I couldn’t believe them myself.

“No, I’m not. So if that’s what’s been hurting your relationship with Levi, you can let it go. I’m not going to tell him, even if you do end up being a prick with Armin.”

“You’ll just find other ways to piss me off.”

“Oh, you can count on it,” he smirked, “It would probably be best for you if you just backed off now. It would save us both the trouble, and it would also save you a lot of time in the end. I always get what I want.”

“You already have,” I muttered the truth, “I told him today that he can be with you. I’m done fighting it.”

Both his eyebrows shot up in surprise, “Is that so?”

“I’m not happy about it, but yea.” I shrugged, looking away. “I don’t want to hurt Armin anymore, and it’s ruining my relationship. It’s kind of a pointless fight.”

“I’ll be surprised if you actually stick to that,” he commented, eyeing the balcony, “Our breakfast is probably getting cold.”

“Yea, and Armin is probably wondering where we are,” I paused and then smirked, “Well, he might be, anyway. He could be distracted, since Jean’s out there with him.”

“Is that your attempt to make me jealous?” Erwin asked with a bemused expression.

“Is it working?”

“Not one bit,” he responded with laugh, “I trust Armin, and I’ll continue to do so until he betrays it. Not that he ever will.”

I rolled my eyes and glanced over at the balcony, watching Jean and Armin talk as if nothing had ever gone wrong. They looked like two friends enjoying each other’s company. They were comfortable, and I had to wonder if that was a good thing. It didn’t seem possible that they would be able to fix things so quickly, but somehow they were managing it.

“Come on,” Erwin spoke as he walked past me, heading for the table outside, “I’m starving.”
“Are you all done?” Armin asked as we stepped outside to join them. He looked between us quickly and then focused on me for a moment, “Is everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine.” I answered before Erwin could. I knew the question was meant for me.

“We just had a few things to discuss,” Erwin added, his fingers brushing along the back of Armin’s neck as he took a seat beside him.

Jean eyed Erwin’s touch, and I saw his jaw tighten just slightly. Maybe he wasn’t taking it so well after all.

“It must have been a lot of things,” Armin continued, glancing over at Erwin, “You were in there a long time.”

“Eren had a lot to say.”

Asshole.

“Jaeger always has a lot to say,” Jean spoke up, “Sometimes I don’t think he’s ever gonna shut up.”

I grabbed a scone off the table and whipped it at Jean’s head, “Shut up, horse face!”

Jean’s eyes narrowed and he rubbed his fingers through his hair, brushing the stray crumbs out of it, “What the hell, Jaeger? You’re nastier than normal. Who the fuck shit in your cereal?”

The shit joke immediately reminded me of Levi, and suddenly I wasn’t hungry anymore. “Screw this. I’m leaving.”

“Eren, please don’t go,” Armin pleaded, moving out of his seat, “Jean will stop, okay?”

“He never stops,” I shot back.

“And you do?” Jean argued, leaning back in his seat as he folded his arms. “You’re the one who threw a biscuit at my head.”

“You started it!”

“Would you two just stop?” Erwin’s sharp voice cut through the conversation, silencing the rest of us. “Eren, sit back down and have breakfast with us. Jean, keep your comments to yourself.”

“Yes, dad,” Jean sneered, picking up his cup of coffee.

Erwin’s glare made my blood run cold, but Jean didn’t even seem to notice it. Either that or he was purposely ignoring it.

“Jean,” Armin frowned, his voice carrying a note of disapproval. Jean rolled his eyes and glanced over in Armin’s direction, offering what I assumed was supposed to be an apologetic look.

Erwin turned his attention back to me, “Sit down, Eren.”

“I’m not hungry anymore.”

“Then don’t eat,” Erwin countered, “I don’t care if you do. Just sit down.”

As if I would take orders from an asshat like you.
I rolled my eyes and turned away again, stepping off of the balcony and back into the apartment.

“Eren,” Erwin’s voice was loud enough to carry, “I can’t help you if you just walk away from me. Get your ass back out here and let’s talk about this.”

“I don’t want to talk about this right now.”

“You want him back, don’t you?”

I stopped and clenched my fists at my sides, standing still for a long moment before finally letting a sigh rush out of my lungs. I turned quickly and walked back to the table, dropping into the seat beside Armin and grabbing a scone. I bit into it and chewed, knowing that it was probably delicious but not tasting it at all.

“So wait, Jaeger and Levi split up?” Jean asked, looking over at Armin.

“They’re just on a break,” Armin replied, squeezing my arm to offer some form of reassurance. “It’s just temporary.”

“You said we were on a break, too,” Jean commented between bites of his scone. “That wasn’t temporar- Ow! Damn it, Armin! What the hell did you kick me for?”

“You’re not helping,” Armin spoke through a smile, almost sounding as innocent as he looked.

I heard Erwin chuckle softly and glanced over at him, trying to get my mind to focus elsewhere. Jean’s comment hadn’t helped.

“Don’t worry, Armin. I’m sure Eren realizes that what he and Levi have is very different from what the two of you had.”

It was hard not to catch the glare Jean sent in Erwin’s direction, but he didn’t comment any further. Either he did that for Armin’s sake or because he knew he wouldn’t stand a chance against Erwin. Both mentally and physically.

I jumped suddenly when I felt a buzzing in my pocket, my mind instantly flying to one thought. He was trying to call. I scrambled to get the phone out of my pocket and heard a metal clinking sound somewhere on the ground. But that didn’t matter right now. Not when it might be him. Not when I had the chance to talk to him again.

I stared at the screen and felt disappointment flood every inch of my body when I saw it was only an e-mail, and not even from him.

Stupid Google Plus.

“What is this?”

I shoved my phone back into my pocket and looked over at Erwin to find him holding up a key. An incredibly familiar key.

My key. The one Levi had given to me.

My hand shot out and I snatched it away, holding it in a possessive grip. “Something Levi gave me.”

Erwin stared at my hand for a long moment and then he spoke softly, “He showed you the room?”

Jealousy flared up in me before I could stop it. “Did he show you?”
“No, he never did,” Erwin shrugged, still eyeing my hand. “I must have asked him a thousand times, but the answer was always no.”

“I’m not going to tell you what’s in it,” I answered before he could even ask. Somehow I knew that would be the next thing out of his mouth.

“I won’t ask then,” he replied after a moment, “But if it’s that important, you might want to keep it somewhere other than your pocket.”

Armin watched me with curious eyes; “You could wear it around your neck, and let him see it.”

“That’s not a bad idea, actually,” Erwin mused. “He might like that.”

I ran my finger over the metal of the key and stared out from the balcony, the idea turning over in my head. It had been an important moment for him when he gave me the key, and I had carried it around in my pocket ever since. I had to admit that my pocket wasn’t the safest place for it, and part of me liked the idea of wearing something so symbolic for everyone else to see. I just didn’t know how he would respond to something like that.

“I don’t even have a chain for it,” I muttered at last, “And he might not even like that.”

“Might not even like what?” Erwin asked, raising one eyebrow, “A symbol that you belong to him, hanging around your neck? Trust me, he’ll like it.”

“I saw a nice shop where we could get a chain,” Armin suggested. “Jean and I were going to go out sight seeing anyway. You should come with us.”

I glanced over at Erwin and took a deep breath, trying to decide if I could really handle a few more hours with him. I had learned to tolerate Jean for hours on end, simply because school required it. But putting up with Erwin was something I wasn’t skilled at yet. Part of me was sure I would never be.

“I’m not going with them,” Erwin informed me, reading my mind. “I have a meeting with Levi in a few minutes.”

I looked away at the sound of his name and cleared my throat, “Yea, sure. I’ll go with. I need to get out anyway.”

“Good, go spend the day with them,” Erwin continued, “And do the same thing tomorrow, and the day after that.”

It was like he was trying to get me to stay away from Levi entirely, which was the exact opposite of what I wanted to do. I had to prove to him that I needed him back. I needed him to know that I trusted him more than anyone else. I couldn’t do that if I wasn’t even going to see him.

“I need to get Levi back,” I reminded him, “Avoiding him isn’t going to do that.”

“He asked for space, so give it to him. He expects you to follow him around like a puppy dog, so surprise him.” Erwin leaned forward in his seat and held my stare, “This is me helping you, Eren. Avoid him at all costs for the next few days. Let him know what it feels like to miss you.”

“And if he gets over me in that time?”

“He’s not going to,” Erwin replied in a laugh, “Trust me. If anything, it’s going to make him go crazy. And when he’s at his wit’s end, that’s when you’ll want to see him. That’s when he won’t be
able to stay away.”

“And why should I even trust you?” I snapped. “How do I know you’re not lying?”

“Because if he betrays you like that, he can’t have me,” Armin whispered from my side.

Erwin fell silent and his expression went cold, but he didn’t try to argue against it. I looked over at Armin and stared at him as if he’d lost his mind. Which I was fairly certain he had. He’d made abundantly clear that he wanted to be with Erwin, and yet he was putting that at risk for me. All for a relationship that I had ruined on my own. And Erwin was going to let him.

“See?” Erwin spoke softly, “Now I have just as much to lose as you do.”

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My phone buzzed from across the room and I groaned, dragging a pillow over my head and holding it down. It wasn’t going to be who I wanted to hear from, so why would I bother answering it? It wasn’t like I needed to. I knew exactly who it was because he had been texting me for the past two days, and I was starting to hate him more than I already did.

Erwin had been sending me constant updates because aside from Isabel and Farlan, he had been the only one around Levi. Of course, that was the plan from the start. I’d been taking great pains to stay away from Levi, and it turned out to be one of the hardest things I ever had to do. I even found myself trying to sneak out of Armin’s room in the middle of the night, which was why Mikasa was now sleeping near the door.

I was pretty damn sure that Armin and Erwin were working together at this point, and I couldn’t decide if they were against me or not.

My phone buzzed again and Mikasa groaned from her spot by the door, “Answer it before I throw it at your head.”

I rolled my eyes and groaned into my pillow, “Go ahead, I have a cushion.”

I heard the sound of rustling blankets followed by the heavy slam of Mikasa’s feet as she stomped over to me. She ripped the pillow off of my head and I grinned up at her murderous expression right until she dropped the phone on my face.

“Ow! Damn it, Mikasa!” I sat up and rubbed at the stinging sensation in my nose, checking for blood as my other hand palmed for the phone. It had fallen into the mess of blankets on the bed.

“Next time answer it,” she shot back before flopping onto the bed, jerking my pillow under her head.

I rolled my eyes again and then stared at the screen.

Come downstairs.

I muttered the word as I typed it out, “Why?”

“Why what?” Mikasa spoke into the pillow.

“Erwin wants to meet me downstairs,” I explained, tossing the phone back onto the sheets before falling over into the mass of pillows behind me. I let out a long sigh and shut my eyes, “I don’t feel like leaving the room.”
“Ditto to that.”

We had spent the past two days exploring everything that Paris had to offer, and while Armin had been more than excited to continue sightseeing both Mikasa and I were burnt out. I missed Levi and I had no interest in seeing Paris without him. It was beautiful, of course, and I was lucky to be here at all but it just wasn’t the same. I wanted to see the Paris he knew. The one he saw through his eyes as a child and on every visit since. I wanted to see a place that mattered because he was in it.

The phone buzzed with Erwin’s reply and Mikasa grunted in annoyance, “Is it that stupid blonde beefcake again?”

“Yea,” I muttered, staring at the message, “He wants me to dress in something nice and come downstairs.”

“Does he want me to go?”

I looked at her, although her face was currently buried in a pillow, and smiled. “No.”

“Thank god, because I’m not moving for anything.”

“Try telling that to Armin when he gets out of the shower,” I smirked, “I’m pretty sure he has another full day planned for us.”

She groaned and pulled the pillow tighter around her head, her voice muffled, “Tell him I died.”

“You will be missed,” I laughed, pausing when the phone buzzed in my hand once more. I bit back a curse and stared down at the screen, my breath catching in my throat.

Mikasa’s head lifted from the pillow and she fixed me with a concerned stare, “What is it?”

“Levi’s with him,” I whispered, still staring at the screen. “He wants me to see him.”

“Well, it’s about time,” she muttered, “Maybe the Shortie Sadist finally snapped.”

Normally I would have commented on her new and favorite nickname for him, but I couldn’t think of the words I wanted to say right now. I was going to see Levi for the first time since he left me standing at the fountain, and suddenly I wasn’t prepared. It had been three days since I’d been able to look into his eyes, and it terrified me to think of what I would see in them now. I didn’t know what I would do if there was no affection left in that beautiful blue gaze.

“Are you going to go?”

“Yea,” I managed to answer, typing out my response to Erwin and letting him know I would be down in a few minutes. “I just have to find something to wear.”

“You look good in green,” she suggested, “And brown.”

I nodded slowly as I stared at my suitcase, going through the options in my head. I had a green shirt that was form fitting enough to draw a stare from Armin, and I had to assume that was a good thing. If I paired it with black pants and my new necklace it might actually be enough to pass as decent. At least for me. I knew I would never be able to impress Levi with my choice in clothing, but I had given up on that long ago. He seemed to prefer me naked anyway.

Or at least he used to.

“Don’t be so nervous,” Mikasa said, watching the way my hands trembled as I dressed. “You don’t
want to let him know he can get to you this way.”

“I think he already knows,” I replied, buttoning my pants before turning towards the mirror to analyze my outfit choice. It was good enough.

“Well, then surprise him by acting confident,” Mikasa suggested before pointing over at the dresser, “It’s right there.”

I paused in my search for the necklace and glanced at the dresser. “Thanks.”

I slipped it on and held it tight in my hand for a moment, taking a slow breath as I closed my eyes. “He doesn’t deserve you,” Mikasa spoke softly, drawing my attention to her. “Not if he’s going to make you feel this way.”

“I hurt him, too,” I reminded her, walking towards the door, “And I’ve been the one avoiding him. You can’t place all the blame on him.”

“Watch me,” she muttered, holding the pillow beneath her chin as she stared at me, “Do you want me to go with?”

I ran my fingers through my messy hair and shook my head, “I don’t think that’ll help, and you look too tired to move. Hang out here, and let Armin know where I am.”

“Will do,” she responded, resting her head against the pillow. “But just so you know… if he hurts you, I hurt him.”

I rolled my eyes and closed the door behind me, pushing into the elevator and hitting the button for the ground floor. I sunk into the corner and shut my eyes once more, tiling my head back against the wall. My lips moved slowly in a silent prayer, begging that I wouldn’t fuck this all up again. I wasn’t sure it was possible to make things worse, but I was worried I would find a way without meaning to.

“Eren!”

Erwin waved me over the instant I stepped out of the elevator and I felt my heart jump into my throat when my eyes landed on Levi. He was staring at me with too many emotions in his eyes to count, and he almost looked pained because of it. Or at least he did until he composed his face into an impassive mask. One I knew too well. One that made me want to give up on the entire thing and go back to the room, but I couldn’t stop my legs from moving forward.

“Just the man I wanted to see,” Erwin greeted me as I approached the table. “Levi and I were just discussing how we haven’t spent time with any of the interns.”

“Were we?” Levi asked coolly, “And here I thought we were talking about how you haven’t been able to pull yourself out of Armin’s ass long enough to attend a meeting on time.”

“You say that as if you’ve never been late,” Erwin replied, his eyes amused. “I remember you missing a few meetings last week because you were stuck in your office. I wonder what you were doing in there.”

He was doing me, but I knew he wasn’t about to give that answer.

Levi stared at him in a stony silence, running the tip of his index finger along the rim of his glass before finally letting out a sigh and lifting his eyes to meet mine. “This is his way of asking you to come with us.”
“Where are you going?” I asked as casually as I could. My voice didn’t even shake, and I wasn’t sure how that was possible.

“We didn’t really decide on that,” Levi murmured, glancing over at Erwin before looking back at me. “We can go wherever you want to.”

I couldn’t ignore how calm and passive Levi was right now. He was talking to me as if I were just another intern and nothing more. There was no affection in his voice and he was being careful not to use any pet names. Or maybe it was just coming naturally. Maybe three days was all he needed to move past everything we had together.

I felt pain twist in my heart and my fingers brushed against the key as I set my hand on my chest. Levi’s eyes followed the motion and they widened slightly when he caught sight of the key, his lips parting and his breath catching. And for a brief moment I had a flame of hope flaring up inside me, but I managed to extinguish it all too quickly. That one look couldn’t excuse the fact that he was treating me like I was just another person. Either he didn’t miss me at all, or I hadn’t done my job well enough yet.

Which meant I had to continue to try.

“I think I’m just going to go back to my room,” I answered at last, glancing over at the elevator. “Armin and I have a day planned anyway.”

“I don’t care what you had planned. You’re coming with us,” Levi demanded.

That hopeful flame came back and burned bright, but I couldn’t bring myself to trust it. Even if I could see desperation in his eyes now, that didn’t mean it would last. And Erwin had told me to avoid Levi until he snapped. Maybe that meant he had to come pounding down my door to reach that point, but if it meant we would last after that, I was willing to do it.

I wouldn’t waste everything on one day, just so he could get me out of his system again.

“Thanks for the offer,” I started, but he immediately cut me off again.

“I wasn’t offering anything, brat.”

My heart started to beat erratically. It was impossible not to hope.

“He doesn’t have to if he doesn’t want to, Levi” Erwin replied, eyeing me carefully. As much as I hated to admit it, I had a feeling he knew what I was thinking.

“Yes, he does,” Levi snapped before moving out of his chair. He grabbed my upper arm and steered me away from the table, walking me towards the elevator.

“Levi, where are we…” I stumbled along behind him, trying to figure out where this was going. I knew I wouldn’t be able to resist him if we were alone.

“Somewhere without an audience.”

He hit the button for the elevator and then turned me around to face him, staring up at me as he gripped the key on the necklace. “You know, if you’re trying to fuck with me, it’s working wonders.”

“I’m not trying to—”
“Then why did you do this?” he cut me off, “Why did you wear it like this?”

“Because it’s too important to just throw in my pocket,” I whispered.

He stared up at me and swallowed convulsively before releasing the key, taking a step back and shaking his head. The elevator opened, but he ignored it. “This is too fucking hard. It’s been three days, and I haven’t seen you at all. Where the hell have you been?”

“You wanted space.”

“Not like this,” he spoke sharply, “I didn’t want you to walk out of my fucking life like you weren’t even there. I thought I would at least see you.”

“I thought you didn’t want to see me,” I replied, trying to keep the confusion from overwhelming me. “I thought you wanted a break from us.”

“From us, not you!” Levi snapped. “I never wanted a break from you.”

“But you said…”

“Fuck what I said,” Levi growled, “Is this how it’s going to be? If we end, that’s it? I don’t see you?”

“Why would you want to see me if we were over?”

Levi stared at me as if I’d lost my mind and then shook his head slowly, looking away. “Because maybe I thought we were more than just that. Obviously I made a mistake.”

My eyes widened and my breath caught. “No, Levi, I—”

“Forget it,” he cut me off, “I’m not talking about this now. Go have your fucking day with Armin and take Erwin with you.”

“They can go without me.”

He rolled his eyes and hit the button for the elevator again; the doors popping open immediately this time. “Why, so you can sit in your room all day?”

“I’m not going to be in my room. I’m going to be with you.”

The words came out on their own, as if my brain knew exactly what to say without me guiding it. My heart was hammering in my chest and my mind was racing a mile a minute, because suddenly I knew what I had to do. Proving my trust to him was going to take more than a day, and it was never going to happen if we spent time apart. I had to show him that I would be here, even if everything ended between us.

Because we were more than a relationship, and I had failed to see that until now. That’s what he was waiting for. He had wanted me to come to him, even if he told me to stay away. I was never meant to listen. He had been waiting for me to disobey and I’d disappointed him by following his orders exactly. I was supposed to fight for him, not the relationship. Because at the end of it all, I needed him in my life. No matter what that meant.

Levi was an unstoppable force that had affected my life past the point of return. Even if we fell apart entirely, I wouldn’t be able to keep myself from seeing him again. I wouldn’t be able to leave his life and never look back just because we no longer shared a bed. I couldn’t deny that it would be agony
to see him move on with someone else, but it would kill me not to see him at all.

I needed him in my life like I needed to breathe. I had been suffocating for days and I was through with it now.

“You’re the last fucking person I want to deal with right now,” Levi snapped, the annoyance clear in his eyes.

He stepped into the elevator and hit the button to close the doors, but my body moved too quickly to allow him time to escape. I shoved my way into the small space and caught his hands before he could push me out again, gripping them tight as I stared down at him.

“That’s bullshit.”

“The fuck it is,” he shot back, jerking his hands free, “Now get—“

“No.”

“Don’t you tell me no, you brat,” he growled, “Get the hell out of this elevator before—”

“No!” I shouted over him, briefly thankful that the doors were now closed. Not that it mattered. “No, I’m not leaving you again! Clearly you’re pissed off about that already. Why would I make it worse by going now?”

“You’re already making it worse, you stupid kid,” he interjected, “Now go.”

He reached out to press the button to open the doors, but I caught his hand in mine and shoved him into the corner of the elevator, grabbing his hands and pinning them above his head. He stared up at me with anger in his eyes, but I caught the smallest glimmer of amusement. A playfulness that he reserved only for me. The kind I was able to identify even when everyone else thought he was furious.

Which he was in this case, but that didn’t mean he wanted me to back off. If anything, it was exactly the opposite. He was waiting for me to fight. He wanted me to chase him, and I was more than prepared to do that.

He’d said he wanted me to stay away, but that was something that neither of us wanted. I didn’t need him to say the words to know that these past few days had been eating at him, too. We were both miserable and I had been making that worse by following an order he never expected me to listen to. I had surprised him in the worst way by staying away, but I was going to change that.

I had never backed down before and I refused to do so now, especially when it came to him. I would fight to the very end to keep him in my life, even if that meant disobeying every single order he gave me. Because he didn’t expect me to follow any of it in the end. I was a surprise to him, and our relationship had thrived off of that. I had chased him down and poured my heart out again and again, but somewhere over the past few weeks I had lost that.

I’d taken him for granted by dismissing every wonderful gesture he ever made. He did so much to show me how he cared, and what had I done lately in return? I’d hurt and accused him multiple times. I’d lied and doubted him every step of the way. I’d shown him countless reasons why I wasn’t good enough.

And now I would show him why I was.

I reached out and punched the button for our floor, keeping my other hand against his chest. If he
had any intention of struggling he didn’t show it, but he kept the ice-cold glare in his eyes. Still, there was something hiding in them that gave me hope. It was faint and hard for even me to catch, but it was there none-the-less. He wanted me to do this. He wanted me to fight for him just as badly as I wanted to keep him there.

Because I couldn’t be without him. That wasn’t a choice.

Fighting was our only option.
YAY FOR THURSDAYS! ^__^ AND YAY FOR MY BIRTHDAY TOMORROW! Which is one of the reasons I'm so excited right now. XD But I'm also excited for this chapter! I really, really am. It's emotional and eventful and... yea, I've really been looking forward to this chapter. ^_^

A huge thank you to thug-seme-since1995 and luckyfurball for the art they shared this week! ^_^ If you'd like to see any of the fanart for The Intern, you can find it under the 'Intern Art' tab of my lootibles blog.

AND WOW! o____o There were so many comments for the last chapter, and it really just made my week to read them all. ^____^ I'm hoping you'll all enjoy this week's chapter. Like I said, it's eventful so... well, I'm looking forward to hearing what you all think of it.

Oh! And I am planning on holding another tinychat for The Intern this week, but it will be a little earlier than usual. Check my blog for details tomorrow. ^_^

As always, you can leave comments both here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you'd like to share anything there. ^_^

ENJOY!

“So what are you gonna do now that you have me up here?”

I opened my mouth but no words came out. None had since we’d gotten to his floor and into the hotel room. I was at a loss, and I had no idea why. There were a million thoughts rushing through my head, all of them were centered around him, and yet I couldn’t get a single one of them past my tongue. Of course that was probably because I was too terrified of what would happen if I said the wrong thing yet again. I was finally close to him, alone with him for the first time in days and I wasn’t ready to have that end just because I had to stick my foot in my mouth.

“If you’re gonna pull this mime shit, you can do it in the hall,” Levi filled in the silence with his clipped words. “Because I’m not having this conversation for the both of us. If you don’t have anything to say then you can just-”

“I have plenty to say,” I blurted out, cutting him off, “I just can’t think of what to start with.”

“Then call me when you do.”

I could already see him shoving me out the door, but I wasn’t going to let that happen again. I’d promised myself that much. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh?” Levi leaned against the wall beside the door and folded his arms as if he were settling in for a long conversation. “Sorry for what?”
“For everything.”

“Everything?” he repeated, fixing me with an annoyed stare. “For the World Wars? The unemployment crisis? The dinosaurs?”

“I didn’t mean that,” I rolled my eyes, “I meant everything to do with us.”

“Are you sorry you met me?”

“What? No! I never said-”

“Then maybe you should say what you mean,” he continued in a voice that was as sharp as a knife, “Instead of just apologizing for everything. Because if you think you can just make this all go away with some fucking cop out like that, then you’re about to be really surprised.”

“I wasn’t…” I paused and shook my head, closing my eyes as I tried to think of a way through this. I never expected it to be that easy, but at the same time I didn’t know what to say. I was sorry for every bad thing that had happened to us because it had brought us to this point. A point where we were teetering on the edge of having anything at all. We were so close to breaking and I was struggling to hold on.

“I know you weren’t,” he sighed, “I know I shouldn’t be expecting anything more than this, but fuck kid… can’t you just tell me what’s in that thick head of yours? Because I’m tired of trying to read it.”

I took a deep breath and then shrugged, staring down between us as I said the only words that could explain away my silence. “I’m scared that I’m gonna say something wrong and that you’ll make me leave.”

Levi eyed me for a long moment and then pushed away from the wall, crossing the short distance between us. “So you’re scared of how I’m going to react… you’re scared of what I’m going to do to you. Is that right?”

I opened my mouth to counter the statement, to tell him I wasn’t scared of him at all, but I knew I’d be lying. He could end us right now if I said the wrong thing and nothing terrified me more. So I nodded.

“What’s our safe word, Eren?”

I felt my brow furrow confusion, but answered anyway. “Wings…”

“Exactly,” he murmured, taking my hand in his before placing his wrist into my palm and letting me see the shape of his black wing tattoo. “So when you say something that pisses me off, I’ll use our word and you’ll stop.”

I stared down at the tattoo, not really seeing the point. It wouldn’t stop me from saying something stupid in the end. “You’ll already be mad by then.”

“I won’t let it get to that point,” he assured me, pulling his wrist away. “And besides, what other choice do we have? It’s not like I’m going to sit here forever and wait for you to talk. I’d rather have you piss me off than to hear you say nothing at all.”

“I don’t know,” I muttered, “I’ve gotten pretty good at fucking things up.”

“That’s because you don’t know when to stop,” Levi pointed out, “And normally I like that, but with Armin it’s getting ridiculous. I’m starting to think you actually want him.”
I wrinkled my nose, “Not like that. He’s my best friend. I just didn’t want to see him with Erwin. I don’t trust him.”

“Yea, I know you don’t,” Levi answered as he walked towards the mini bar. “To be honest, that’s partially my fault. I’m the one that demonized him from the start.”

“But you had a reason to.”

“Did I?” Levi murmured, pouring some amber liquid into a glass. He turned it slowly in his hand, eyeing me as he leaned against the wall. “I’m starting to think I took that a little too far.”

I rolled my eyes and looked away from him, fixing my stare on the balcony. “He got to you, too?”

“Who, Erwin?” Levi chuckled softly and took a sip from his glass, “That man will forever get to me.”

I felt my jaw tighten but I managed to suppress any comment I had. Showing just how jealous Levi’s words made me wouldn’t help our situation right now. Not when my jealousy was one of the reasons we were so close to falling apart.

“So are you giving up on it then?” I asked, finally looking over at him, “Do you not care about your revenge anymore?”

“I care about one thing right now and it’s not that,” Levi responded simply, watching me as he angled his head to the side. “And considering this whole shitfest happened because of that… well, my revenge isn’t worth it if it means losing the one thing I actually care about.”

“It didn’t happen because of that,” I muttered, “It happened because I accused you of something I knew you would never do. Because I was so angry and so wrapped up in their stupid relationship that I managed to ruin ours.”

“We’re not ruined, Eren,” he whispered, looking down, “Just broken.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but the words were choked in my throat. It was a struggle to get them out at all and they were mangled when I finally managed to speak them.

“I miss you.”

Levi took a deep breath and turned his eyes to me. “Then why didn’t you come to me?”

“Because Erwin told me not to,” I shrugged, “And you’d already asked me to stay away. I figured it was what you wanted.”

“I thought I’d been seeing too much of him lately,” Levi mused, “At least more so than usual. Not to mention he kept talking about you. That was suspicious enough.”

“He talked about me?”

“Only every two seconds,” Levi rolled his eyes and took another sip from his glass. “I had a feeling he was trying to get under my skin, I just didn’t know why.”

“He said if I stayed away, it would drive you crazy.”

“Well, he was fucking right, wasn’t he?” Levi snapped before shaking his head, setting down his glass.
“I didn’t want to stay away.”

“But you did it anyway,” he countered quickly, his expression somewhere between anger and annoyance. Exactly what I’d feared.

“Wings.”

“No,” his voice cracked like a whip and he pointed in my direction, fixing me with a stony glare. “No, you don’t get to say that to me right now. You don’t get to run away from this fight.”

“I don’t want to fight.”

“Well I do,” he shot back, “Maybe you’re willing to give up on us, but I’m not. We have to fight about this, Eren. You’re just as angry about this as I am, and we’re not going to get anywhere if we just slap a band aid on this now.”

I was breathing heavily, as if my body were already anticipating the fight that I knew was coming. He was going to yell at me and I was going to have to yell back, and somewhere in that mess we were going to have to figure out how to make things better. Because the only other choice was letting go.

“Fine, we’ll fight.” I spoke in a clipped voice. “But don’t expect me to hold back.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it, brat,” Levi replied, a smirk on his lips. “Now tell me why you really stayed away.”

“I already did,” I pointed out. “That wasn’t a lie. Erwin really asked me to stay away.”

“I’m sure he did, but you didn’t have to listen.” Levi paused and then confusion touched his expression. “Why did you listen? Why were you even talking to him in the first place?”

“Because Armin asked me to,” I muttered, “It was just supposed to be breakfast but then Erwin confronted me. He knew something had happened to us when you said you would be going to the meeting after all.”

“That doesn’t surprise me.” Levi shrugged, “But why would you listen to someone you claim to hate. Or is that over? Are you two buddy-buddy now?”

I rolled my eyes. “No. I just think I’m at the point where I can tolerate him, but it’s never going to be more than that.”

“Armin must be thrilled,” Levi commented.

I tried to keep the look of distaste off of my face and failed miserably. “I’m guessing Erwin told you what happened?”

“Aside from trying to talk you up, Armin was the only other thing coming out of his mouth,” Levi murmured, looking at his nails. “It was actually a little sickening to hear him talk so much about another man.”

“Jealous?”

I said the word before I had even realized it came out of my mouth, and regretted it immediately. He looked up at me and raised one perfect eyebrow, regarding my expression for a long moment before he smirked.
“I’m sure a small part of me is,” he admitted, “As much as you don’t want to hear that. I wasn’t expecting to see him move on, but it’s easier considering I already have.”

The words were just enough to ease the hit to my self-confidence, and I managed to remind myself that he was mine, not Erwin’s. Or at least he was up until a few nights ago.

“I told Erwin he could have him,” I said at last, wanting Levi to know that I was done fighting it. Even if I hated the idea of them together, I wasn’t going to destroy my relationship any further to prevent it from happening.

“I know you did. Trust me, Erwin told me all about it in his little Gossip Girl fest.” Levi rolled his eyes, shaking his head. “But do you really think I care about any of that? You don’t have to let them be together. That has nothing to do with us.”

“You said yourself that I was too focused on them.”

“That’s because you are, but it’s not going to break us.” Levi paused and then shrugged. “It’s the whole lack of trust that I can’t handle. You should know by now that I need that in a relationship. I can’t be with you if you can’t trust me.”

“I trust you.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Yes, I do!” I shouted over him, feeling a sudden surge of anger. “Stop telling me that I don’t! Would you just let me explain myself, just let me tell you what’s in my head before you go and tell me how wrong it is?”

Levi stared at me for a long moment and then waved his hand in my direction. “Go on then, kid. You have my undivided attention. Tell me what’s in that head of yours.”

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, trying to gather my thoughts into something that would actually make sense. Not that it mattered. I knew it would all come out as a mess in the end, and I could only hope that he would actually understand it. Because I did trust him, more than I trusted myself or anyone else. I knew he would never hurt me. I knew he would never even try.

“You’re my first relationship,” I started softly, picking the words along the way. “I mean the first ever, not just the first real relationship. I have absolutely no idea what I’m doing and I’ve just been waiting for the time when I fuck it all up. Which I did.”

Levi opened his mouth to speak but I held up my hand and continued. “I don’t trust myself, Levi. That’s who I don’t trust. I’m new and inexperienced. I’ve never had something worth losing and the fact that I do now terrifies me. I’ve been so scared of losing you that I’ve been pushing it in that direction. I’ve been putting distance between us like it’s a barrier. I’ve been making you out to be the bad guy and I don’t even mean to.”

My next breath trembled on the way in and I looked up to meet his eyes. “And you’re not the bad guy, Levi. Not even close. And I know that, I do. I know you won’t hurt me, and I know you won’t hurt anyone I care about. Saying otherwise was the stupidest thing I’ve ever done. I don’t even know why those words came out; all I know is that they were the biggest mistake of my life. And not because I lost you, but because I hurt you. Losing you was just my punishment. To lose one person that has mattered to me more than anything.”

“You haven’t lost me, Eren.”
“And I’m so sorry,” I continued, my voice cracking along with my resolve. “I am, Levi. I swear I am. I never meant to hurt you, and I hate myself for it. And I know I don’t deserve you, but I… I…”

Levi’s hands touched my face and my eyes instantly met his, my heart hammering in my chest. He was so close and finally touching me willingly again, and it took everything I had not to take him into my arms. I wanted to hold him against me and never let go, but I kept my hands glued to my sides. I couldn’t ruin this now.

“I was never going to let you go,” Levi spoke as he searched my eyes. “I was just trying to light a fire under your ass so you’d realize you couldn’t jerk me around like that. I was trying to scare you and obviously it worked.”

“How could it not work?” I frowned, shaking my head, “I thought I was losing you.”

“I didn’t even expect it to last the night. I didn’t think you would let it get this far. I expected to come home to find you waiting in my bed, but you weren’t there.” Levi continued, his words becoming clipped and angry. “I didn’t think that anything could keep you away from me, but all it took were some words.”

“You asked me to stay away.”

“And you listened,” Levi countered, “I really didn’t expect you to do that. Not when you’ve chased me down every time before that.”

“But all those times I had something to fight with,” I argued, “We were both wrong then, but I was the one who fucked up this time. You had every reason to want me to stay away.”

“That doesn’t mean you just give up,” Levi snapped, stepping back from me. I could feel the world starting to spin again. “It’s doesn’t mean you stay away from me completely.”

“I wasn’t going to until I talked to Erwin,” I explained. “I was planning to go after you the next day, but he told me not to. And I was already so scared that I was going to fuck everything up that I thought it would actually help if I stayed away.”

“So that I would see what it was like to miss you?” Levi shot back, his eyes narrowing, “Tell me those weren’t his exact words.”

“How did you…”

“Because I know him and how he thinks,” Levi responded, gesturing at the key on my necklace. “And I’m guessing that was his idea, too.”

I looked down at it and my hand instantly closed around the key, holding it close. “Armin’s, actually.”

“So it was the baby manipulator’s then.”

“He’s not a manipulator!”

“It’s not supposed to be an insult, kid, so don’t take it that way,” Levi shrugged, eyeing the hand that was closed around the key. “Trust me when I say those two know what they’re doing. They’re able to think circles around us, and just because they’re manipulating doesn’t mean they’re doing it for the wrong reasons.”

“So they were right in telling me what to do?”
“No,” Levi responded quickly. “Because that’s them, not you. And that’s not what I want. You’re what I want, Eren. As you are and no other way. Angry, impulsive, jealous, kind, loving, every single thing that you are is everything that I want. The demanding little shit that I fell for. The one that never gave me a choice.”

“Then don’t let me give you one now.”

The only thing I knew was the beat of my racing heart as my body moved of its own accord, driving me across that small distance to the one person that mattered. He must have been moving too, because our bodies crashed together as one when we finally met. My hands tangled in his shirt and in his hair, fighting to take purchase of any inch of him as my mouth struggled to find his. My teeth grazed his chin at first and it was with a soft amused laugh that his lips finally found mine.

And then everything around us faded away as if it were nothing but an after thought. The anger, the fight, the time spent apart, none of it mattered while his lips were on mine. I was lost to the taste of his mouth as his tongue invaded mine, sweeping against me in sensual licks that had my knees forgetting their purpose. But it didn’t matter. Levi’s arms circled around my waist and my feet left the floor when his hands palmed my ass. He was carrying me then, and I didn’t care where we went. He could send us sailing off the balcony so long as his lips stayed where they were.

I felt the soft sheets of the bed behind my back as he dropped me onto it, momentarily breaking our kiss and drawing a sound of protest from me. He chuckled softly and bent over, claiming my lips and lingering there for a moment more before depriving me once again. I panted softly as I stared up at him, realizing that I was forgiven for at least the next hour. And if it meant being his again, even temporarily, I would take it.

But of course I was hoping for more.

“And to think you really thought I wanted you to stay away,” Levi murmured softly, eyeing my body like a hungry predator. A smirk crossed his lips as he tugged his cravat loose, sliding the white material out from its rightful place around his throat. I knew it would be around my wrists soon enough. “Hands above your head and prepare yourself, brat. We have days to make up for.”

The silence of the room was broken only by the soft sound of our breathing, which had once been labored but was now slowed into the languid pattern of sleep. It was a wonder I’d been able to wake up at all with my ear pressed firmly against Levi’s chest, given a front row seat to the rhythmic beat of his heart. I had no idea how much I’d missed this simple sound for the few days that I’d been denied it, and I couldn’t imagine sleeping to any other sound now.

His chest vibrated beneath my ear as he laughed softly, “You’re finally awake.”

I was too lazy to rub the sleep from my eyes, and I blinked slowly as I stared up at him. “How long was I asleep?”

Levi paused for a moment to eye the clock beside the bed. “A solid ten, if not more.”

“How long was I asleep?” I shot up, twisting around to stare at the window and rubbed my eyes. Dawn was creeping over the horizon. “I slept all night?”

Well, considering we fucked all day, I’d say you needed the rest,” Levi murmured softly, a lazy smirk on his lips. He ran the tip of his index finger down the length of my spine, and I suppressed a shiver and the urge to repeat what we’d done the night before.
“When did you wake up?” I frowned, rubbing at my one eye as I glanced over at him. He was still focused on touching my skin in any way that might arouse me, and it was working.

“Not too long before you,” he continued in a soft voice, casually rolling one shoulder in a dismissive shrug. “Just long enough to order breakfast.”

I dropped my hand to my side and blinked as I stared at the window. “You had a conversation and I didn’t wake up?”

“You talked a little,” he offered, his smirk growing. “When I was ordering food, you said ‘muffin.’ I’m not sure if it was directed at me or breakfast, but I ordered it anyway.”

My stomach rumbled in response and I felt a flush stain my cheeks. I cleared my throat and then flopped back down onto the sheets beside him, resting my left arm behind my head. “So…”

“Yes, Eren.”

“Does this mean you forgive me?” I cast a small, hopeful glance in his direction and he eyed me with an amused expression.

“Like I said… yes, Eren,” Levi rolled his eyes and then set both of his hands behind his head, staring up at the ceiling for a long moment. He let a sigh rush out of his lungs and finally looked back at me, fixing me with a small glare that was far less intimidating with the playful edge in it. “You’re still a fucking shithead, just so you know. But I’m figuring that’s something I’m going to have to get used to if I want to be with you.”

“And you do?” I probed with the most obvious question. At this point I just wanted to hear him say it.

“You already know the answer to that one, kid,” Levi shot back, but the teasing smirk remained.

I could already feel things getting better between us, and the flame of hope was burning bright in my chest. He’d found it in himself to forgive me, even when I didn’t deserve it. And I knew I didn’t. I’d lied to him, hurt him, and even accused him of horrible things. But I wasn’t going to do that anymore. Now that Erwin had assured me he would never tell the lie, I was going to bury that one as deep as it would go and start fresh. I wouldn’t mess up again. Not this time.

“I’m sorry,” I murmured softly into the silence.

“You don’t need to apologize anymore,” he replied, his fingers once again finding my skin and reassuring me with his touch. “We talked it out and I’ve forgiven you. It’s done.”

“Then…” I paused for a moment and looked down at him, saying the only words stuck in my mind. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

I shrugged and closed my eyes, smiling. “For giving me a chance not to be a shithead.”

“You’re always gonna be a shithead, kid.” Levi retorted, “But as long as you’re mine, I think I’ll be able to deal with it.”

I stayed in my relaxed position as if it would hide the fact that my heart was racing a mile a minute. I still couldn’t believe how quickly things had managed to change. Less than twenty four hours ago I was almost convinced that I would never have him again, but here he was beside me. The only thing
that was disappointing about this was that it had come too late to explore Paris with him. We would be leaving in a few hours.

“Can we come back?” I blurted out suddenly, “To Paris?”

He raised one eyebrow and fixed me with an amused stare, “Didn’t you get to see it all with Armin? I thought you two have been sight seeing for the past few days.”

“I don’t care about any of that stuff,” I replied with a shrug, “I told you, I want to see the Paris that has you in it. I want to see the things that matter to you.”

“Then go look in the mirror.”

I could tell by the smirk on his lips that he was trying to get a reaction out of me, and it worked. I rubbed at the blush in my cheeks and looked away. “You know what I mean.”

“And you know that money’s no object,” Levi continued, “So if you let me pay then we can come back whenever you want.”

“I want to come back over the summer.” Part of the reason was because I wanted to know we would still be together in the summer, but I wasn’t about to lead with that.

“Then that’s when we’ll come back,” he said simply, glancing over at the clock before playfully slapping my thigh. “Now hurry up and get that gorgeous ass in my shower. We need to get ready before the food shows up.”

We were still in the shower when they delivered it.

“I can’t believe you’re going already,” Isabel whined, her arms like a steel cage around Levi’s waist. “It’s barely been a week.”

“We traveled with interns who have families to get home to,” Levi explained, ruffling her hair. It was hard to believe that they weren’t siblings with the way they acted together. “And we’ll be visiting again soon.”

“You and…?” she glanced over Levi’s shoulder to look at me and pursed her lips. I had a feeling she still didn’t trust me after everything that had happened, and I knew it would take time before she finally warmed up to me.

“Yes, him too,” he answered her unspoken question. “But I can come separately another time if you want. Maybe in a few weeks.”

“Only if you want to,” she shrugged, trying to seem as if she didn’t care either way. I knew she wasn’t about to reject me in front of him, and I had to appreciate her effort. “You should bring Mikasa, too. She’s your sister, right?”

It took me a second to realize she was addressing me, “Uhm… yea. Did you two talk a lot?”

“No,” Isabel drew out the word and glanced past me, “But she and Farlan seem awfully close. I think he’s going to miss her.”

I followed her stare and caught the image of Farlan kissing Mikasa’s extended hand before she walked onto the plane, and realized I had no idea how to react. I couldn’t be angry over someone I
barely knew, and I’d only heard good things about him so far. He seemed like a decent man, and I was willing to trust Mikasa’s judgment when it came to men. She was probably stricter than I was.

“Strange,” Levi mused, “I didn’t know Farlan was into women.”

“Oh, whatever,” Isabel rolled her eyes and nudged him with her elbow.

“Levi, Eren,” Farlan greeted us as he walked over, pausing only for a moment before pulling Levi into a tight hug. “Don’t let it be another year, okay?”

“It’s barely going to be a few weeks if Maggie has anything to say about it,” Levi answered, giving him a quick smack on the back. Farlan held on for a little longer and then finally pulled away, glancing in my direction.

“You have a great sister, Eren,” he spoke, reaching out to grab my shoulder and giving it a squeeze. “And I know she’s going through a lot right now, but she’s not ready to talk about it yet. Just make sure you’re there for her when she is. She needs you right now.”

“I… uh…” The words were all jumbled in my mind. Why had she talked to him and not me? “Yea, I’ll be there.”

He squeezed my shoulder once more before releasing it, and I turned my attention to the plane as Levi said his farewells to Isabel and Farlan. I still had no idea what was going on with her, and it made me angry that a complete stranger knew more than I did. But maybe that was because it was easier to talk to someone who was impartial to the situation. Farlan couldn’t judge her on any of it because he didn’t know everything that I did.

But even still…

Levi and I boarded the plane and I headed straight for the back, trying to ignore the fact that Armin looked a little too cozy next to Erwin. If that even counted as sitting next to someone. Even with the quick glance I gave them, I was pretty sure that Armin was practically sitting in Erwin’s lap. But even if he was, none of the others seemed to mind. Jean and Mikasa were carrying on a conversation as if nothing was wrong, and I decided that was just fine. After the bit of information I’d learned from Farlan I wasn’t in the mood to be sociable anyway.

“Are you alright?” Levi asked when I huffed for the umpteenth time.

“Yea,” I muttered, staring out the window at the sky around us. “Just thinking.”

“Anything you want to share?” he probed. I knew he was concerned, but he was trying to seem nonchalant about it. Apparently my attitude made it clear that I wasn’t open for conversation, but he was worried enough to ask anyway.

“I want to talk about it,” I admitted and then paused as I looked towards the front of the plane. “But not right now.”

“Is it about one of them?”

“Yea, but for once it’s not about Armin or Erwin.”

Levi was silent for a long moment as he stared at the people in question. Finally he leaned into me and took my hand in his, lacing our fingers together. “She didn’t tell him anything, if that’s what’s been eating at you. Trust me, I asked. He knows just as much as you do.”
I opened my mouth and then shut it just as quickly, letting a sigh out through my nose. One day I knew I would get used to how easily he was able to read me, but right now it was a little unsettling. I barely had to say anything at all and he knew what was wrong. It was a wonder he didn’t know everything inside my head.

“Close your eyes and relax,” he continued, his voice just as soothing as it had been before. It was low and deep, and reminded me of the bedroom. “If you sleep, the trip will go by faster.”

It was impossible not to obey, especially when he pulled me against him and I once again had the sound of his heart close to my ear. The rhythmic beat pulled me into a sleep that was so deep that he had to shake me awake hours later to get me to move at all. Everyone else had gotten off the plane by the time I opened my eyes, and I looked around the empty cabin as I tried to figure out when we had landed.

“How long were you trying to wake me up?” I asked, rubbing the back of my head. My hair was messed up from sleeping.

“I tried a few times and then gave up,” he replied with a shrug, “I would let you sleep longer, but I’m sick and tired of this plane and I know my bed’s more comfortable than this seat.”

I rubbed the back of my neck and frowned, standing up to follow him off of the plane. “I should actually stop at home to see if my mom’s back yet. It’s been a while since I’ve seen her.”

“That’ll actually work out,” he mused, “I need to stop by The Wall to see what damage Hanji has done in my absence.”

“It’s only been a few days.”

“You’d be surprised what she could do in a few hours,” Levi retorted, “And with a few days, she probably took the entire thing down.”

Knowing Hanji, he was probably right.

We got into the car and drove most of the way in silence, which was something I was grateful for considering I was still trying to wake up from my nap. By the time we rolled up to Trost Tower, I was actually able to keep my eyes open and I could feel my thought patterns returning to normal. I would probably be able to maintain a conversation with my mom just long enough to get my ass out of the apartment and back into Levi’s bed.

“How long do you think you’ll be at The Wall?”

Levi turned off the engine and we both got out of the car. “Hard to say. Could be a few minutes. Could be a few hours.”

“Do you want me to go there after I talk to my mom?”

Levi leaned onto the driver’s side door and pulled me against him, running his index finger along my jaw. “You know you’re always welcome there, but you have the key to my apartment if you want to wait.”

I angled my head into his touch and smiled, “Is that you’re nice way of saying that Hanji will keep you there longer if I show up?”

“You get better at reading me every day, kid,” he replied with a smirk. “Wait for me in the apartment. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”
I met his lips in a kiss that was far too brief to satisfy either of us, but I knew I couldn’t have more right now. I watched him walk towards The Wall and then forced myself to make my way upstairs. It was hard enough to hit the button for my floor and completely ignore his when it was really the only place I wanted to go. But I had to remind myself that he wouldn’t be there for a few hours anyway, and it had been too long since I’d seen my mom in person. Even if she just ignored me when I got there, I still had to make the attempt.

I twisted my key in the lock and pushed the door open, stepping into the dark apartment. “Mom?”

There was no answer, but there usually wasn’t even when she was home. I made my way towards her bedroom and opened the door, but the room looked the same as when I had left it. She hadn’t come back from her trip yet, which wasn’t exactly surprising, but I couldn’t understand why she hadn’t bothered to call. Of course, I hadn’t bothered to check the messages left at the apartment, so it was possible she left me one there.

I walked over to my bedroom, deciding I may as well check the phone there instead of lingering in the kitchen. I hadn’t been in my bed since the night Levi had taken me for the first time, and the idea of laying there for a while to fantasize about him was too tempting to ignore. Not that it compared to having the real man in my arms, but I knew I wouldn’t get that for another hour or two.

I pushed open the door to my room and was momentarily confused by the shadow standing in front of the window. It was tall and familiar, but it wasn’t my mother. The shoulders were too broad and the hair was too short.

“I saw you outside,” my father’s deep voice filled the room. “Standing there with a man.”

He turned to face me and even with the shadow that covered half of his features, I could see the look in his eyes. And it wasn’t friendly. It wasn’t anything I was used to. Not from him. My blood ran cold and fear raced through me stronger than anything I had ever known before it. There was something wrong in those eyes, and suddenly I knew why Mikasa had run. Without a question, without a doubt.

She was running from him.

And she had every reason to.

“I think we need to have a talk, son.”

Chapter End Notes

******THE NEXT CHAPTER WILL HAVE TRIGGER WARNINGS******
Please, please, PLEASE read those beforehand if you have any doubts that you should read the next chapter!
I never thought he would kill me.

I didn’t even think he would try. I’d spent my whole life idolizing this man, and the idea that he would ever cause me pain was something that had never crossed my mind. Until now. Now that I could see the murderous look in his eyes and know, without a single doubt, that it was meant for me. He wanted to hurt me for what I was and who I loved, and that knowledge caused me more agony than his hands ever could. Because without saying a word, I knew he was rejecting me. Hating me for something that I couldn’t change, something that I didn’t want to change.

And even though he didn’t need to use his hands to break me, I knew he was going to try.

“You’re home,” I whispered the only words that were safe, knowing they wouldn’t do a thing to save me.
But what more could I say?

I couldn’t say what we both knew to be true. The words wouldn’t move past my lips because I was too scared of what would follow. Admitting to anything could open the floodgates and break apart everything I knew. I wasn’t ready for that kind of disaster, and part of me was still holding onto the vain hope that I could somehow talk my way out of this and avoid the subject entirely. But the rest of me was sick with the idea that I would hope for something like that at all. It made it seem as if I were ashamed of what I had with Levi, ashamed of myself, and I hated that anything could make me feel that way.

I hated him for making me feel that way.

“Who is he, Eren?”

I wanted to blurt out his name with the same bravado that I’d always had. I wanted to say his name and what he meant to me as if it didn’t make a difference what anyone else thought. And in truth, it didn’t. I didn’t care who accepted us so long as I could be with him, even if we were alone in the end. It didn’t matter to me if my father didn’t approve of him or the idea of us.

But the thought that he wouldn’t accept me was killing me inside.

“I don’t know who you’re talking about.”

It couldn’t even be called a lie with the way my voice trembled. I knew that I hadn’t fooled him, I hadn’t even come close, and yet I was still hoping that he would let it go. The man I had once called dad would have seen the fear in my eyes and dropped the subject immediately, but this wasn’t him. I didn’t know who this was. Those eyes didn’t belong to anyone who’d ever loved me.

“You got out of his car, Eren,” he continued, stressing my name as if it were the crack of a whip. It stung like one. “You were standing there with a man. You had your arms around him.”

You kissed him.

The unspoken words hung between us, but I knew they were there. So loud and inescapable that I could almost feel them, almost see them hovering there like a glowing neon sign that wouldn’t turn off. I had no way around this and I knew he wouldn’t stop. He would keep pushing the subject until I caved, so I knew I had to say something. Even if it were small and a half-truth, it would have to do.

“He’s a friend,” I muttered the words, hating the taste. Hating the lie almost as much as I hated myself in that moment.

I was a coward.

“Armin is your friend,” he corrected me immediately, pausing only long enough to take a swig from the long-necked bottle that was clutched in his hand. It was then that I finally noticed the pungent smell of alcohol that was lingering in the room. He was drinking and had been for a while. Long before I had arrived home and kissed Levi outside of the car. There was more to it than this.

“Yes, Armin is my friend,” I agreed in a voice that waivered, “Dad, how long have you been drinking?”

He paused to eye the bottle in his hand and then took another sip before ignoring my question completely. “You touch Armin the way you touch him?”

If I was being honest, I held Armin with as much affection as I held Levi, but it was never for the
same reasons. Still, I knew that wouldn’t help me here. It wasn’t the answer he wanted to hear and in the back of my mind I was worried that he would try to hurt Armin, too.

As it was, I was already terrified that he would go after Levi.

“I was only hugging him,” I lied again, “He’s going through a rough time and—”

“Stop lying.” he cut me off, his voice nothing but a snarl. I felt my blood run cold and fought the urge to run to the door. In the end, running was probably the smartest thing to do but I couldn’t bring myself to flee. Not from this.

“What makes you think I’m lying?” I asked, trying to keep my voice as steady and confident as my body would allow.

“Because I’ve seen you with your friends, Eren,” he snapped, his voice sharp over my name. “You don’t act like that with friends. You don’t do that with friends.”

“Do what?”

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, but I realized I didn’t want to take them back. There was a vicious quality to his voice when he said those words, and I hated the sound of it. It pushed me past the point of fear and straight into anger, and I could feel the emotion bubbling up inside me. He made it sound as if I were doing something horrible with Levi. As if all the moments we’d spent together were nothing more than a despicable act, and I couldn’t stand for that.

“You know what you did,” he growled, his lips curling in disgust, “Don’t make me say it.”

“No, I want you to say it,” I pushed, the hot flame of anger rising in me now. “I want to hear you say it.”

“I’m not going to, Eren,” he spat my name like it tasted foul. “You know exactly what you were doing, you don’t need me to say it.”

“Yes, I do,” I interjected. “Say it.”

“Stop it.”

“No,” I cut in quickly, my voice sharper now as I stepped towards him. “I want to hear you say the words. Tell me what we were doing, dad. Tell me what was so fucking wrong with what we were doing.”

“Watch your mouth,” he snapped.

“He likes it when I talk that way,” I shot back, watching his eyes widen even in the dark of the room. It felt good to say the words, better to finally get it out even though I knew it would hurt me later. I knew that, and yet I craved more. “He likes it when I curse. When I talk dirty to him. He loves it.”

“You sick—“


“You don’t know what you like!” he roared, taking a step forward as he lifted his arm, his hand fisted around the bottle of beer. I didn’t even flinch, and in the back of my mind I was proud of that. “You’re just a fucking kid who’s pretending to be a fag because he saw a pretty face! You’re
confused!"

“I’m not confused and I’m not pretending!” I shouted back, my anger burning into a white-hot rage that had me shaking from head to toe. “This is who I am, dad. Whether you like it or not. This is me. This has always been me.”

“It’s not you!”

“Yes, it is!” I urged; my eyes stinging as angry tears started to rise in them. This rejection was what I’d feared, but I wouldn’t give up who I was just for him. “Dad, it’s still me. I’m still Eren. Just because I’m with a guy doesn’t mean that I’ve changed.”

“My son wouldn’t have wanted this,” he spat, shaking his head in disgust, “You’ve been manipulated, Eren. That guy is just using you and tricking you into thinking that you’re something you’re not.”

“No, he’s not! He helped me see who I am,” I cut him off, my voice trembling. “He made me realize what I want, and it’s him. I want him.”

“You don’t need him.”

“I love him.” It hadn’t even been a thought in my mind before it left my tongue, but when I spoke the words with such conviction I knew they were true. I was in love with Levi and nothing could change that. Not even him.

“You don’t know what love is.”

“And you do?” I shot back, unwilling to stop now. “Dad, you barely even look at mom. You haven’t even been here for her. She’s been sitting in that room, wasting away and you don’t even go to her.”

“She knows why I haven’t been here, Eren,” he countered in a deadly voice, my name still a curse on his tongue. “So don’t try to compare our marriage with whatever disgusting acts you do with that boy.”

“We have more than you and mom ever will,” I continued, the anger pushing me forward now. It was stupid and in the back of my mind I knew that, but I couldn’t stop myself from defending what we had. “You don’t look at her the way he looks at me. You don’t care. And you know what? It doesn’t matter that we’re both men! Just because I’m gay doesn’t mean that—”

The bottle left his hand and sailed a fraction of an inch past my cheek, slamming into the mirror behind me. The entire room filled with the sounds of shattering glass as broken shards fell around my feet, the remaining beer spraying across the wall. I looked down and then behind me, my eyes leaving him for only an instant but that was all it took. By the time I heard his hurried steps and realized he was coming towards me, his hand had already found my neck and wrapped around it like a vice.

"Don’t!” I cried out and shoved at his shoulders, stumbling back and hitting the wall behind me. The few shards that were clinging to the mirror fell to the ground on impact, crashing around our feet as he followed me to the wall. He was reaching for my neck again and I could feel the panic swelling up inside me as my eyes flew to the door.

It had never been so far away.
"What's this?"

His hand fisted around the key hanging from my neck and I felt my skin slice open as he ripped the chain away. An overwhelming rage twisted in my stomach as I watched him stare at the single most important thing Levi had ever given me with nothing more than a look of extreme disgust.

"Give it back."

"Is this a gift from that boy?" he sneered, ignoring me entirely, "Is this the key to his heart?"

"Give it back," I repeated forcefully, fighting every urge I had to rip the key out of his hand.

"Maybe I'll give it back to him," he mused, a sick grin twisting on his lips as he eyed the key. "Shove it up his ass. Since he seems to like that."

And suddenly I forgot my fear.

"Give it back!" I screamed, lunging forward and grabbing his hand. I curled my nails between the creases of his fingers, digging into his skin as I fought for the key. And for a fleeting instant, I thought I might actually stand a chance. I believed, ridiculously, that I could get the key back from him and run out of the apartment before he could get a hold of me again.

I was wrong.

His fist collided with the side of my face with a force that exploded fireworks across my vision and burned me with a pain that seared straight down past the bone. My knees turned to jelly and for a moment all I could see was black. But then his hand was back around my throat, gripping tighter now and he pushed me into the wall as if he wanted to put me through it.

"Dad," I gasped, my fingers clawing at his and trying desperately to pull them off. Even though I knew it was a pointless struggle; he had me beat in both size and strength, but the will to live urged me to fight instinctually, stupidly.

"I won't have a gay son," he growled and I gagged, the scent of alcohol spilling out of his mouth and into my nose. It was overpowering to the point that I had to wonder if he knew what he was doing at all.

"Dad, stop," I wheezed, struggling to breathe under the pressure of his hand. "You're hurting me!"

"Your mother wouldn't want this," he continued in a deep, rumbling voice. He sounded like an animal and nothing more. "Your sister wouldn't want this."

"Dad, Mikasa-"

"Eren wouldn't want this."

"Dad, I'm-" my words cut off as the oxygen left my lungs and my body struggled for the next inhale. He didn't even know who I was right now. He was denying me to the point that I didn't exist at all. I wasn't his son.

I wasn't anything.

He tightened his grip and my nails dug deeper into his skin in response, pulling harder now that the adrenaline was raging through my system. Not that it could save me. I knew I couldn't get away. He was going to kill me, I was sure of it. He had never raised a harmful hand to me, hardly raised his
voice, and now he was going to kill me in my dark little bedroom.

And Levi didn't know.

He was at The Wall, probably for the next hour or so, cleaning up whatever mess Hanji had made while lecturing her on how she should properly take care for the club. He had no idea I was fighting for my life, struggling for my last breath as my father choked it out of me. He wouldn’t know how desperately I needed him until it was too late. He would call my phone several times and before finally coming up to the apartment. I had given him a key, after all. It would be natural for him to look for me, and of course he would find me here.

But I would be gone by then. Left as nothing but a shell that would offer no farewells.

I would never be able to say goodbye. Never have the chance to tell him that I cared for him, even more than I was aware. I could never tell him that I loved him now. I would never have the chance. And I would never again hear his voice or feel his skin. All of that was going to be taken from me now by someone who didn’t understand me. From someone who didn’t even want to understand me.

From someone I shouldn’t have had to hide from.

My father's eyes were crazed, so much unlike the man I thought I knew. The man I clearly didn't know. I never could have expected this from him, and the idea that he was able to surprise me in this way made me feel empty inside. I had no idea who he was. I'd never known what he was capable of. And to be honest, I didn't even think his mangled mind could comprehend who I was anymore.

But that didn't stop the strained plea from prying its way out of my throat.

"Please..."

His fingers tightened and for a moment I was certain my neck would snap under the pressure of his hand. He wasn't going to stop, and it didn't matter how much I begged. If anything that would spur him further, which was something I quickly realized when my feet left the floor. He was forcing me up the wall, and the only staple left keeping me in place was the filthy hand pressed tight against my throat. There were black spots covering my vision and I knew, without a doubt, that I wouldn't be seeing anything soon enough.

And that fear was just enough to push me.

The last shot of adrenaline surged through my body and panic gripped me tighter than my father's hand had. My legs started to kick wildly, my feet pushing into the wall as I scrambled to find anything that could free me. I tugged desperately at his hand, my nails digging into his skin until I was certain they were coated with his blood. And then suddenly his hand was gone. My neck was free and he was doubling over with a pained groan, clutching between his legs as he fell to his knees.

My feet hit the floor and I stumbled, falling forward and slamming into the ground. The room spun as my mind tried to focus, and when it did I caught sight of the key in front of me. My hand closed around it and I held it tight as I pushed forward, begging my legs to work against my rattled nerves.

The growl behind me struck a fearful chord in my heart, and through a wave of panic I felt his hand closing around my left foot. Guided by nothing more than the urge to run, I kicked as hard as I could with my right foot and heard the sickening snap of his nose.

And then my feet were back on the ground again.

I was standing and stumbling. Finding my pace and breaking into a desperate run. I pushed through doors as if I was sure of where I was going, and once I was in the hall I knew I couldn't wait for the
elevator. I couldn't give it the chance to slow me down. I pushed into the stairwell and gripped the railing, moving as fast as I could without falling headfirst down the stairs. My lungs were burning with a desperate cry for oxygen and I was certain I would pass out soon, but I was banking on the adrenaline still coursing through my veins to get me to safety.

Fear was a powerful thing.

Somewhere in the back of my mind I realized the staggering amount of stairs I would have to master in order to get out of this building, but I couldn't bring myself to care. The idea that I could try for the elevator only to find him waiting in it was a paralyzing fear that I wasn't about to tempt. Even if I had to die halfway down the building, I wasn't going to let him find me. Not again. I wasn't going to go through that again. I wasn't going to see those eyes staring at me as if I were some monster again.

Never.

My mind focused on one thing: escape. Urging my body to do things that I knew it was no longer capable of. Pushing me to levels I thought I could never achieve. My legs were burning and yet I couldn't feel them at all. I couldn't feel anything, save for the overwhelming need to get away. To escape to the only safe place I could imagine. The Wall had been a stranger to me on the first day I stepped into it, but now it was a sanctuary. A place of protection. Somewhere that would accept me as who I was, without argument or complaint.

Without trying to change me.

My body was ready to give up the moment my feet hit the pavement and the cold air swirled around me. I had made it out of that building and the fact that I might actually be safe was so overwhelming that I almost relaxed. But I didn't. I knew I couldn't. Not until I was through those doors. Not until I saw him and knew, beyond a doubt, that I wouldn't be hurt. Because I knew he wouldn't allow it.

I could see the lights of The Wall ahead of me and I ran towards them, taking what little energy I had left to reach the only place I wanted to be. The line to get in was steadily growing, but I ignored it and stumbled past the bodyguards. They let me through without a second glance even though Hanji wasn't with them. They were aware of who I was at this point. They knew I belonged to The Corporal.

I pushed through the doors and felt relief rush out of my lungs when I saw Levi standing across the room, lecturing Hanji about something she had done with the tables in the bar. He looked more beautiful than I had ever seen him, even though his expression was tainted with annoyance and disapproval. He was what I needed to see, the comfort and protection I needed to feel in order to finally relax.

I had made it out of that hell, and I was safe now. He wouldn't find me here.

"Levi..." The words were choked and barely a whisper. I wasn't even sure I heard them myself.

The entire room started to spin and bend as the dark spots came back to cover my vision, determined to fill it completely. My legs were giving out, my knees losing any hope they had of keeping me up any longer. I could feel myself falling, but I didn't really care. I could sleep now. I was safe here. I knew that, even as my mind started to slip into unconsciousness. My body felt heavy, and my vision was fading quickly into darkness as exhaustion took over.

The last thing I saw before my body hit the floor was the image of Levi yelling something as he ran towards me, his hand outstretched.
I think I heard my name.

I could have sworn I felt his arms.

But it was too late to tell. By then, everything had gone black.

“I think the bleeding finally stopped.”

The throb in my head made it painfully obvious that my body was attempting to wake up. Somewhere in the recesses of my mind I realized that the voice I’d heard belonged to Armin. I felt coolness on the back of my neck as something damp and chilled slid against my skin, cleaning me slowly. Wiping up the blood that must have been left on my neck from the cut caused by the necklace. The one he had torn from my throat when he took away the…

My hand shot down to my pocket to feel for the key and relief swept through me when my fingers brushed across its familiar shape. I didn’t lose it.

“He’s awake,” Armin spoke quickly, surprise coloring his tone. “Eren, are you okay? Can you open your eyes?”

I felt warm fingers press against my cheek and was momentarily confused as to why Armin was the one cradling my head in his lap. I had expected to wake up to Levi, and instead I was here with my best friend. Still, the fact that Armin was talking to someone meant that Levi was probably in the room even if he wasn’t at my side. But why wasn’t he near me?

I opened my eyes and turned my head, white pain flashing across my vision and momentarily blinding me before clearing once more. I stared at the limited view ahead of me and saw Levi sitting in his throne, his chin balanced against his knuckles as he stared off at the door. He wasn’t even looking at me right now, and something about that worried me.

“Eren,” Armin continued softly, as if the mere sound of his voice would damage me further.

It was then that I finally realized that Armin was actually here at The Wall, and it didn’t make sense. Why would he be here?

“But you’re awake,” Armin spoke quickly, surprise coloring his tone. “Eren, are you okay? Can you open your eyes?”

“I called for him,” Levi answered immediately, saving me from finishing the question. He watched me from his throne, his expression impasive and guarded even though his eyes held all the remorse in the world. “Mikasa’s also on her way. I knew you would need them when you woke up.”

I stared at him for a long moment, wanting nothing more than to cross the distance between us to put my arms around him. Somehow he looked as though he needed it even more than I did. Why was he sitting so far away, wearing an expression as if he had been the one to hurt me?

“What happened?” Armin asked, his voice still soft.

“My dad,” I started, the words breaking over the rawness of my throat, “He…”

Levi made a sound, something that was pained and angry, and it drew my attention immediately. He lowered his head into his hand and his fingers gripped the longer strands of his hair as he fell silent. He stayed like that for a long moment, seemingly frozen that way. I was almost sure he wasn’t going to say anything at all, but then he sighed in a rush.
“I’m sorry, Eren.”

His voice was filled with such remorse that it made me wonder if he thought that he was the one who had hurt me. I couldn’t keep the confusion from my eyes, my brow furrowing and the pain shooting up into my skull.

“Why?” I rasped, my voice still strained. I was certain it would be like that for a while now. “You didn’t…”

“No, I didn’t,” he cut me off, lowering his hand to stare at me, “I didn’t do anything, did I? I wasn’t even there. And I should have been. I should’ve never let you go in there alone.”

So that was it. He was blaming himself for the things that had happened to me. Because he hadn’t been there to defend me from something he might not have even been able to stop.

“You couldn’t have known…”

“I knew,” he assured me, his expression grave. “I knew from the moment I met him, and I didn’t trust him then. Not with you.”

“You met him?” I muttered, touching my forehead as my brow furrowed again. Would this pain never stop?

“Just once,” he replied, “In the elevator. I didn’t even know how to bring it up with you because… well, he’s your father and…”

“I’m not mad,” I whispered, trying my best to sound reassuring. But I was too tired to pull it off. Still, it was true. I wasn’t mad at him.

“I know you’re not,” he muttered softly, “But that doesn’t mean I’m not mad at myself. I’ve made a point of going there with you every single time since that day. I should have gone up there with you. I knew it, and yet…”

“You couldn’t have known,” Armin interjected, speaking the words for me. “And it’s not like you could have kept him from his dad forever. This was going to happen eventually, because none of us expected this from him. None of us thought he would ever hurt Eren this way.”

“Here,” Hanji spoke up from beside me, and suddenly I felt a cold pack pressing against my cheek. “This will help with the swelling.”

Levi made a disgusted noise and looked away, his jaw strained tight as he stared at the door. He was upset with himself, and I knew that there was nothing I could say to change that right now. I could tell him it wasn’t his fault a million times, and he would still blame himself for not being there.

“Thanks,” I said softly, glancing back to Hanji. It was then that I realized that she wasn’t in her usual attire. In fact, she dressed in her normal, laid back clothing. Nothing even mildly appropriate for The Wall. “Did I sleep through the whole night?”

“What?” Hanji blinked once and then looked down at herself, realization entering her eyes. “Oh, no. You’ve only been out for about half an hour.”

“Then why are you…”

“Because I closed the club for the night,” Levi responded softly, staring at me from his throne. “I wasn’t about to open after you walked in like that.”
“You didn’t have to do that for me.”

“Please tell me that you’re fucking kidding right now,” he shot back, watching me with eyes that were only mildly annoyed. “I would move heaven and hell for you, and you think I give a shit about closing down for a night? You came in here after having the shit beat out of you and passed out on my floor. Do you really think I’d ignore you?”

“I could have stayed in the back room,” I tried to shrug and realized it hurt too much. All of my muscles felt like they were on fire. “You didn’t have to close.”

“When the hell are you going to realize that you’re the one thing that matters to me?”

I stared at him for a long moment, my mouth open for words that my mind couldn’t form. None that I wanted to say in front of a room full of people, anyway. I could think of three words that I was desperate to say, and he was making it very difficult not to blurt them out right now. But I knew it wasn’t the time for that. Not when we were surrounded by people. Not after what had just happened.

“Why did he…” Armin broke the silence and then trailed off, looking down, “I’m sorry, that’s a stupid question. You don’t need to talk about it right now.”

“He found out about Levi,” I murmured, pressing my hand back against the cold pack to hold it in place.

“How?” Hanji asked, pulling up a chair.

“He saw us kissing outside,” I explained, watching Levi’s expression darken as he continued to stare off at the door. “He was watching me from my bedroom window.”

“He did all this just because you’re with Levi?” Armin whispered, clearly still in a state of shock. He’d had nothing but wonderful memories with my father, so this entire ordeal was almost impossible for him to process. I could barely understand it myself. I had never expected to be rejected by him. Not this way.

“He did it because I’m with a man.”

“Father of the fucking year,” Hanji muttered, leaning back in her seat and folding her arms. She shook her head, a look of utter distaste on her face.

“He was really drunk,” I replied before I could stop myself, and I hated the fact that I was covering for him when I knew that there was no excuse for what he’d done. But I kept going. “Even when I got there, he could barely walk straight. I don’t even think he knew who I was when he had his hands on me.”

“I don’t care how fucking drunk he was,” Levi snapped suddenly, his voice so sharp and fast that it felt like a whip cracking across my skull. “You don’t beat the shit out of your son and not even realize who he is.”

“Levi,” Petra scolded softly, speaking for the first time. She was sitting in the corner of the room, watching me with worried eyes.

Levi followed her gaze and stared at me for a long moment, a million emotions crossing his face before his expression darkened to the point that my blood ran cold at the sight of it. I had never seen him look so deadly, and it was then that I realized that Levi was fully capable of killing someone. Without regret. Without remorse. If he could justify it, he would do it.
He stood up from his throne and crossed the small distance to me, kneeling down before I could even think about sitting up. His hand covered mine and he moved the cold pack away from my cheek, replacing the coolness with the warm touch of his lips. The lingering kisses traveled down to my neck, covering every inch that had been bruised or cut. He didn’t leave any part of me untouched. His lips found every injury, and then finally his mouth covered mine.

I didn’t realize how much I needed his kiss until it was there, and it was gone too soon. It wasn’t deep enough or long enough, but I knew I was too weak to protest. Even when he stood, I could barely manage the energy to grab his hand. I was too exhausted from the fight, and I was still trying to remember how to breathe normally.

“Stay,” I pleaded.

“Sleep,” he whispered. “I’ll be back when you get up.”

“Where are you going?”

He stared at me for a long moment and then smirked, placing his hand gently against my forehead, “Don’t worry about it, brat. I’ll be back when you wake up.”

His thumb brushed soothingly against my temple, moving in a slow circle that had me forgetting what my question was. I was exhausted to the point that I could feel it in my bones, and the room was quickly fading around me. I knew I needed sleep, so it wasn’t hard to listen to him. The reassurance that he would be there when I woke up made it even easier to fall asleep. I would feel better then, once I had rested. And he would be sitting here waiting for me to wake up once he returned.

But I still couldn’t help but wonder where he was going and why he had to leave right now.

And it wouldn’t be until hours later, when Levi returned with his hands covered in blood, that I would finally realize where he’d gone.
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

YAY FOR THURSDAY! ^_______^ I've been looking forward to this chapter. A lot of interaction with Levi and Petra, as well as plenty of the others. For anyone who didn't read Chapter 36 because of the trigger warnings, this chapter should more or less sum up what happened for you.

Oh, and a huge thank you to blaqmarquet (x2), haru-to-my-levi, poproxmmmd, and harleqwinn for the awesome fanart they shared this week! You can see their art under the 'Intern Art' tab on my blog. ^__^

And thank you all so, so much for all of your amazing comments! I really do look forward to reading them all and hearing what you thought about the latest chapter. It's fun to see what you think might happen next - I'm actually really excited about the end of this chapter for that exact reason. XD

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

“Oh my god. Levi, whose blood is that?”

Petra’s terrified words were not the first thing I expected to hear when waking up, but after the dream I’d had they weren’t surprising at all. He’d been more violent than I could have ever imagined, and now that I could see the blood on his hands I knew what he was capable of. Somehow I think I always knew. Somewhere in the depths of my mind I had known exactly what Levi was going to do when he left The Wall. I’d anticipated this to the point that my mind had conjured up a front row seat to the beating.

And I enjoyed it.

“You know exactly whose it is,” Levi muttered, snatching a black cloth from one of the tables as he walked past. He leaned against the bar and started wiping at his hand, a look of utter distaste coloring his features as he stared at the blood. “Filthy.”

“His father?” Petra pushed, pointing at me as if Levi would have trouble putting two and two together. “Are you crazy?”

“Well, mad is another word for crazy,” Levi replied, his expression bored as he continued to clean. “And since I’m fucking pissed off right now, then yea. I’m crazy.”

Petra was silent for a long moment and then she whispered the one thing we were all wondering. “Did you kill him?”

Levi rolled his eyes and threw the napkin down on the counter. “Don’t be ridiculous, Petra. Of course I didn’t kill him.”
“Shame,” Mikasa muttered, drawing my attention to her for the first time since she arrived. I must have been asleep when she walked in.

“Don’t think it didn’t cross my mind,” Levi smirked, glancing over at her before he busied himself with cleaning his nails. I wasn’t sure if it was my dad’s blood or the idea of blood in general that had him so desperate to get it off his skin.

“Well, he’s still upstairs,” Mikasa offered.

“And there’s not a witness to be seen,” Levi agreed, a small smirk still toying on the corners of his mouth. I wasn’t entirely sure whether they were joking or not.

Somehow I didn’t think they were.

“Okay, can we just stop for a second and realize how fucked up this is?” Petra snapped; trying to pull the conversation away from the dark path it was taking. I’d never seen her look so concerned and the fact that she was willing to lecture Levi at all made me wonder how serious this really was.

“Which part?” Levi asked, although it was obvious he wasn’t interested in the answer.

“How about the part where you went and beat the shit out of his dad?”

“His dad?” Levi repeated the words as if they tasted vile in his mouth. “Listen to me, Petra. Look at me and listen. Just because Eren is one of that fucker’s sperm blossoms doesn’t make him his dad. That’s a title you earn, and you don’t do it by beating the shit out of your son just because you don’t agree with who he is.”

“Fine, call him whatever you want.”

“Shitbag.”

“Whatever,” Petra replied, throwing up her hands, “I really don’t care about his name or the condition you left him in. He had it coming, and I’m sure he deserved even worse. But Levi, he can come after you for this.”

“Let him.”

“I don’t think you—”

“Oh, I understand perfectly,” Levi cut her off, his voice sharp with anger, his eyes narrowing, “I know exactly what I did up there, and you know what? I wouldn’t take any of it back. He hurt Eren, Petra. He beat the shit out of him. He touched what’s mine, and he’s lucky I didn’t kill him for that.”

"Levi, we're all upset that he-"

"Enough, Petra," Levi snapped, stopping her again. "I don't want to hear about it."

"About what, Levi? About how you might have made this even worse for Eren?" Petra continued, her voice carrying a sharp note of anger. "About how you could go to jail? Is that what you don't want to hear?"

"I'm not going to jail," Levi muttered, inspecting his nails as if there might still be some blood trying to escape his scrutinizing eyes. "It's not going to go that far."

"What condition did you leave him in? Is he even conscious?"
"He should be in a few hours," he replied, a smirk catching the corner of his mouth once more.

"This isn't funny!"

"I'm not laughing," Levi sighed, still staring at his nails. He looked like a scolded child right now, and I was beginning to wonder if he was purposely avoiding her gaze. I had the feeling that he hated arguing with her, more so than the rest of the people he knew. It was written all over his face.

"I'm worried about you."

Levi's expression changed almost instantly, softening out of the hard anger as reassurance entered his eyes. He stared at her for a moment and then crossed the short distance between them, stopping in front of her and reaching out to tap her chin.

"You should know me by now, Petra," he whispered, as if speaking a secret that was meant for her alone. "You know the things I've done. Would I ever get myself into trouble? Do you really think I'd be so sloppy?"

"I don't think your mind was in it with this one."

A million thoughts were flying through my head as I stared at Levi, trying to understand what they were talking about. Petra made it sound as if he had done this before, hurt people before, and I suppose it was possible he had. I'd only known Levi for a few short months whereas Petra had known him since he was a teen. He had a mysterious past that I knew nothing about, and I was just beginning to realize that I had never even bothered to ask.

And suddenly I wanted to know everything.

"Trust me," Levi reassured her, his voice no longer carrying the bite of anger. "I knew exactly what I was doing."

Petra stared at him for a moment longer, as if trying to decide whether or not she believed him. Finally she looked down at his hands, where the blood used to be. "Are you sure he's alive?"

"Would it really matter if he was?" Mikasa interjected. "It's not like Levi would even be considered as a suspect. No one would connect them."

"It wouldn't take very long for them to find out that Eren and Levi are in a relationship," Hanji chimed in, holding a glass between her hands as she leaned against the bar. She eyed Mikasa and shrugged. "Besides, he has a history of violence. No one would put it past him to kill someone."

"Not even his friends," I muttered.

Every set of eyes in the room turned on me and the offended look in Petra's almost made me wish I could take back the words. But at the same time, I knew I meant exactly what I said. As silent as I had been through the entire conversation, I was sitting here stewing in anger. The fact that they would accuse him of murder so easily made me question more than I wanted to admit. Either they didn't know a thing about him or I had no idea who he was, and I wasn't exactly thrilled with either option.

"Eren," Petra began in a soft voice, as if worried she would upset me further, "It's not that we don't trust him. We just know that he has a history of violence."

"I've never seen it."
“Of course you haven’t. He cares about you.” Hanji countered. “It’s not like he’s ever hurt anyone he cares for. Just those who deserve it.”

“Mostly,” Petra agreed.

“Well, I don’t care about his past,” Mikasa continued with a shrug. “Grisha deserved whatever it was he did.”

“Out of curiosity,” Armin spoke softly from my side, turning to look at Levi with wary eyes, “What exactly did you do?”

“Oh?” Levi met Armin’s gaze, his eyes mildly amused. “Do you actually want to know?”

“I think we all want to know,” Petra replied, leaning against the bar beside Hanji. I watched Hanji’s arm snake around Petra’s waist as she offered her a half-hug, and realized that I still wasn’t quite sure what their relationship was.

“Well, he was drunk out of his mind when I got there,” Levi started, “So I don’t think he even knows what happened.”

“So he’s not going to think it was you?” I asked softly, realizing there was only one other person my father would suspect.

“He’s not going to think it was you, either,” Levi answered, reading my mind, “I trashed the place and made it look like a robbery. I took a bunch of your stuff and some of your mom’s jewelry. A couple of things that belonged to that asshole… You can give it all back or throw it away if you want.”

“He’s not going back there,” Mikasa interjected, “Either their shit can show up on the fucking doorstep or they can live without it, but Eren is not going back.”

“No, he’s not,” Levi agreed, “That’s not what I was suggesting. He can’t ever go back there. I think that’s obvious now.”

“What if Grisha makes him go back?” Armin spoke softly, looking down at our hands. He had been holding mine since I woke up, and he was still refusing to let go. “He could go to the school and—”

“That’s not going to happen,” Levi cut him off, “Eren’s going to be a legal adult in a few months, and if he wants to emancipate himself now he can. Trust me, he has more than enough reason to. Besides, that scumbag’s not going to take it that far.”

“Why not?” Armin frowned, squeezing my hand reassuringly. He seemed to be the only one who realized just how upset I was right now, even if I wasn’t vocalizing it. Everything that had happened was still raging through my mind. The images of his face as his hands wrapped around my throat, a man I never thought would hurt me and he had torn me to pieces.

“Because he’s a fucking coward,” Levi spat, “The type who hides behind a perfect mask. If he goes after Eren now, everyone will know what he did. And even if he feels justified in his actions, he won’t want anyone to know that he raised a hand to his own flesh and blood. Once he’s sobered up and he realizes what happened, he’ll back off. I’d put money on it.”

“He’s right,” Mikasa whispered softly, staring off with a distant look in her eyes. “Once his mind catches up with him, he’ll go right back to normal. Or what he wants everyone to think is normal. He’ll just start pretending again until the next time he snaps.”
“And Eren won’t be there when he does,” Levi added, “I’ll make sure of that.”

Armin squeezed my hand once more and looked over at Levi. “Where’s Eren going to live?”

I’m right here.

I wanted to scream the words, but my throat was too tight to let them out at all. It was driving me insane that they kept talking about me as if I weren’t here, as if I didn’t get a say in what happened to me. I was only just beginning to realize that I had no home to go to now. I had no safe place. Even if I hadn’t spent the last few weeks in my bed, it had always been there for me. I had always been able to go to it, to escape whatever else was happening in my life. I didn’t have that anymore.

“He can stay with me,” Mikasa answered Armin. I was only half-aware of her voice and I wasn’t sure I heard her words at all.

The room was spinning so fast now.

“He doesn’t have to,” Levi spoke up, “I have a place for him.”

“He can’t stay with you,” Mikasa countered immediately, “You live in the same building as Grisha. It’d only be a matter of time until they crossed paths.”

“I wasn’t talking about Trost,” Levi replied, rolling his eyes and folding his arms. “I’m not that stupid. Give me some credit. I actually have a place closer to work and the security is the best money can buy. He’ll be safe there.”

“I don’t want him to be alone.”

I felt alone right now, even in a room full of people. It was like no one knew I was here and I still couldn’t get the words out of my throat. I was panicking, drowning internally, and none of them knew.

“He’ll be with me,” Levi reassured her, “I’ll stay with him and we’ll be close to work. There won’t be any reason for us to be in Trost. At least not until I’m sure it’s safe.”

“I’d still rather have him with me,” Mikasa muttered, although it was obvious by the tone of her voice that she wasn’t going to fight it.

“It’ll be better if he’s closer to work,” Armin offered as he looked over at Mikasa. “Your building is in the opposite direction, and he’d have to pass Trost on the way. If that’s what we’re trying to avoid then it just makes sense for him to stay with Levi.”

It wasn’t safe for me to pass by my own building. A place I hadn’t lived in all that long, and yet it had become my favorite place to be. Somewhere I could run to, and it was all gone now. I wouldn’t be in Levi’s bed again. I wouldn’t be able to sit at the kitchen island and smell the delicious scents as he cooked us breakfast. We wouldn’t lie in front of the fireplace, talking for hours on end. I wouldn’t see his mother’s room again. I’d fought so hard to keep a key that I couldn’t even use now.

Everything I knew was changing and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

“I have to get out of here,” I choked out the words and pushed off of the couch before I even realized I was moving. But once I got going, I knew I couldn’t be stopped. I couldn’t face them right now when I knew I was breaking apart. I couldn’t stand the idea of Levi seeing me that way.

I ignored their worried voices as I walked out of the room, pushing through doors with no intent to
leave and every hope that I would find a quiet space to myself. Which wasn’t exactly hard to do. The club was closed for the night and I walked through many empty rooms, but I slowly began to realize that I was looking for one in particular. I needed to feel safe right now, and in The Wall there was only one room that came to mind.

I shut the door to Levi’s office, the place where he had first started opening up to me, and collapsed against the wall. My knees gave out and I slipped down to the floor as my chest began to heave with the desperate need to breathe. But as much as I struggled, I couldn’t seem to find enough air. I was shaking to the point that my teeth were chattering together, striking so hard that my jaw was going numb. I wound my arms around myself and gripped fistfuls of my shirt, clutching it tight in a vain attempt to keep myself still. But that wasn’t going to happen. I was breaking apart and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

But he could.

I heard the soft click of the door and then suddenly Levi’s arms were wrapping around me, pulling me into an embrace that was both strong and reassuring. He held me there and I buried my face against his chest, suddenly able to breathe despite the fact that his shirt was covering my mouth. His scent, so familiar and comforting, filled my nose and took down the remaining walls that I was desperately trying to hold in place. For the first time in hours, I actually felt safe and as much as I didn’t want to break down in front of him I knew I couldn’t stop it.

The tears started to fall, slow at first, dripping down one by one and disappearing into the soft fabric of his shirt. But soon enough they were flowing, pouring down as ragged sobs tore free from my throat. I clutched his shirt as if I were holding on for dear life, as if letting go of him for even a moment would mean losing him forever. I didn’t know how much I needed him until now. Before this I was fine on my own, but now that the world had come falling down around me I needed this support. I needed him.

“Levi, I…”

“Shh,” he murmured softly, his fingers drifting slowly through my hair. “You don’t have to talk right now, Eren. You don’t have to do anything. Just let me be here for you.”

A pained sound stirred in the back of my throat as I felt my heart ache, suddenly realizing that he probably understood better than anyone else ever could. He had lost his father when he’d discovered who Levi really was, choosing to end his life rather than accept his own son. The only difference was that my father loved himself too much to ever do something like that. No, in his eyes I was the problem. I was the one who had to be exterminated.

The image of his hands wrapping around my throat took over my mind once more and my hands flew to my neck, as if protecting it from some unseen attack. Levi drew back at the sudden movement, taking a long moment to scan my expression before finally resting his hands on my forearms. His touch was so gentle that I barely felt it at all, and I knew then that he was scared of how I would react to him now. And that wasn’t just because of the injuries I’d suffered.

“I could kill him for hurting you this way,” Levi said at last, his voice rough with the force of his anger. “I don’t even know why I stopped myself. I shouldn’t have left him there. He deserved worse.”

I wanted to agree, but I couldn’t get the words past my lips. It was impossible to explain, but a large part of me didn’t want to hate him. I didn’t want to bring myself to believe that he had hurt me at all. Hours ago I had loved him so much, looked to him as a protector, and to see him as nothing but a monster now was something I just couldn’t wrap my mind around. It was too soon to demonize
someone that I had loved so much. Everything had changed and I didn’t want to believe it.

I wasn’t even sure I could.

Levi was quiet as he searched my eyes, and as the silence dragged on I realized that he had no idea whether or not I was angry with him. There was a concern in those beautiful blue eyes that told me he was terrified he’d fucked up this time. And in any other circumstance I might have actually been angry, but I couldn’t be now. He’d had the strength to do what I wanted to. I wanted to hurt him for hurting me, even if I wasn’t at the point where I could admit it. Levi had done the work for me, protected me when I needed it most.

And I could never hate him for that.

“Eren,” he spoke softly, drawing my attention back to him. “Are you upset that I hurt him?”

“No,” I whispered, my voice cracking, “I’m upset that he hurt me.”

“You didn’t deserve it.”

Levi said the words with such conviction that I was certain he knew I was thinking it. Maybe he’d thought it himself back when he discovered his father’s body. Maybe he’d spent years telling himself that it was his fault for being what he was, for causing such a tragedy. Even if he knew it was wrong. Even if he knew he’d done nothing to cause it. And as much as I hated to admit it, I was doing the same thing at this very moment.

I hated myself for being who I was.

“Eren, look at me,” Levi urged, giving me only a moment to comply before his fingers were pressing gently under my chin, tilting my head up. He stared into my eyes and as much as I wanted to look away, I knew I couldn’t. “This isn’t your fault. Do you understand that? None of this is your fault.”

“I didn’t say that it was,” I muttered, fighting the urge to look away.

“You don’t have to,” he continued softly, touching my jaw and brushing his thumb over the bruise there. “I’ve been where you are, Eren. I know exactly what’s going through your mind right now because the same thing went through mine. I know just how easy it is to blame yourself instead of admitting that the other person was wrong. Because it’s so fucking hard to believe that someone who is supposed to love you could hurt you for no reason at all. For something that isn’t your fault. For something that shouldn’t even be considered wrong.”

“Levi, I…”

“I want you to know that this isn’t your fault,” he cut me off, his voice shaking now. There were memories bubbling up in his mind that he wasn’t ready to deal with, but he was pushing through them for me. Pain filled his eyes to the point that there was nothing else in them, and suddenly I wanted nothing more than to comfort him. “It took me so long to realize that there was nothing I could do. That I did nothing wrong. Sometimes I still don’t think I believe it. Sometimes I still think that I…”

His voice cracked and my arms tightened instinctively around his waist, holding him closer to me. None of this was easy for him, but it was even harder for me to believe the words. As much as I wanted to listen to them, I continued to blame myself. But even still, I knew that Levi’s past was not his fault. He’d never done anything wrong and no one could convince me otherwise.

“It wasn’t your fault.”
“And it wasn’t yours,” he whispered back, his voice still unsteady. He gripped my shirt and held me tighter, leaving not an inch of space between us. “I need you to know that, Eren. I need you to understand that this wasn’t your fault. That you didn’t do anything wrong. That you are fucking perfect just the way you are and that you don’t need anyone who doesn’t agree with that. I need you to know that. Because I don’t want this to break you the way it’s broken me.”

The agony in his voice broke me apart inside, and I found myself hiding my face against his neck so that he couldn’t see just how much it hurt me. I hated the idea that he had suffered through anything at all, far more than I had in the past few hours. Levi had lost everything he cared about, and he’d blamed himself for years. He was fractured, broken, all because he wasn’t given the chance to decide things for himself.

No. Erwin had taken that decision into his own hands. He had decided to ruin everything without Levi’s knowledge or consent. And even if it was true that he had done so with the good intent to free Levi from a life of restrictions, it didn’t change the fact that he had brought the world crumbling down around Levi without so much as a warning. Erwin ruined the one person I cared about most, and suddenly I understood Levi’s pain better than I ever thought I could.

Because the choice had been taken from me as well.

Not by anyone but fate, and the horrible luck that my father would be looking out my window when we kissed on the streets, but it had been taken from me regardless. I knew the pain of that now, of having no control over someone’s reaction, and suddenly I could understand why Levi hated Erwin. Why he needed that revenge so badly that he was unwilling to give up on it. Because Levi was still blaming himself, and the only way to turn that hatred outwards was to focus it on someone else. Erwin was the perfect source for that anger.

And I wanted to help him get that release.

I wanted to help him find peace, even if I couldn’t.

Levi didn’t deserve the pain that he’d been burdened with since childhood, and I would release him from it even if I had to unravel everything else around us. I’d promised him once that I would help him with this and even though I’d agreed at the time, I had never understood what I was agreeing to. Now I did. Now I knew why it was so important to him. Because he was holding onto the vain hope that once it was done it wouldn’t hurt so much. That maybe, at the end of it all, he would finally be able to forgive himself for his father’s suicide.

And maybe none of this would fix it, but I was willing to try. If it was what he needed, then it was what I wanted. Because I couldn’t imagine anyone else feeling the way I did now. I couldn’t imagine this pain inside him. I needed to get it out if I could.

“I don’t want to stay here anymore,” Levi said at last, breaking the silence. “There’s too many people here, and I know you don’t need that right now.”

He was right, of course, but I was sure everyone else knew that by now. I had run out of the room to escape all of their eyes and I wasn’t ready to go back to them yet. Not when I couldn’t tell what they were thinking. Even Armin was foreign to me right now, and I hated that thought. It was like he was walking on glass around me, careful with each word and every touch. Scared to let go and yet terrified to speak. But I knew exactly why. He was having just as much trouble seeing my father that way as I was. And I had been the one to experience it.

I knew that after tonight I would need Armin and Mikasa more than anything else, but right now I needed Levi. I needed someone who knew what I had gone through.
Someone who could help me forget, even if it was only for a few hours.

“Where are we gonna go?” I spoke in a voice that broke almost instantly. My throat was still raw on the inside and aching on the outside. I didn’t even want to know what my skin looked like right now.

“I have an apartment close to the Survey building,” Levi replied, his fingers brushing against my throat with a touch that was so soft I barely felt it at all. From the look in his eyes, I could tell my neck looked far worse than I could imagine. “I rarely ever go there, but it’s cleaned on a regular basis. It’s safe and no one will find us there.”

That last part was the most important thing to me, I was sure he was more than aware of that. “Can we go now?”

“I asked Hanji to call for a town car. It’s already waiting outside.”

He already knew I would want to get out of here, and the fact that he had planned ahead was exactly what I needed. I barely had the ability to think for myself right now. I honestly wasn’t even sure I could make it out of the building on my own, but with Levi here I knew I would be able to. He would think for the both of us until the raging storm inside my head started to calm.

I was promising myself one night. One night of anger, sorrow, and confusion, and then I would wake up. I would get myself up and I would talk myself through this. Because falling apart was not an option for me.

Even if I didn’t know that right now.

No one said a word to me when we walked back into the room with the others. Their eyes were concerned, and I could tell that Armin and Mikasa were doing everything that they could not to speak. I didn’t have to guess that Levi was the one who asked them to be quiet when I finally came out of the office. It spoke volumes that Mikasa actually listened to him; even if it was obvious she was mere seconds away from talking to me anyway. Part of me almost wanted her to, but deep down I knew conversation was not what I needed right now. Thinking was not something I wanted to do at the moment.

“Levi,” Mikasa spoke up as we stopped at the door. He turned around just as I did, but her eyes stayed on him. “Thank you… thank you for taking care of my brother. You’re good for him, just so you know. Even if I’ve never said it or shown it, I want you to know it now. He’s lucky to have someone like you.”

Levi stared at her for a long moment and the rest of the room remained silent. She didn’t even look once at my face, but I knew she would see the shock there if she did. I’d never expected her to verbally approve of Levi in any way, and the fact that she actually did almost made me want to ignore the fact that I needed time alone. It made me want to hold onto her and never let her go.

She approved of me, even if my father didn’t. She loved me for who I was.

She was happy for me, and I wouldn’t trade that for anything in the world.

“He’s even luckier to have a sister like you,” Levi spoke at last. He held me closer and then opened the door, pausing only a moment more to speak to her. “I’ll have a town car pick the two of you up in the morning.”

The fact that Mikasa and Armin would be there for me when I woke up was exactly what I needed to hear.
I let Levi lead me into the car, trying to ignore the nagging voice in the back of my head that was telling me to look up at my window. To see if the eyes were watching me now, judging me yet again. It wasn’t until we were pulling away that I finally complied, but by then we were too far for me to see anything at all. Still, I stared until I could no longer see my building. A place I had once called home.

A place I could no longer return to.

The rest of the trip was spent in complete silence, and at one point I was certain that I had fallen asleep. Levi’s arms tightening gently around my waist roused me from the start of another nightmare, and I looked up to see an unfamiliar building. My new residence. At least until I could figure out another arrangement. I didn’t like the idea of living off of Levi rent free, but I suppose that was something I got from Mikasa.

In my mind, I was promising myself that I would pay Levi back for everything he spent on me. Even if it took forever. And it probably would. I owed him so much at this point, and it wasn’t just in the monetary sense. Through all of my mistakes and lies, he had never been dishonest in our relationship. He was open and caring, willing to do so much more than he needed to when it came to me.

Even now he was rescuing me, taking me to a place that was safe. He was giving me an escape.

“Eren,” Levi broke the silence once we were finally in the elevator. It was, thankfully, much faster than the one in Trost. “I can’t promise you’re going to like what you see on the other side of the door.”

I felt my brow furrow, but the full sense of confusion couldn’t settle into my already clouded mind. What could he possibly have in the apartment that I wouldn’t like? Unless it was dirt, which was something I knew he didn’t care for even though I didn’t give a damn about it. It could be as dusty as it wanted to be and I would still be more than happy to be there.

“What is it?”

“You’ll see in a moment,” he replied, his voice tighter than it was mere moments ago. He was tense, and it worried me. “Just promise me that you won’t think I kept this from you on purpose.”

“I…” I frowned, staring at the doors as the elevator chimed our arrival. What was waiting for me on the other side?

“Promise.”

I opened my mouth, but I didn’t say the word. I didn’t have the time to. The doors spread open and suddenly I could see what he was so worried about. What he was certain I would assume he was hiding from me on purpose.

“Levi… this is…”
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

YAAAAY! The update is here! ^___^ Many of you guessed what's in the room already, but for those of you that haven't... you will know what's in the room now. XD Oh! And this week doesn't have a cliffhanger, so you can also be excited about that.

Thank you so much to professionalfangirl-btw who shared artwork of Intern!Levi this week! ^__^ It's a very nice piece of the end of Chapter 36, so if you haven't already seen it please check it out!

Thank you all so much for your wonderful comments! I really do look forward to hearing what you think about the chapter updates, and it was interesting to hear what you all thought was in the room.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, you can do so at lootibles. I am also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

“I feel like I’m back at The Wall…”

There was really no other way to put it. It was as if we had taken a car ride in one large circle only to end up right back where we started. Only this wasn’t the club. It wasn’t familiar. It was one fucked-up room that I hadn’t been in yet, and as much as I tried to remind myself that I wasn’t supposed to freak out, I kept forgetting. I could feel the worried panic rising inside me, my mind consumed with nagging thoughts as to why he would keep this a secret. Why he would need to hide this from me. Why he’d never so much as mentioned it, even in passing.

Hey, Eren. Just wanted to let you know I have a sex pad right next to my office.

No big deal, right?

But it probably would have bothered me even then. Because somehow I knew he’d never brought anyone into his apartment, with the exception of his closest friends and myself. I’d never even thought of his sexual history until now. I’d dismissed the idea that he’d ever been with anyone other than Erwin or me, and that was only because it was impossible to ignore someone you worked with on a daily basis. Erwin had been his lover once. I couldn’t ignore that.

And now I couldn’t ignore this.

How many people had he brought here before me? How many different bodies were beneath him on that bed? When was the last time he was with any of them?

In the back of my mind I had to wonder if I should actually be grateful to have something that worried me this much. Worried me to the point that I almost forgot everything else.

“Stop it.”
Levi’s voice was sharp with command, the order cracking from his tongue like a whip. I probably would’ve jumped if I weren’t so focused on the room in front of me, but the word was just enough to draw my attention back to him.

“Is that how you’re going to talk to me while we’re here?” I asked, my voice surprisingly calm despite the storm of emotions brewing inside me. I turned my gaze to him and watched the confusion enter his eyes. “Should I call you Corporal?”

“You can call me whatever the fuck you want if it gets that look out of your eyes,” he retorted, “But don’t expect me to treat you like you’re one of my playthings while you’re here. That’s not what this is about.”

“Do you have a lot of them?”

I knew I shouldn’t have asked, but I couldn’t stop the words from leaving my lips the moment he brought up the word. Being called a plaything wouldn’t have bothered me, but he was applying the term to someone else and he was using it in the plural sense. It was like having his lovers fill the room, and each one was an uninvited guest to me. I felt like I could see them all, and it was making me sick.

Somehow I think he knew.

Levi regarded me for a long moment, searching my expression before he crossed the room to me. His movements were slow, as if he were trying to judge whether or not I would run from him. Not that he would let me get very far. Something in his eyes told me he wouldn’t let me get away.

“A lot of what, kid? Crops? Whips?” There was a teasing lilt in his voice and his eyes were tinged with amusement. He stopped in front of me and cupped my chin, letting his thumb brush over my lower lip. His tone was serious now. “Do you really think you have to ask that question, Eren?”

I wasn’t sure I needed to ask any of it, but it came out anyway. “When were you going to tell me?”

“That really depended on you,” he answered simply, pausing for a moment to look around the room, “I haven’t been here since meeting you, Eren. And unless this turned out to be the lifestyle you wanted to be a part of, I wasn’t planning on ever bringing you here.”

“So what would you have done with it?” I pushed with the only question rolling around in my mind. “If I didn’t want this, would you find someone else who—”

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence, brat.” Levi cut me off, his voice sharp with warning. “Not after tonight. Not after everything we’ve been through. If you think whips and chains are what I need in order to have a relationship, then you don’t know me at all. I’d give that up for you, Eren. In an instant. I wouldn’t look for it somewhere else, because it means nothing compared to you.”

“I’m not asking you to give it up.”

“I know you’re not,” he continued, his voice taking on a calmer note, “But I also know that you’re not ready yet, which is one of the reasons I didn’t bother to bring you here.”

But I was here now. Even if I wasn’t ready. Of course, I knew he wouldn’t make me do anything while we were here. Fuck, I would probably have to beg him to get him to do much more than the bit we’d done. He’d already warned me that he would make me beg for it before he went any further. He wanted me to be comfortable with this every step of the way, which was one of the reasons trust was so important to him. He needed me to know that he would never hurt me. And I knew that now.
“I was going to sell it,” Levi interrupted my thoughts. “If you had never shown any interest in this lifestyle, I would have just sold it. You never would have known about it.”

“Why not?”

“Because I didn’t want to scare you away with it.”

I stared at him as if he had lost his mind. “You own a BDSM club, Levi. I barely knew you, and yet you shoved a crop up my ass in front of everyone after only a week. If that didn’t scare me away, why would this?”

A small smirk teased the corner of his mouth as amusement filled his eyes, “Because that’s a public place and that’s what we do there. Everyone uses the equipment. Everyone plays there, but I don’t. You were my exception, Eren. I bring everyone else here.”

And suddenly I felt sick again.

“Would you stop it with that look?” Levi growled, “I bought this apartment so I would never have to bring anyone to my real home. It’s not like I’m hiding a bunch of men in my closet. There hasn’t been anyone since you.”

“I know that,” I shot back, looking away long enough to compose my expression. I was annoyed that this was able to get the best of me, but I wasn’t exactly emotionally stable right now either. Given the circumstances, I was proud of myself for dealing with it at all. Most of me just wanted to tell the rest of the month to fuck off and sleep it away.

“I really don’t think you do,” he countered, his eyes mildly annoyed, “You wouldn’t look so fucking crushed if you did.”

“It’s not that I think you’re with anyone else right now,” I explained. “I just don’t like thinking about the fact that you were.”

“What the hell do you think I did with Erwin? Played Chess?”

I wrinkled my nose at the thought, trying to banish all of the images of them from my mind. “No, I know what you did with him. I just never thought about you with anyone else.”

“There really weren’t that many others, Eren.”

I tried not to roll my eyes, and then paused to look him over. No one would have ever said no if he so much as asked, and I knew firsthand how sexual a man he was. It was hard to imagine he ever went more than a few days without someone in his bed.

“I doubt that.”

He raised a brow and angled his head to the side, his expression bordering on offended. “So, what? I’m attractive, and that means I have to fuck around with everyone?”

“No, it just means that you can.”

“Likewise, kid.” Levi shot back, “But as I recall, I was your first. So maybe having good looks and a tight ass doesn’t make someone a whore.”

The word caught me off guard and my stomach twisted uncomfortably as I finally began to realize what I was saying. I was accusing him of things I knew nothing about. It was true that I didn’t know
how many people he had been with, but the number shouldn’t have mattered. It was all in the past, and even if there had been dozens in his bed I was the only one there now. That was the only thing that mattered, and I was being ridiculous by allowing this to get the best of me. The only thing I was succeeding in doing was upsetting the both of us, and after the week we’d had we didn’t need anymore anguish.

Suddenly I wanted nothing more than to drop the whole thing. I didn’t care about his past if I was going to be his future. All of the men he’d had before me were done now. He wanted me, and that was all I cared about.

“I didn’t…” I faltered, trying to find a way to put it into words. Unfortunately, my mind wasn’t in the mood to help. “That’s not what I… Levi, I’m sorry, I’m just…”

“Jealous,” he filled in the blank, “And save for the part where you’re accusing me of sleeping with half of New York, I’m actually kind of flattered.”

The worry began to fade. “Really?”

“Only slightly,” he smirked, brushing his thumb along my jaw. “Now keep the smile there and let’s drop this. All of that’s in the past, and it doesn’t matter anymore. The only thing you’re going to do with it is stress yourself, and you don’t need that right now.”

I couldn’t argue with that but as I took a look around the room, one last question came to mind. “Can I ask one more thing?”

“You can ask a thousand things if it’ll put your mind at ease.”

“Is it clean?”

Levi’s eyebrows shot up in surprise and his expression went from offended to amused. “Just who do you think you’re talking to, brat? It’s fucking immaculate. But if you’re not convinced, say the word and I’ll have every piece of furniture replaced by tomorrow.”

I knew he wasn’t kidding, and the fact that he would go so far just to put me at ease had my heart racing in my chest. I couldn’t even keep the smile off my lips. “No, you don’t have to do that. I trust you.”

“I know you do.” Levi replied, his voice soft. Somehow I knew the words meant more now than they had before. Trust was an important thing to him, and I was finally beginning to understand that. Even more, I was starting to prove it.

“Are you going to be staying here, too?”

“You wouldn’t be able to keep me away if you wanted to,” he mused, a small smirk on his lips. His fingers lingered on my neck for a moment, tracing over the cut he found there and then suddenly his smile was gone. “I found the chain on the floor.”

“It’s probably broken now.” I kept the words as simple as I could, because I didn’t want him to know how much it upset me. I saw that necklace as a symbol of the next step in our relationship. The fact that it had been ruined in such a violent way, covered in my own blood, was not something I wanted to think about.

“It was,” he admitted, pausing for a moment before continuing, “But it was still one of the things I grabbed before I left. I wasn’t sure if you would still want it, and I didn’t want to leave it there if you did.”
“I don’t know if I want to put that back around my neck after having it ripped off like that,” I muttered, rubbing at the tender area. I hated that the mere thought of it was making my skin crawl, but I was sure that if I wore it again I would only remember that moment. And I knew I didn’t want to remember anything about my dark bedroom and my father’s cold eyes.

“Then you never have to wear it again,” he murmured softly, his fingers once again touching the cut on my neck. There was an anger that was still burning in his eyes, and it grew every time he looked at my wounds. I was almost worried to go to sleep, because somehow I knew that I was the only thing keeping him here right now. Otherwise he would be back in my room, finishing the job. And I knew I couldn’t have him risking himself for me.

“I’ll look for something new tomorrow,” I offered, trying to seem dismissive and casual even though we both knew I wasn’t capable of either right now. “Maybe a leather cord or something. That might look nicer than a chain anyway.”

Levi stared at me for a long moment, searching my eyes as if he could see all the pain hiding there. And I knew that he could. But even still, he didn’t mention it. He let me hide it because he knew that was what I needed right now. The only thing I wanted was a distraction, and talking about something as pointless as getting a new necklace was just enough to do the trick. And he knew that.

“I have something for you,” he said at last, gesturing to the bed. “Sit.”

I looked over at the blood red sheets and the intimidating black metal frame that was softened only by the ebony silk draped over the canopy. There were handcuffs dangling from each of the four metal bars and I could practically see myself spread out on the bed, captured in their hold. And it wasn’t what I wanted right now. Not after tonight. As much as I needed a distraction, this wasn’t it.

“I don’t think I can…” I started and then stopped, suddenly scared to refuse him. He had never made the offer before and I didn’t want to shut him down so quickly when he was finally opening up.

“You don’t think you can what?” Levi asked, pausing halfway across the room. He glanced over at me and raised one perfect eyebrow. “Sit?”

“No, I just…” I took a deep breath and shook my head, pausing to let my fingers touch the cool metal frame. My eyes lingered on the handcuffs and I swallowed. “I don’t know if I’m ready to… to do this. At least not tonight. I’m sor—”

“No,” Levi cut me off quickly, holding up his hand, “First off, that’s not where this was going. I’m a little more sensitive than that, brat. We’re not going to be doing anything tonight. And second… never, ever apologize to me when you’re not in the mood. That’s not something you have to apologize for. Ever. We’ll do that when and if you’re ready, and not a moment sooner. Never be sorry about that.”

“Then…” I paused and my brow furrowed, “What did you want me to do on your bed?”

“Exactly what I said,” he continued, eyeing me with a bemused stare. “Sit. That’s all I want you to do. Just sit. Trust me, kid, you need it after the day you’ve had.”

I dropped down onto the sheets and stared at him, watching him as he walked over to the tall cherry wood dresser across the room. He opened it and revealed a closet full of leather goodies, much like the toys I had seen so many times at The Wall. He lingered there as if he were searching for something, which he probably was. But I didn’t have the mental capacity to worry about what it was right now, and I was just happy to know it wouldn’t be going up my ass.
I shut my eyes and let a sigh rush out of my lungs, trying my best to ignore the images that rushed at me. I felt as if I would never be able to forget tonight, and deep down I knew I wouldn’t. As much as I hated to admit it, those horrible minutes spent in that room had changed me for a lifetime. I would always remember how it felt to be rejected and hated by someone I had loved so much. He’d hurt me in a way that no one else could, in a way that I had never expected to be damaged. And I would carry that with me forever.

“Say the word and I’ll kill him.”

I opened my eyes and gazed up at Levi, who was staring down at me with an expression that was twisted between concern and anger. The emotions were conflicting on his face as if he couldn’t decide whether he wanted to comfort me or kill my father. Although I was pretty sure he was more intent on doing the latter. But that wouldn’t help either of us.

“You’d get in trouble.”

“Yea, I probably would,” he agreed through a laugh that held no humor, “But honestly, kid, when you look like that I just can’t fucking care about what happens to me. All I want to do is hurt the piece of shit that hurt you this way.”

“I want to hurt him, too,” I admitted, my voice trembling with a touch of anger. I wasn’t aware it was burning inside of me until now, but it was still only a dull roar compared to everything else. “I really want to hurt him, but at the same time I… damn it, I don’t even know what I feel right now. I don’t know what I’m supposed to feel. I don’t even know if I want to.”

“Then don’t,” he spoke softly, setting something down at my side before taking my face into his hands. He rested his forehead to mine and stared into my eyes before continuing, “Don’t think about a single thing right now. You don’t have to. Close your eyes and sleep. Just take the night and forget today. We can deal with it in the morning.”

The scent of him filled my nose and made my heart race, allowing me to forget everything for a few short moments. I hadn’t realized how badly I needed his touch until now, now that I could feel the warmth of his hands pressed against my cheeks. And suddenly it was the only thing I wanted. His arms wrapped around my body, his lips pressed against my neck. Those were the only things I wanted to feel right now, the only things I wanted to think about.

And when he moved onto the bed and pulled me into his arms, I was sure he knew exactly what I needed. I settled into his embrace and rested my head against his shoulder, tracing his forearm with the tips of my fingers. All the way down to his hand, where I finally noticed the strip of leather resting there.

“What’s that?”

“Hrm?” The soft sound rumbled in his chest and I felt his head turn as he followed my gaze. “Oh, that. Don’t worry about that right now.”

Because hearing that would somehow make me less curious, right?

I reached out and grabbed the leather, sitting up as I pulled it into my lap. It was a thin strip, no wider than an inch, and it was just thick enough to be a durable piece. One end was attached to a little metal buckle, the opposite side holding several little holes. In the center, attached to the leather, was a perfect metal circle dangling from the piece. I looped my finger through the center, knowing full and well what this was, and mused about how easily it would attach to a leash.
I wasn’t sure why that was the first thought that entered my mind, but it was.

Levi watched me in silence, never once trying to stop me as I investigated the collar. After a while, I realized it was because he was nervous. He was waiting for my reaction to it, as if somehow it was more than just a decorative piece. And maybe it was to him. Maybe it meant far more than I could comprehend as an outsider to his world. But I was willing to learn.

“So,” I prompted, drawing out the o as I stared at the collar. “Does this make me your dog?”

“My dog?” Levi asked through a short laugh, and then raised a brow. He was actually considering the question, and after a moment his voice lowered an octave and a sensual grin curved his lips, “I could train you like a dog if you wanted me to.”

That was almost tempting.

“Woof,” I replied, a small smile touching my lips.

“Good boy,” Levi smirked, snatching the collar from me and pulling it away, pausing to fiddle with the buckle. “But not tonight, and not for a while.”

As relieved as I was to know we wouldn’t be starting tonight, I knew I would be disappointed tomorrow when I finally realized that it could be weeks until we did much of anything at all. “How long?”

“When I’m sure you’re ready,” he shrugged, “However long that takes.”

“And I get this then?” I asked, tugging on the leather strip he was holding between his hands.

“No, you get this now,” he answered, his eyes meeting mine. “If you want it, that is. You don’t have to accept it. And even if you do, it doesn’t have to be anything more than a substitute for your necklace.”

“What does it mean to you?”

I knew I had to ask that question. The way he said it didn’t have to be anything other than a necklace told me that it was so much more than that. It meant something to him in a way that I didn’t know. And I desperately wanted to understand.

“Erwin offered me one of these,” he explained, hedging on the words. I could tell he wanted to talk about his former relationship as little as I wanted to hear about it. “When we really started our relationship. It meant something to me at the time, and I know it meant something to him. It was when he started to train me.”

“So it really is like I’m your dog,” I murmured, not at all intending the words to sound as offense as they probably did. But he didn’t seem to take it that way regardless.

“You don’t have to wear this if you don’t want to,” he continued, “And if you do, it doesn’t have to mean that.”

“I want it to mean whatever it’s supposed to mean to you.”

The words came out of my mouth so quickly, so easily, that I knew they were true. Even if I was still uncertain of what this lifestyle was, I knew without a doubt that I wanted to explore it with Levi. The small taste I’d had at The Wall had left me curious and wanting more, and he’d given me little since then. I knew I liked having him in control, as strange as that was for me. Usually I was the one who
wanted to control the situation, but with him it was different. With him I wanted to give in. I wanted
him to dominate me.

“I don’t think you really understand what it’s supposed to mean yet,” Levi mused, touching my neck
softly, “But we’ll get there.”

“Will you put it on me?”

“Maybe you should wait until you know what you’re asking for.”

“It can be a necklace until then,” I offered, reaching out for it, “Even if it’s just for the key, I want to
wear it.”

And it was true. Although not entirely. I wanted to wear it for more than just the key, even if I didn’t
understand why.

“Fine, but if you find something better in the meantime, you can switch it out.”

I knew I wouldn’t.

I felt the leather slip around my neck and reached into my pocket to take out the key. He plucked it
from my fingers once the buckle was secured and the collar was on my neck. I was surprised by how
comfortable it felt, even against my tender skin. I had expected it to pinch me, or at the very least
strangle me, but I barely felt it at all. It was nothing more than a smooth, cool comfort pressed against
my body. A reminder that I belonged to him.

Levi stared at the key for a long moment and then moved out of the bed, walking to a short dresser
across the room. I heard the soft clink of metal and turned over in the bed to watch the strong
muscles of his back move beneath his shirt as he worked. My fingers brushed against the collar and
hooked around the small circle, wondering what he would attach there in time.

“What do you use this part for?”

Levi glanced over his shoulder at me and a smirk crossed his lips, “We’ll get to that part soon
enough. But for now it doesn’t have any physical purpose. It’s just a symbol.”

I ran the tip of my finger along the outside of the cool metal and watched as he walked over. “What
does it mean?”

He looped his finger through the circle and leaned close, his forehead pressed against mine as I stared
into his sharp blue eyes. “It means you belong to me.”

A soft click caught my attention and I looked down to see his mother’s key now dangling from the
metal circle. His lips brushed against my ear as he pushed me back onto the bed, his fingers lingering
on the key. “And this means I belong to you.”

I felt my heart race as I held the key in my hand, an exhausting relief settling over me. I had no idea
how much I enjoyed having it there until it was gone, and now that it was back I never wanted to
take it off. I didn’t want anyone to take it off. The collar meant that I was his and the key meant that
he belonged to me.

And I wouldn’t let anything change that.

Levi flicked his index finger against the end of the key, helping it sway in place as he smirked. “I
actually like the way this looks on you, kid. You should wear collars more often.”
“Because I have an abundance of those in my closet, right?”

“You don’t have anything good in your closet, collars or otherwise. You’re lucky any of that actually passes as clothes.”

“Or did,” I shrugged, touching the collar, “I’m guessing I don’t have too much to pick from now.”

I knew Levi had managed to snag a few items from my room, but I was willing to bet that I’d definitely be lacking in the clothing department. And it wasn’t like I could borrow anything from him. Hell, even Armin would be a bit of a stretch.

“Lucky for you, I have plenty of money and I’ve been desperate to get you a new wardrobe anyway.”

“So it all works out for the best.”

Levi paused, watching me. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I know you didn’t,” I shrugged and then shook my head. I had no idea why those words came out, why I even thought I could joke about it yet, but somehow I’d hoped that I could. As if doing so would make me forget. It didn’t.

“And you know you didn’t deserve this, right?” he asked, still watching me with concern in his eyes. I hated knowing that the concern was there for me, as if I were some fragile boy that was only seconds away from breaking.

“Yea, I know,” I muttered, holding the key as I looked away, “I’m just not what he wanted me to be.”

He took my hand and held it tight, threading our fingers together. “You are exactly who you need to be. Exactly who you are. And you are perfect, Eren.”

I could feel my heart pounding in my chest as I turned my gaze back to him. His bright blue eyes were intense with emotion, as if he were genuinely terrified that I would hate myself. His hand tightened around mine and his voice trembled on the way out, “Don’t let him take that away from you.”

And suddenly I remembered the horrible thought I’d had up in that room. Back when my father’s hands were around my neck, choking the last bit of life out of me, I’d realized that I would never be able to tell Levi how I felt. He’d almost taken that away from me, and at the time I’d truly thought that I would never have that chance again. In that moment, I never expected to see Levi, and now that he was here in front of me I couldn’t bring myself to lose that chance again. Not when I could tell him now.

“I love you, Levi.”

His hand dropped from mine as if he were burned, and his eyes widened with surprise. He opened his mouth and then shut it again, trying once more but with little success. In the silence I began to realize the words that had come out of my mouth, but even then I couldn’t bring myself to regret them. Given the chance, I wouldn’t take them back. I’d almost been denied the right to say them at all and even if they scared him away now, I needed him to know.

“Eren, you…”

“I mean it,” I cut him off; almost certain he was about to deny it. “I love you. Even if you’re not
ready to hear it right now, I need you to know it. Because today I thought I would never have the chance to tell you, and I don’t want that to happen again. I don’t want to die without you knowing that you were loved. That you were…”

Levi’s lips covered mine and took away any thought that had been left in my mind. His fingers twisted in my hair, gripping it in a way that was all at once passionate and yet mindful of the damage I had suffered earlier that day. He pressed me into the soft mattress, his body on top of mine as his lips continued their hungry assault. My mouth gave way to his and I released a throaty moan when his tongue found mine, overwhelming me with the taste I had craved so desperately. I didn’t even realize how badly I’d needed this until now. I wanted to lose myself in the motion of our bodies, until I couldn’t move anymore.

“Don’t,” he growled the word, taking my lower lip between his teeth and tugging it once before kissing me again. “Don’t…”

I felt confusion furrow my brow as my lips stilled on his, “Don’t what?”

“Don’t talk about death as if it can happen to you,” he continued in a gruff voice, finally breaking away from my lips. He stared down at me with anger in his eyes and shook his head, “You’re not allowed to die on me, kid. Do you understand that? You don’t have permission to. You don’t have any right to, so don’t.”

I searched his eyes for the joke, but I couldn’t find it. There was only anger and pain. “Levi, I can’t control whether or not…”

“He’s not going to touch you again,” he vowed, “I’m not going to let that happen. He got a hold of you once, but I won’t let him again. I’ll kill him next time if I have to.”

“Levi, you’ll…”

“Go to jail?” he cut me off, “Fine, so long as that means I’m not visiting your grave. Because I can’t do that, Eren. I can’t mourn someone else. I can’t go through that again. I can’t lose another person that I…”

He closed his mouth and shut his eyes, his jaw tight as if it were locking away the rest of his words. Words that I already knew. Feelings I was already sure he had, even if he wasn’t ready to say them to me yet. And I realized then that I didn’t need him to. So long as I could tell him how I felt, that would be enough. He didn’t need to repeat the words back to me for me to know that they were true.

“I’m sorry,” he said at last, his voice as tight as his jaw, “I didn’t mean to react like that. I just… I didn’t expect you to say it. Not now, not any time soon and I… damn it…”

“It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not,” he muttered, leaning back against the sheets. He stared up the canopy in a long moment of silence before finally looking over at me. “Listen, kid… it’s not that I don’t… fuck… It’s just that… I’ve never said it before, okay? And I don’t want to say it just because you did. I don’t want that to be my reason. I don’t want it to just be a response. When I say it to you, it’s because I know I’m ready. Because I know I mean it and I want to say it, even if I don’t hear it back from you.”

“You don’t have to,” I spoke softly, “That’s not why I said it. I didn’t say it because I wanted you to say it back to me. I said it because I needed you to know that you’re loved.”

Levi stared at me until I knew I was the only thing he could see. His eyes were glassy as he
swallowed convulsively, clearing his throat before finally looking away. I could only assume he was taking a moment to compose his expression, and I would never hint at the fact that for once I knew just how much he was feeling. Because I knew it mattered to him. I knew he needed to know that he was loved, because they were words he never heard. Words he deserved to hear.

He pulled me tight against his body and held me there, not saying a word. But I didn’t need him to. I was comfortable in our silence, as I always was. I didn’t need a million words between us, as long as I could feel the beat of his heart. That gentle rhythm that had become as familiar as my own, even in the short time we’d known each other. It was the sound I fell asleep to every night, a sound I had missed desperately for three days, but I had it now. Beating beneath my ear as a steady reminder that he was here with me, holding me in his arms. And I knew that as long as I was there, nothing could go wrong.

Because he wouldn’t let it.

As strong as I liked to think I was, Levi was still my protector. A savior I never knew I needed, but was so grateful for now.

I didn’t want to think about how this day would have ended without him there. I couldn’t imagine life without him now.

“I don’t know what I’d do without you, kid,” Levi murmured. His voice was so soft that I knew the words weren’t meant for my ears. His fingers moved in a slow, gentle touch against my arm, soothing me further into a dreamlike state. I could barely hear the rest of the words as they left his lips in a soft whisper.

“You’ve changed everything, Eren. In a way I thought no one ever could. I never expected to let you in this deep, but here you are. And it scares the shit out of me. It really fucking does. Because before you, all I knew was anger. All I wanted was revenge. But now all I can see, all I want, is a life with you.”
Chapter Notes

It’s Thursday! ^___^ This little notes bit is probably going to be fast this week because I’m in a bit of a rush, but first an important fact about this chapter…

This chapter takes place about three months after Chapter 38. It occurs on Eren’s canon birthday, which is also Eren’s birthday in The Intern.

Thank you all so much for your wonderful comments on the last chapter! ^__^ It made me so happy to read them, and I’m glad you all enjoyed Eren’s collar and his confession. Hopefully you’ll enjoy this chapter as well!

I’d also like to thank blaqmarquet and russianpunklevi for sharing some truly amazing fanart of The Intern this week! Blaqmarquet made an incredible comic strip for Chapter 38, so please check it out if you haven’t already seen it!

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you’re not already following me on tumblr, you can do so at lootibles. I’m also tracking the tag, ‘fic: the intern’ if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

A few months later...

I couldn’t take this anymore.

My hands twisted futilely, fighting against the rope that was so skillfully binding them in place and rendering them useless. They were held up by the thick cord, tied to a metal bar that was somewhere above my head. Or at least that’s what I had to imagine was holding me in place. Whatever it was had enough strength behind it to keep me from struggling out of its grip. Even still, I couldn’t be sure of what it was. Even if I wanted to look, I wouldn’t be able to.

I couldn’t see.

The blindfold around my eyes was dark and thick enough to block out any hope of light. I could have had the sun shining directly in front of me and not have seen a thing. But that was the way he wanted it. He didn’t want me to be able to see what might be coming next. He wanted me to lack as many senses as he could deprive me of, short of hearing and touch. He wanted me to hear this. And even more, he wanted me to feel it.

And I did.

Even without the sound of buzzing filling the room, I would have felt every agonizing second. I gritted my teeth together, knowing that I couldn’t allow myself to scream or breathe a word. No matter how desperately I wanted to. It was almost impossible to keep everything inside, but so far I had managed to do just that and I was determined not to break now. Not when I knew he was trying to get me to. He wanted to see me crack, wanted that satisfaction, but I wouldn’t give it to him. Not as long as I could fight it.
“You’re struggling…”

I grunted in frustration, but gave nothing more to allude to the fact that he was absolutely correct. Of course, he knew that already. Even without me telling him, my struggle was disappointingly obvious. I couldn’t keep myself from fighting against the rope around my wrists, although I had learned to keep my hips from moving. The ropes that were binding my calves to my thighs, the ones tied tight just below my knees, made any movement impossible. The most I could do was wriggle my hips, and doing so would only make the agony that much worse.

Because no matter how much I moved, I couldn’t get that fucking vibrator where I needed it most.

It was buzzing wildly inside of me, taunting me from every angle as if it knew what I so desperately wanted. The bottom of the device was pressed flat and tight against my asshole, keeping it from diving inside completely; something I would be thankful for later but right now it drove me nuts. My cock, which was throbbing to the point of pain, had a little vibrating egg taped to its base in order to further my arousal. Which it did with exquisite perfection, and normally I would have been blissful for it. But not now.

Not when I had an order to follow.

“Control yourself, Eren.”

A groan dragged its way out of my throat and I puffed up my cheeks when a rough sigh was denied its release through my clenched teeth. I knew if I opened my mouth now I would give into everything entirely, and I didn’t want to do that yet. He had been very clear about what he wanted from me, and I was determined to give it to him. I wasn’t allowed to have my orgasm until he deemed me worthy of it, until I had earned it in his eyes. I couldn’t say a word, not even his name. Moaning, he agreed, was almost impossible to control, but I was trying anyway because I wanted to please him. Even more than that, I wanted to impress him.

Because knowing that I had, knowing that he enjoyed what I was able to do, was somehow more gratifying than any physical pleasure he had ever shown me before.

He had told me it would be like this back when we first started, but I didn’t believe him then. I couldn’t imagine ever enjoying anything more than the sex we’d already had. It was mind numbing on its own, even before all the tricks we’d added over the past few months, but this was so much more. I felt like I was his in the truest sense of the word. I gave myself to him entirely and he took everything as if each part of me were its own gift. I was his, fully and completely.

And I knew he was mine.

“I could watch you all day, kid…”

The deep rumble of his voice was closer now, right beside me, and I felt my body screaming to give in. Every time he was close to me my senses went wild, every nerve under my skin vibrating for him alone. I wanted to give into it so badly, but I wanted to please him that much more. It was a desperate struggle and I could feel myself caving, my muscles pulsing around the thick piece inside me as if I were already coming. I wanted to be pulsing around him.

“Do you need to come, Eren?” Levi asked in a husky purr, “Do you want me to give you permission to come?”

I wasn’t sure whether or not that was supposed to be a trick, and I didn’t want to give in if it was. I knew that if I answered him now, my body would take care of the rest. Even if he were planning to
give me permission after all, the rest of me wouldn’t be able to wait for it. I was teetering on the edge as it was.

“I asked you a question, brat,” Levi warned, his crop striking the bottom of my chin to angle my head up. I knew that if it weren’t for the blindfold, I would be looking into his eyes right now. “Don’t make me ask you again.”

“C-Corporal…” The word was nothing but a desperate moan on my lips. “Please… oh… oh god, please… I… c-can’t…”

I was panting heavily, straining against the ropes that were holding me in place. I couldn’t stop my hips from writhing and when they did, a blinding white light filled my vision and sent my mind reeling. I couldn’t wait any longer, no matter how much I wanted to. My body was at its breaking point.

“Oh, Eren… you’re too easy…”

The vibrating egg left my body in the same moment that Levi’s lips wrapped around my pulsating cock, the slick heat engulfing me as if it were the only place I was meant to be. My head kicked back and my arms strained against the cord as my body arched up into his. I couldn’t even distinguish the sounds from each other as they tore out of my throat, caught between screams and moans and the mangled sound of his name on my lips. All I felt was him and his wet tongue as it moved up and down my aching length, milking every drop I had to give until there was nothing left inside me.

I felt his tongue circle my tip and lick across the top once more before he laughed softly. “Don’t tell me you passed out on me, kid…”

“Still…” I swallowed and tried again. “Still here… Corporal…”

“Good boy, Eren.”

My heart swelled with satisfaction and pride when I heard the words, and I had to bite my lower lip to keep from grinning. For some reason I didn’t want him to know just how much it pleased me.

I heard him shifting around on the bed, collecting the egg and vibrator from my body and switching them off before tending to me. He freed my legs first, and I felt a wave of relief as I stretched them out across the bed. My knees popped softly and a shiver shot up my spine. My hands were next and I lowered them the instant they were free, feeling them tingle as the blood rushed into my fingers. Pins and needles were always something I hated, and I was sure I would never get used to it. Even after months of practice, I still couldn’t adjust.

His fingers brushed through my hair, toying with the strands as he took his time in removing the blindfold, “Your hair’s so long now.”

“Do you want me to cut it?” I asked even though I knew the answer. He had been the one who wanted to see me with long hair in the first place, and he’d been admiring it since my hair had passed the shaggy, unkempt stage.

“What, now that it’s actually started to look good? Are you kidding?” Levi replied, amusement in his voice, “I didn’t put up with you looking like a fucking caveman in a suit for months just to have you cut it now.”

He pulled the blindfold away and I stared up into his blue eyes, a small smirk on my lips, “I happened to like the messy look.”
“And I like being able to see your eyes,” Levi shot back, brushing his fingers through my bangs to push them aside. “It was like trying to fuck a bad head of hair with no face.”

“Well, that’s flattering.”

Levi rolled his eyes and a small smirk twitched on the corner of his mouth before he paused to inspect my wrists. I watched as his eyes scrutinized the skin, looking for any damage that might have been left behind by the ropes. Either way, the aftercare would be pretty much the same. He usually went a little overkill in making sure that every inch of my body was cared for after one of our sessions. But I wasn’t about to complain. It was probably the part that I looked forward to the most.

It had been a surprise after our first session, when he held me in his arms and smoothed the lotion over my skin. His lips followed soon after, kissing every mark left behind by our activities. Not that there had been many marks after the first time. None that would have even lasted the night, but I had expected as much. I knew he would lead me through it slowly, pausing at each step to see if I wanted to go any further. I was still barely exploring his lifestyle, even after a few months. We had done plenty already, and yet I knew there was still so much left to try. And I wanted to. I really did. The deeper I went into this world, the more I enjoyed it.

I laid back against the sheets, enjoying the familiar feel of the smooth silk that had become my bed. It had been months since I’d first walked into this room, filled with nothing but worry and exhaustion after what had been the most traumatic day of my life. It was amazing how easily things had gone since then. Although I still woke up every night in a cold sweat, my life outside my nightmares had been relatively simple. The revenge plot was a thing of the past, the internship was going well, I was actually maintaining grades that were passable by most standards, and Levi had finally introduced me to his lifestyle. Everything was perfect.

Save for the fact that I had no family left. Biologically speaking, of course.

As Levi had predicted, Grisha backed off as if I were a leper with personal space issues. I hadn’t so much as heard from him since that night, and I would have almost worried whether or not Levi had indeed killed him if I actually cared. There were no police coming to take either of us away, and Grisha wasn’t coming after me any time soon. Especially not after today, now that I had finally turned eighteen. I was an adult, by legal definition anyway, and I could live wherever I wanted to. Which just so happened to be as far away from Grisha as I could get.

Not that it had been an easy decision, at first. There were times when I almost wanted to go home. Not that I had a home to go to. Even if I walked through those doors again, it wouldn’t be the same place. There would be no loving arms waiting for me there. Even my mother had cut me off entirely. For weeks I tried to call her but there was never any answer, and then finally the line just stopped connecting. It was then that I knew that she didn’t want me either. After that day, I knew that I had no home and no family to return to. I wasn’t wanted.

Levi smoothed the lotion against the marks on my wrist, his thumbs rolling slowly over my skin. I watched him as he tended to me, his eyes on the job even though I was sure he could feel my gaze.

“What is it?”

“Nothing. It’s just…” I turned my wrist in his hand, moving it back and forth. “It doesn’t really hurt. You don’t have to…”

“I want to,” he replied simply, his attention turning to my other wrist. “What’s really bothering you, kid? I know that’s not it.”
I let the air rush out of my lungs and looked away, staring at the thick red curtains that were keeping the sun from the room. “My mom’s number doesn’t pick up anymore. She must have changed it.”

His fingers stilled on my wrist and I felt his eyes on me. “Eren…”

“It doesn’t matter,” I shrugged as if that could make my statement true. “Right? It doesn’t really matter. I knew she didn’t want to talk to me. I mean, she would have picked up if she actually cared, right? So I should have seen this coming. I should have…”

“Eren, look at me.”

My head obeyed the order as if it was second nature and I found myself staring up into his eyes.

“Anyone that can just abandon you like that isn’t worth it,” Levi spoke in the ruthless voice that he reserved for talking about Grisha. “And I’m sorry if that’s harsh. I know it is. But I’m not about to sugar coat shit with you. Not when it comes to this. Fuck them both for doing this to you. Fuck him for hurting you and fuck her for defending him. They don’t deserve goddamn a second of your time, Eren. They don’t deserve any of your tears. They aren’t worth this.”

“That’s easier said than done,” I muttered, fighting the urge to look away. “Trust me, I’ve tried to cut them off as easily as they did it to me, but I just can’t get myself to do it. Especially not with mom. It was easier with him after everything he did to me, but she didn’t hurt me like that. And maybe that’s because she didn’t have the chance, but I can’t lose faith in her. The only other option is accepting that she hates me and I just… I can’t.”

Levi was silent as he drew in a slow breath, and I knew without asking that he was trying to think of words that he could say to make everything okay again, even if they didn’t exist. And if they did, he wouldn’t be the one to find them. As much as he cared about me, I knew that he hated my parents with a vicious passion and had no good words for them. He left that to Armin, who could at least be diplomatic about things when he had to be. Even if he hated the subject, he could shine a positive light on it. Levi couldn’t and neither could I. We saw everything as it was, covered in shadows.

“We’re still going to The Wall tonight, right?” I asked before he could continue the subject. He paused for a moment, regarding my expression before deciding to take the hint. He knew I didn’t want to talk about it any more than he did.

“Like I said, it’s your day, kid,” he replied with a shrug, his fingers brushing against the collar around my throat, “But I can’t say I’m thrilled about it.”

“You promised.”

“I did.”

And it didn’t come easily. I had to beg him for weeks to get him to take me anywhere near Trost. Not that I could blame him, of course. I knew he was still worried that Grisha would find me, and he had gone to every great length to ensure that never happened. I hadn’t seen Trost in months, except through a car window, and The Wall had been off limits since that night. Levi had made an excuse about my age by telling me that I was too young to go into the club, but we both knew that wasn’t the real reason. I tried to argue that I would miss Hanji and Petra if I couldn’t go to The Wall.

They showed up at the office the next day to take me out to lunch.

When the lunch dates turned into a weekly occurrence, I decided to stop fighting about The Wall. At least until I turned eighteen and age was no longer a factor. At this point it had been months since
anyone had seen Grisha, and even if he saw me now I doubted he’d notice me. My hair had been
growing fast for months now, and it had been over half a year since I’d actually had it cut. I was
looking shaggy back when I first met Levi, and now it was long and full. He wouldn’t know me
from anyone else on the streets.

“Well, tonight’s still a few hours away,” Levi mused, glancing over at the clock, “Do you have any
plans with Armin or Mikasa?”

“Nope,” I grinned, actually excited about the fact, “I’m all yours.”

“I think that’s the first time in weeks,” he laughed, rolling out of the bed. “Are you sure you’re not
forgetting something?”

If I hadn’t purposely planned an entire day for just the two of us, I might have actually wondered the
same thing myself. I hadn’t been able to spend a whole day with Levi in over a month, and knew
that was intentional on his part. Despite Mikasa’s worries when I first moved in with him, Levi had
done the opposite of isolating me. I went out to lunch with Hanji and Petra and had dinners and
movie dates with Armin and Mikasa. I saw my friends every day, and took time by myself when I
needed it. It was actually a rare occasion when I was alone with Levi for an entire day or longer.

I almost wanted to protest at first, but I wouldn’t dream of it now. As much as I loved to be around
him, I loved to be around my friends as well. And he accepted that. Even more, he insisted on it.

“Well,” I moved to the edge of the bed, smiling, “Now that you mention it, I do have a two-day
romantic getaway planned with Armin. I’m probably late for that, actually. Did he text me yet? Can
you get my—”

The pillow hit my face and muffled the rest of my words.

“You damn brat,” Levi muttered, rolling his eyes, “You are so fucking lucky that I—”

He cleared his throat and shook his head, running a hand through his hair as he walked to the closet.
I didn’t comment. We both knew what he’d been about to say, and it hadn’t been the first slip. He’d
come close on multiple occasions over the past few months, and rather than prying I decided to give
him time. I knew how he felt at this point, and I didn’t need the words to make it true.

But I was looking forward to the day when I finally heard them.

“So, you’re really free?” Levi returned to the conversation, glancing over at me as he pulled a black
leather jacket on over his red shirt. “No plans at all?”

“Oh, I have plenty of plans,” I shrugged, moving off of the bed, “They just all involve you.”

His eyes raked over my body for a moment and he smirked, “Do they involve you getting dressed?
Because then I don’t think I’m interested.”

I rolled my eyes and snatched my shirt from the chair he had thrown it on. “I don’t think they’d
appreciate my naked ass in the tattoo shop.”

His brows shot up. “Tattoo shop?”

“Ah…” I faltered, tugging on my black top. It was another band shirt I’d fished out of the bin, Three
Days Grace. I actually liked their music.

“You’re getting a tattoo?” Levi prompted when I reached for my jeans without answering.
“I was thinking about it,” I shrugged like I didn’t care. “I mean, I made an appointment. I’ve been thinking about it for a while.”

“How long?”

“A few months.”

“No, how long until the appointment?”

I glanced over at him, checking my pocket for the wallet I already knew was there. “Two hours.”

He looked over at the clock before snatching his keys from the dresser. “And what do you want to do before you get inked?”

“So you don’t care if I do it?”

He raised a brow, regarding me with an expression that was only mildly amused. “Should I?”

“Well,” I paused, fiddling with the collar on my neck. “I guess not. I just…”

“It’s your body. Do what you want with it.” Levi shrugged, walking towards the door. He paused as he passed me, setting a hand on my hip and leaning close to speak against my neck. “Just don’t hurt it.”

I fought back a shiver and flushed. “Don’t the needles hurt?”

He laughed and smacked my ass hard before continuing to the door. “As your Corporal, I can guarantee you’ve had worse.”

I wasn’t about to argue that one.

“I’m sure I can handle it. And I’m old enough now that I can get one, so I figured I might as well.”

I followed him into the elevator and pushed the button for the lobby as he leaned into his usual corner. I could feel his eyes on me and for a long moment there was an awkward silence between us that I couldn’t understand. It was like there was something hanging between us, something that made me feel as though he were both physically and emotionally distant in the same moment. What worried me more was that it wasn’t there before. It changed in an instant, but I could see it in his eyes now. A coldness that I hadn’t seen in months.

“You’re finally legal,” he spoke softly. And maybe it was meant to be a simple statement, but it didn’t feel that way.

“You’re just now noticing?” I teased, trying to keep the situation light. Why was it suddenly so hard to breathe?

“Guess I am,” he replied through a short, humorless laugh. “It’s a good thing though, isn’t it? Now you know without a doubt that I’m with you regardless of what you can do for me.”

There was a bitter quality to his words, but even without it I knew exactly what he was talking about. Erwin. The revenge plan. Something he hadn’t talked about in months. Something I didn’t think he cared about anymore. But his face said otherwise.

“Levi, I…”

“Don’t look so stung, kid. It’s not supposed to be a bad thing,” he rolled his eyes and stepped off the
elevator when the doors opened. “Now you know I’m not using you. Now you couldn’t even do it if I asked.”

“I could still do it,” I offered, hating the words. I followed him towards the front doors, reaching for his hand. “Age doesn’t really matter for this, right? His wife would still be mad, wouldn’t she?”

I felt the lie rear its ugly head, like a black venomous snake that had been sleeping in the depths of my belly until now. Why had I let those words out of my mouth when I knew what they could cost me?

“I wouldn’t let you be involved with it even if you wanted to be,” he replied, threading our fingers together when his hand found mine. “I’ll just find someone else for it if I really need it in the end.”

“I had no idea you still did.”

“Neither did I,” he muttered, pausing at the sidewalk to wait for a cab. “Not until recently, anyway. I really thought I was over it, but it just keeps coming back.”

“Then why didn’t you ask me?”

“Because I’m not going to use you,” he answered simply, “And because he’s with Armin and I’m not about to hurt your friend. Because that would hurt you and I just have this weird thing where I don’t want to cause you pain.”

“Except in bed,” I reminded him with a small smile. Part of me was still trying to steer the conversation away from the dark direction it was taking.

“You know what I mean,” he rolled his eyes, “So don’t joke about it. In fact, let’s just drop it. I’ll get used to Erwin eventually.”

“Will you?”

His hand tightened reassuringly on mine. “For you, kid, I’d do anything.”

As much as I wanted to believe that, I couldn’t help but be terrified now. The storm clouds that had disappeared completely were suddenly rolling back into our lives, and I wasn’t sure how to handle them now that I’d gotten used to the sun.

A cab rolled up to the curb and we climbed inside. Levi didn’t bothered to hide the look of disgust as he examined the interior of the car, which would have never been able to meet his standards of cleanliness. Still, it was cheap and easy, and it meant that his driver wouldn’t be waiting on us all day.

“Where to?”

I glanced over at Levi and he looked at me expectantly, waiting for me to decide. I already knew where I wanted to go.

“Bryant Park.”

I leaned back in my seat and pulled Levi against me, knowing that he wanted to touch the cab as little as possible. The city passed by us slowly, the blaring horns accompanying us in our trip. Traffic was bad today, but I couldn’t bring myself to care. I was too happy to have the day with him, and even more excited for the night that would follow. Levi had promised to officially become my Corporal tonight at The Wall. Everyone would know that I was his and he was mine, and that was
something I had been looking forward to for weeks.

It was actually the reason I wanted to get a tattoo in the first place, to commemorate the occasion. To mark myself as his in a way that anyone could identify.

Levi paid the fare and followed me out of the cab, grabbing my hand as we walked up towards the park. It was a beautiful area that I had come to admire over the past few weeks. Armin, Mikasa, and I had started the tradition of taking a weekly trip to the sandwich shop, ‘wichcraft. They had grilled cheese and tomato soup that made me melt, and I was dreading the warmer days when eating hot soup wouldn’t make sense.

There was a group of children playing a game with sticks. Some of them had built up a wall of thick wooden blocks and the others were trying to knock it down by throwing wooden balls. It was like watching a live game of Angry Birds, but luckily nothing was being thrown into the air. Not that the parents would allow that anyway. They were standing close by, supervising the kids and cheering them on whenever a wall went down. I watched as one father scooped up his son and hugged him tight, congratulating him on whatever he had done.

And then I had to look away.

Levi squeezed my hand as if he knew I needed it, but his eyes were on a group of people flinging around thick metal balls.

“What the hell are they doing?” I frowned, watching as one of the silver spheres hit the gravel. It rolled near a small wooden ball and the spectators started to cheer as if it actually meant something.

“It’s called Pétanque,” he replied, “It’s a French game. To put it simply, they want to throw the metal balls as close as they can to that little one there.”

“Have you ever played it?”

“Oh? Just because I’m French, I have to play all the French games?” Levi smirked. “Yes, I have. But I’m not very good at it.”

“I didn’t think it was possible for you to be bad at anything.”

“I didn’t say I was bad, I just said I wasn’t great.” Levi shrugged, walking with me over to ‘wichcraft. “Do you want anything to drink?”

“Hot chocolate.”

“You’re a wild one, kid,” he teased, leaning against the counter as he ordered, “Two hot chocolates.”

“You’re one to talk.”

He rolled his eyes and smirked; glancing over at me, “Go find us a seat, birthday boy.”

I walked away from him as he waited for our drinks, scanning the green tables and chairs for an empty set. It was surprisingly busy today and nearly everything was occupied.

But there was the fountain.

It was large without being massive, and beautiful yet simple. On most visits, I tried to get a seat close to it. It probably should have bothered me after Paris, after that night with Levi, but it didn’t. I found the sound of the water soothing and the sight of it even more so. Perhaps it was because in the end I
knew that was the best thing for our relationship. That fight had brought us to the comfortable point we were at now, and I wouldn’t change that for anything.

“What is it with you and fountains?” Levi mused, handing me the cup. He took a seat beside me on the fountain’s edge and glanced at the water. “Mikasa mentioned that you sit here a lot.”

“You talk to her?” I asked, trying to keep the surprise from my voice. “And you don’t kill each other?”

“Believe it or not, I actually like your sister,” he admitted, taking a sip from his cup. “She has a fire about her that I can admire. And she’s strong, especially when it comes to you.”

“Yea, she’s a regular hard ass,” I muttered, sipping at my own drink as I looked around us. “Hey, Levi?”

He glanced at me from over the rim of his cup.

“Can we ride the Carousel?”

He slowly lowered his drink and stared at me with a look of profound amusement, searching my expression as if he would find some joke hiding there. “Are you serious?”

I glanced over at the ride and fought back a smirk. I was actually serious, but I was also enjoying myself with the tease. “You won’t go on it with me?”

“Oh, I will,” Levi assured me, “I’m just wondering if you’re actually serious.”

“I am,” I grinned, looking back at him. “I’ve wanted to go on it for a while, and the weather’s so nice today so… why not?”

“Hot cocoa and a carousel ride,” Levi repeated as he stood up, holding out a hand for me. “Are you sure you wanna follow that up with a tattoo and some bondage?”

“I figured it would balance itself out,” I smirked, taking another swig from my cup. “Besides, I’m only eighteen. Not forty like some people.”

“Are we going to relive that one?” he asked, raising a brow, “Do I have to call you four again?”

“I’d be five now.”

“And starting kindergarten soon. I’m so proud.”

“I know, it’s gonna have me pretty busy,” I grinned, walking at his side as we headed for the carousel. We swung our hands slowly together. “I promise I’ll still visit you in the old folks home, though.”

“Do I need to remind you that your ass is mine tonight? In front of everyone? To do with as I wish?” A sudden shiver went through me, but I managed to hide any other reaction to his words. “Are we still going to do that?”

“Only if you want to.”

“I thought you were going to try to back out of it,” I admitted.

“Why would I do that?” Levi looked at me as if I’d lost my mind. “Why in the world would I not
want to let everyone know that you’re mine? I’ve been looking forward to this as much as you have, kid.”

He paid for the carousel and grabbed the first available horse, hoisting himself onto it. I paused only long enough to dig in my pocket for my phone before climbing onto my own horse. I hooked my arm around the metal bar that was slowly moving me up and down. Levi was gazing off at the park around us, his expression momentarily soft and content. Exactly what I wanted to capture.

The sound of my phone’s camera drew his attention to me, and his eyes widened. Another flash.

“Oi, you little shit!”

I fought back a laugh and leaned out of reach when he grabbed for my phone, snapping a third picture. “You’re supposed to smile!”

“I’ll smile plenty as soon as I get that phone out of your hands,” he shot back, reaching again.

I leaned the other way and grinned. “What if I promise never to show it to anyone?”

“That’ll only last until you see Hanji or Mikasa. And then I’m never going to hear the end of my ass riding a fucking horse.”

I wrinkled my nose as Jean came to mind.

Wrong horse.

“Take some of me as collateral, then.”

“No one’s going to be surprised that you wanted to ride on the merry-go-round, brat.”

I fiddled with my phone and rolled my eyes, fighting back any sign that I was amused. “Fine, whatever. I’ll delete them.”

The phone left my hand and Levi rolled his eyes. “Move in.”

“What?”

“It’s your birthday, isn’t it? Consider this your gift and move your ass in.”

Levi pushed me forward and moved up onto my horse, his one arm wrapping tight around my waist as he held the camera in front of us. His lips brushed against my ear and I felt them curve in a smirk, “You better be smiling, brat.”

I was.

And amazingly enough, as small as it was, he had a smile, too.

“You’re lucky, you know…” he breathed the words against my neck, pushing the phone back into my hand.

And I did know.

I knew exactly what he was saying to me. Those unspoken words said in the only way he was ready to say them.

And they were perfect.
We rode the carousel in silence, Levi keeping his arms around wrapped tight around my waist. The attendant only came over once to ask him to find his own horse, but whatever Levi handed her was enough to convince her that two to a horse was more than fine. The city passed around us in slow circles, the park spinning into a world of green. The day was so perfect that I was almost ready to spend the rest of it right here on this ride.

“We’re going to be late,” Levi murmured softly. “You want to get that tattoo, don’t you?”

“Yea,” I answered, moving off of the ride as he did. I walked a few paces behind him and then paused, looking at my left wrist. “Actually, I wanted to ask you something before I got one.”

He glanced back at me and raised an eyebrow, “If you’re asking if it hurts, it really depends on your pain tolerance.”

“No, not that.” I really couldn’t care less about the pain involved.

“What is it, then?”

“I…” I took a deep breath and then let the rest of the words out in a rush. “I want to get your tattoo.”

“Please tell me you’re talking about the wings and not my face,” Levi started, holding up his hand, “Because if I have to stare at my fucking mug every time I bend you over…”

“Well, I was going to get your face on my chest…” I teased, “So if you flipped me over, it wouldn’t really be an…”

“Jaeger.”

“Yes, the wings.” I admitted, staring at him for a moment before looking down at my wrists. “They mean something to you and honestly, they mean a lot to me, too. It’s the only safe word I’ve ever known, the only one I want to know. And it’s… you. It reminds me of you.”

“And you want to brand yourself with me, kid?” he asked, regarding my expression, “You sure about that?”

“I’m positive,” I assured him, “I’ve thought a lot about this and I know it’s not something I’d regret. Even if things didn’t work out for us, I wouldn’t regret the time we’ve had together. Not a second of it.”

“Well, then…” Levi took my hand in his and lifted it up, pressing a kiss to my wrist as he held my eyes. “Let’s go get you inked.”
YAAAAY! Early update! Although it is still technically happening on a Thursday - at least for me. XD But either way... SURPRISE! ^___^ 

Thank you so, so much to everyone for all of your amazing comments on the last chapter! I'm hoping you'll enjoy this one as well. I had originally planned something else for this chapter, but the characters took it in a direction I wasn't expecting. So it surprised me a little bit. XD 

OH! For those of you who haven't already seen the posts, there is an Intern!Eren ask blog now! ^___^ And it is just amazing, and perfect, and... GAAAH! ^___^ I am still so giddy/excited over it. Seriously, it's absolutely amazing and you should check it out when you get the chance! If you're interested in following the blog, you can find it on tumblr at ask-titanboy69. 

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there. 

ENJOY!

“Does it sting?”

I shrugged as I fiddled with the plastic wrap on my left wrist, trying to decide why I thought this was a good idea in the first place. Somewhere in the back of my mind I had convinced myself that I would be in and out of the shop with a tattoo that matched Levi’s and nothing more. I’d never even considered the aftercare involved, which was almost silly after all the kinky sessions I’d had. Every ounce of pain I experienced earned me just as much care afterwards, and this was no different. Even if it had been minimal compared to what I expected, it was pain nonetheless and I had to deal with it the same way. 

Or risk winding up with a huge, ugly scab, and I knew Levi wouldn’t let that happen. He would sooner tie me up and leave the bandages on my wrists until he was sure I was good and healed. 

And that could take days. 

As it was, I wasn’t allowed to take the wrap off my wrists for another day and by then our night at The Wall would have passed. The night I had been looking forward to for weeks, and I had sufficiently ruined any chance of it happening the way I wanted it to. It wasn’t as if Levi could tie me up this way without taking some risk to my wrists, and I knew that he wouldn’t chance it even if I wanted him to. Which was honestly one of the reasons I hadn’t even bothered to ask about taking the wrap off. When the artist had said it would be safest to leave the bandages on for a day, I knew I had no hopes in getting them off before that. 

Levi wasn’t about to take chances when it came to my body.
“Why do you look like someone shot your puppy?” Levi muttered, hooking his finger in the ring of my collar and turning me to face him. “Are you really that disappointed, kid? Isn’t this what you wanted?”

“It is,” I shrugged and dropped my attention back to my wrist. “I guess I just wasn’t thinking about the fact that I would have to wear some ugly ass bandaid for a day.”

“They put a needle in you over and over again, and you’re surprised that it needs to heal? What the hell did you think they were going to do? Have your tattoo licked on by kittens?”

I rolled my eyes and tugged at the plastic once more. “I didn’t know it could scab.”

“It’s a wound, Eren,” Levi snapped, grabbing my hand before I could pull at the plastic anymore, “And it’s going to scab if you keep picking at it like that.”

“It’s not going to scab over if I pick at the plastic,” I shot back. The bite in my tone sharper than I intended it to be and I regretted it almost immediately.

Levi dropped my hand instantly and stood up from the bed, running a hand through his hair as he moved over to the dresser. I watched him walk away and felt guilt begin to churn in my gut, but it wasn’t strong enough for me to say anything more. I hated to admit it, but part of me was mad at him for allowing me to get the tattoo just hours before we were supposed to go to The Wall. I had a feeling that he’d used my interest in getting a tattoo as an easy way out of tonight’s trip, and now I was just waiting for him to use the excuse.

“Was there something special you wanted to wear?” Levi spoke up, his voice carrying an icy edge. His back was to me, but I didn’t need to see his face to know I had pissed him off.

“What do you mean?”

“To The Wall.” He turned to face me and folded his arms as he leaned back against the dresser, regarding me with annoyance in his eyes. “Did you have something special planned? Is that why you’re being such a little shit stain about this right now?”

I felt confusion furrow my brow as I realized what an ass I was being. “We’re still going?”

Levi cocked one eyebrow and the annoyance left his face. “So that’s what this is about. Yes, we’re still going. Did I say we weren’t?”

“Well, it’s not like we can do anything if I have this on,” I muttered, looking down at my wrist once more. “So what would be the point?”

I didn’t bother to look up when I heard him coming towards me, but it was mostly because of the guilt I was still feeling. I’d been cold to him since we’d gotten in the car to head home and I didn’t so much as give him a reason. Now I knew I didn’t even have a reason to give. He’d allowed me to get the tattoo because I wanted to, and nothing more. It had nothing to do with The Wall or his unwillingness to go. I had wasted hours of our day being angry with him over nothing, and now I didn’t know what to say.

“Levi, I’m…”

“You’re sorry,” he cut me off, catching my chin in his hand to turn my stare up to him. “And you don’t need to say it. Just tell me why you’re pissed off next time so we don’t waste half a day with you glaring at me.”
I frowned. “I wasn’t glaring…”

“You’ve been staring daggers at me for hours, brat. You’re lucky I didn’t flip you over and beat your ass red.”

I tried not to think about how much I actually enjoyed that idea, or how tempting it was to piss him off again.

“Oh, and as for your wrists…” Levi bent down until his lips brushed against my ear, and I felt them curve in a smirk as he whispered. “Don’t worry. My creativity has no limits when it comes to putting you in compromising positions, brat.”

“You’re gonna have to get pretty creative with bags on my wrists.”

“You’ll be able to take those off by the time we get there. And trust me, I already have plans for what I’m going to do with you,” he assured me, tugging on my collar once more. “Like I said before, I’ve been looking forward to this as much as you have. Nothing’s going to spoil our night.”

A soft buzzing drew his attention down to his pocket and he snatched his phone out, turning away from me as he held it to his ear. I angled my head to the side as I watched his free hand settle on his hip, taking a moment to admire the muscles in his back.

“What is it, Hanji?”

I flopped back and rolled over on the bed, reaching for my phone on the dresser. My head settled against the pillow as I swiped my thumb across the screen, only half-listening to Levi’s conversation. Apparently Hanji wanted us to come before opening, but that had already been our plan from the start. Levi wasn’t thrilled with the idea of walking through the crowd to get in, and it was rare when he showed up after the club had already opened.

“Listen, I’m going to need you to take something out of our personal collection,” Levi continued, glancing in my direction, “Eren got his wrists tattooed today and I… yea, that’s the one.”

I raised a brow as our eyes met and he waved dismissively. “Why do you care what he got? No, I’m not… Hanji, it’s none of your business.”

I fought back a smile as I watched the annoyance creep into his steel blue eyes, knowing that Hanji was trying to figure out what I’d branded myself with. Not that she wouldn’t know soon enough.

“Wings,” Levi snapped at last, rolling his eyes as he looked back over at me. His jaw tightened for a moment and something bordering on embarrassment crossed his features for a fleeting instant. “Shut up.”

He hit the end button on the phone and slipped it back into his pocket, making his way to the dresser, “Remind me to take a crop to Hanji when we get there.”

“Will do, Corporal,” I spoke through a grin, pocketing my phone as well. I knew he was kidding, of course, but I could only imagine the amount of teasing Hanji had done on the other end of the line. Whatever she said was enough to make him flustered, and I had to appreciate her for that.

“So,” I hedged as he swiped the keys from the dresser, “What did she…”


I couldn’t bring myself to argue with that.
“So, I can really take these off?” I asked as we stepped out of the car, stopping at the entrance to The Wall. Levi glanced over at my wrists and then shrugged, extending his arm to me to give me a brief glance of his tattoo.

“This healed up fast enough for me, and you look like you’re doing fine.” He drew his hand back and started walking in the direction of The Wall, “Besides, it’s your body and it seems like they’re pissing you off, so don’t wear them.”

“Aren’t you worried they’re going to get infected?” I pushed, even though I was already tugging at the tape holding it in place.

“Are you?”

I gave a tentative shrug because I honestly wasn’t sure. Part of me was asking for permission because I had no idea if the chance for infection was high. And as much as I didn’t want to wear the bandages, I didn’t want to risk my skin or the tattoo either. Still, I had to imagine that Levi wouldn’t let me do anything too dangerous, regardless of how annoyed I was.

“I think you’re worrying more than you need to, kid,” Levi continued, eyeing me with an amused stare. He could see just how uncertain I was. “Now get your ass inside and hurry up. Hanji’s got something for you.”

I pushed through the doors of the club and felt my heart stop for a moment, suddenly realizing that I hadn’t seen this place since that night. When I’d managed to get inside only to collapse moments later, drained of the energy it took to escape Trost. I hadn’t even looked at the building, not even a glance, and I had to wonder if it was because I was subconsciously avoiding it. I couldn’t bring myself to think of my old bedroom and the horrors that happened there. Things that could happen again if he ever got a hold of me, and right now he was only a few stories away. Barely out of reach.

Levi’s arms circled around my waist and brought me back to where I was, and I felt his breath on my neck as he whispered at my ear, just for me, “I have an army of muscle outside, and every single one of them has memorized his face. There’s not a chance that he can come anywhere near you. But if you don’t feel safe, say the word and we’ll go. Remember that this is for you, Eren. This does not have to happen tonight.”

“I want it to happen tonight,” I spoke the words before I even had the thought, but I knew they were true. I had been looking forward to this since the moment he had agreed, and I wasn’t about to back out of it now.

“Are you sure about that?”

“I’m positive.” I gave the most casual shrug I could manage and then took a few steps forward, but stopped and turned when I realized he wasn’t following me. Levi stared at me with concern in his eyes, a wariness to his features that told me he was only seconds away from driving me back to our apartment. And I didn’t want that. “Levi, I’m fine. I promise.”

“No, Eren, you’re not. You fucking froze the second we walked in here. You had that look on your face again. It was like he was standing in the room with us.”

“It’s just been a while since I was in here. I was just-”

“Don’t act like this has anything to do with you coming back to The Wall,” Levi cut me off, “Do you think I don’t know your face, Eren? Do you think I can’t tell what’s going through your mind?”
I stared at him for a long moment, my mouth still open and caught mid-sentence until I finally decided to close it. I knew he could read me like a book, and yet I forgot every time I wanted to keep a secret. Not that I wanted to keep anything from him. In truth, I wanted to tell him everything but at the same time…

“I don’t want you to worry about this.”

“I’m going to worry no matter what, kid,” he countered, “So you may as well give me something to worry about. Trust me, you’re not saving me any stress by keeping your problems to yourself.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready to talk about it yet,” I muttered, looking away. I had been trying to avoid this conversation for months, but it kept coming back in various ways. If it wasn’t Levi asking, it was Armin or Mikasa. Armin had even gone so far as to suggest a therapist before I shut him down entirely. Ever since then I refused to discuss it with him at all.

There was a silence that hung between us for a long moment, Levi staring at me with an expression that was battling between annoyance and concern. I knew he was desperate to help, probably more so than I even realized, but I couldn’t bring myself to say the words. I couldn’t linger on the memories long enough to say everything that I needed to get out. It was like a sickness that had burrowed deep inside me; something that could be removed if I just opened my mouth. But I couldn’t. I was letting it fester because I was scared of the pain it would take to heal.

“You’re going to have to talk about it at some point,” Levi said at last, “Maybe not to me. Maybe not to Mikasa, or even Armin. But you’re going to have to talk about it, Eren.”

“I know.”

“I don’t think you do,” Levi continued, “And I really don’t want to force you to do anything you don’t want to do, but at the same time I’m not going to let this destroy you. Not when I can do something to stop it.”

“You’re going to force me to do something?” I asked, trying to ignore the curiosity bubbling up inside me. I knew he would never physically hurt me, so I had no idea how he would force me to do anything at all.

“Not right now.” He shrugged and then folded his arms, angling his head to the side. He regarded me for a moment more before turning away, “But I’ll do what I have to do to save the person that you are. Even if it means losing you, I won’t have you broken.”

I felt panic rip through me like a sword tearing me apart, and I moved across the short distance between us before he could take another step. I latched onto his hand and turned him around to face me, searching his eyes with fear in my own. I’d had no idea that he was worried to the point that he would even consider something like this, and the fact that he was terrified me.

“You’re going to leave me? Over this?”

“Do you actually think I want to leave you?” Levi shot back, pulling his hand out of my grip. “Do you really think that’s what I want?”

“Isn’t that what you’re trying to say?” I pushed, trying to ignore the fear that was building quickly now. “What else could you possibly mean by saying that you’d be willing to lose me?”

“Being willing to do something and wanting to do something are two very different things, Eren.”

“So it is what you’re saying then,” I urged, the pain twisting in my gut. “You’re saying you’ll leave
me if I don’t talk to you about this.”

“I’m saying I’ll consider leaving if you don’t ever to talk to anyone. If you don’t even try.”

“That’s not fair!” My voice trembled with the force of my anger, and I could feel it rising fast now. The fact that Hanji and Petra weren’t coming in the room told me they knew exactly what was going on. They were giving us space, even if I didn’t want it. I didn’t want any of this. I didn’t want to fight today.

“I didn’t say that I was being fair,” Levi’s voice remained level and calm, the opposite of how I felt. “It probably isn’t fair at all. I’m probably a horrible person for asking it this way, but I don’t know what else to do. I have no other way to get you to talk. And it’s not fair to you. No one ever forced me to talk about the things I went through, but you know what? I wish they had.”

“You could talk about it now.”

“The damage is already done.”

I looked away when he said the words, trying to hold onto my anger. “You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do,” he assured me. “And I don’t want you to get to that point, Eren. I’m not going to let that happen. You’re too strong to let him break you, and I’m too fucking stubborn to allow it.”

“And how the hell is leaving me going to fix any of that?”

“Leaving you isn’t supposed to fix anything, and you’re out of your damn mind if you think I want it to get to that point,” Levi snapped, “But you’re hiding in me, kid. Don’t think I haven’t noticed. You’ve thrown yourself into our relationship, work, school… everything so that you don’t have a second to spare for what happened.”

“Is not thinking about it that bad?” I shot back, my voice starting to rise again. “Is it really that fucking bad that I don’t want to think about the fact that my own dad beat the shit out of me? That my mom doesn’t talk to me? That my family doesn’t want me? That I’m a fucking orphan?”

“Eren-”

“God damn it, Levi! Of course I don’t want to talk about this!” I yelled through the tightness in my throat. I could feel the angry tears stinging my eyes. “It’s in my head every fucking second! Every minute of every day I see his face, and when I talk about it I can feel it. I can feel his hands on my neck. I can feel myself dying. And maybe, somehow, that makes me weak. Maybe that makes me less than what I was to you, but—”

Levi’s eyes widened as he stepped towards me, “Eren, you’re not—”

“Let me finish!” I shouted over him, moving back before he could come any closer. “Let me say this so you can understand, because I don’t think you do.”

Levi stared at me with self-hatred in his eyes and nodded, and I knew then that he was regretting everything he had said. The threat he’d made, even if he was only doing so to help. Just like Armin had when he recommended I go to therapy. They were all trying to help in their own ways, some more drastic than others. And even though I was certain that Levi would never actually leave, never really carry out that threat, I needed him to know the truth. I needed him to know that I was fighting.

“I haven’t talked about this with anyone because that’s not going to fix anything for me,” I continued in a voice that was much softer than before. “I’m sure that helps people like Armin, and maybe even
you, but it doesn’t help me. What I am doing now, doing here, is helping me. Coming to The Wall is helping me. Even if you don’t think it can, trust me, it is.”

“You still mean the same to me, Eren,” Levi spoke into the silence, “You don’t mean any less.”

“I know,” I assured him quickly, because I knew it was true. Even when the words had left my lips, I knew he didn’t feel that way. I knew that I meant as much to him as I had before, even more so now.

“I made you feel weak,” he continued, not even bothering to phrase it as a question. He didn’t give me time to answer, but it wasn’t like I was going to tell him he was wrong. “I shouldn’t have done that. I didn’t even think about what this meant for you. What coming here could mean. I was so focused on what we would be doing tonight, and seeing you freeze like that…”

“Made it feel like it was that night again.”

I finished the words for him because I had been there myself. I had been trapped in that night the moment we stepped into the room, but it was fading now. My mind was beginning to settle and I could feel the strength returning to my bones, stronger now than before. I had taken a step in the right direction by returning to The Wall, and even if everyone else thought that I was broken I knew I was beginning to heal. I didn’t need words to build layers over the pain; I needed to break through it.

“I’m sorry,” he spoke at last, and the pain in his voice was almost too much for me to handle. The sound of it was something I rarely ever heard coming from him; I could probably count the number of the times on one hand with fingers to spare.

And this was worse than it had ever been.

Because he’d played a card he never intended to use. He’d bluffed with a hand that he didn’t even have, and played with chips he wasn’t willing to bet. He didn’t want to put our relationship on the table, and he had used it as a last ditch effort to try to get me to come to my senses when it wasn’t even necessary. When I already knew what I was doing. He’d caused me to panic for no reason at all, and the guilt from it was written all over his face. Guilt that I didn’t want to see. Guilt that didn’t belong there, because I didn’t blame him. I’d been more panicked over the fact that he was pushed that far. In truth, I knew he wasn’t going to leave. I knew that wasn’t an option.

Because I would never let it be an option.

I crossed the short distance between us and took his face into my hands, staring into his surprised eyes and enjoying the sight. He was always the one that touched me this way, always the one offering me some kind of comfort. He wasn’t used to this and neither was I, but I loved it. There was a strength in it that I adored, as if I could protect him from anything, even his own thoughts. It made me wonder if this was how he felt in all those moments where he held me. Even more so, it made me wonder what it would feel like to be in control, in the same way that he could control me.

“You don’t have to be sorry,” I murmured softly, “I know you didn’t mean it.”

Levi arched one perfect eyebrow and a small smirk touched the corner of his mouth, and I couldn’t help but think that part of him was enjoying this, too. That he was admiring my sudden display of control. Either way, I was silently celebrating the fact that the pain was no longer in his eyes.

“Oh? Do you think you know me that well, kid?”

“I think I know you better. And besides,” I continued as I lowered my mouth to his ear. I felt him shiver and my body screamed for more. My lips curved into a smirk that should have belonged to him, and I whispered in a voice that was low and deep. “I would never let you go that easily.”
His body shuddered again and this time he shoved me back, muttering a curse under his breath before fixing me with a glare. “Watch yourself, brat. I’m not going to be the one crawling on my knees tonight.”

“You could be.”

His eyebrows shot up in surprise, and it took everything I had not to mimic his expression with my own. I had no idea where the words had come from, or how they had managed to find their way onto my tongue, but I didn’t want to take them back now. A large part of me was actually longing to see him crawling to me; ready to take any orders I wanted to give. Not that I would be able to give any in the way that he could, but I wanted to try. Even if I lacked the command and intimidation that he exuded like it was second nature, I was willing to pretend. Even if only for one night. For just a sampling of what it would be like to have him at my feet, with a collar around his neck.

To have his view, for just one day.

“I knew it,” he spoke through a short laugh, amusement coloring his features as he shook his head. “I fucking knew it. From the moment you cornered me in the elevator, I knew you wouldn’t just bow down to me.”

I felt my hand move to the collar around my throat, the sign that I could and did bow down to him on a daily basis. I searched his eyes as I held the ring, trying to read through the amusement to see what he was really thinking. I wasn’t sure whether this was a bad thing or not; if I had violated some kind of code I wasn’t aware of. Even if I had, I was willing to push for this. The image in my head was too perfect to just let it go.

Levi eyed my hand for a moment and then smirked, angling his head to the side. “Why didn’t you say something sooner?”

“I didn’t know I wanted it until now,” I admitted, still holding onto the collar.

“Oh, you knew.” His eyes were holding new kind of hunger that was making my body ache with a desire I’d never known before. “Maybe not in the sense that you would ask for it, but you knew. You’re not the type to obey every single order I give you. You never were. And to be honest, brat, that’s why I fell for you in the first place. Because you chased me down. You surprised me every step of the way. You’re a wild, unpredictable fire that has done nothing but consume me, and I love that.”

I felt my breath catch in my throat, my heart beating madly against my chest. It was the closest he’d ever gotten to saying those three words. To the point that “love” had actually crossed his lips without him even attempting to stop it. I wasn’t even sure he realized he had said it at all, but I knew I would never forget the sound. He was passionate right now, and I could see it in his eyes. They were bright and alive, intensely sharp. There was no denying that he was as excited by this as I was, and I knew I wanted more.

“So you don’t want me to bow down to you?”

“I want your knees on that floor the second I tell you to put them there,” Levi corrected in a voice that reminded me of The Corporal. The same sharp, commanding tone he used in the bedroom. The one that made me throb and ache from the mere sound of it.

But I wanted to make him throb, too.

“And if I don’t?”
“If you don’t do as I tell you to,” Levi continued in a deep voice, reaching out to grip the ring of the collar. He jerked down and brought me to eye-level, speaking a breath from my lips. “Then you better be prepared to take control before I make you pay for disobeying me.”

My hand moved so quickly that I wasn’t even aware I had done anything at all, but I found my grip wrapped tight around his wrist as my other hand fisted in his hair. He wasn’t wearing the wig yet, and my nails met his skin as they grazed against his scalp. He hissed in the most erotic way I had ever heard, and I felt my pants tightening as my length began to throb with hungry demand. I wanted him this way more than I ever thought I would. I wanted him beneath me, writhing, begging, submitting.

Obeying.

“Is that really what you want?”

I realized then that I had said the words out loud. Growled them in a husky voice against his ear as I backed him into the wall. My hips were grinding instinctively against his, driven by the pure and uncontrollable need to possess and consume him. I wanted him in every way. In all the ways I’d had him and all the ways I hadn’t. I wanted to be on my knees until he was fully satisfied, and then force him onto his own. I wanted to dominate and submit. Order and obey. I wanted every inch of his body for my own just as he took every inch of mine.

I wanted everything I could get out of him, and I wanted to give every single thing I had.

I wanted him.

I wanted it all.

“‘I want this,’” I rasped at his ear, my hips still moving against him. He groaned in response and gripped my shoulders tight, his nails digging in.

And then he pushed me away.

“‘And you can have it,’” Levi spoke, his voice bordering on breathless. “After tonight. We still have a show to put on.”

“Fuck the show.”

“Don’t tempt me,” he muttered through a laugh, leaning against the wall as he eyed me with hunger still burning in his steel gaze. “The only reason I’m stopping now is because it’s your birthday and this was what you wanted.”

And in the back of my mind, I knew he was right. Not that I could really get my dick on board with the idea, but I had to try. I would regret it tomorrow if I skipped out on tonight. I had planned this for weeks, and I couldn’t just throw that away over a sudden need. No matter how badly I wanted it. Even if refusing it now would mean giving Levi time to change his—

“I’m not going to change my mind,” Levi assured me, watching me with the same heated gaze. “Trust me, I won’t. I’ve been waiting for you to show me some bite for weeks now. Don’t get me wrong, kid, I love being in control. But that doesn’t mean I don’t like to submit. I’ve enjoyed both sides, and I knew I could get that from you. I’ve just been waiting for you to show it.”

“You’ve been wanting me to do this?” I asked, my brow furrowing in confusion. “Why didn’t you just ask?”
“Because I wanted it to be genuine, not an order. I didn’t want you to do it because you knew it was what I wanted.” Levi shrugged, watching me with a hint of amusement in his eyes. “I knew eventually you would snap. You’re not the type to obey forever. Even if you are the perfect dog, you’ll never stay in a cage. And I don’t want you to.”

“So, you want me to take control?”

“I’m a master first and foremost, Eren,” Levi murmured, staring at me through his lashes with a smirk on his lips. “But if I’m going to submit to anyone, I’ll submit to you.”

I knew he was saying yes, in so many words. But he didn’t want to outright tell me what to do. That would defeat the purpose, after all. I was supposed to take control, but I was going to have to learn how to do that first. I knew I couldn’t jump right into it and I knew he wouldn’t let me. He would make me fight for it first, and something about that excited me to no end.

I wanted this struggle.

It was like a new game we had added to the bedroom, and I wanted to go home and play now.

But I knew I couldn’t.

“Sorry to interrupt, boys,” Hanji called as she walked into the room. She didn’t sound sorry at all. She had a wide grin spread across her face as she swung her crop in a slow circle. She wore a long black trench coat that reminded me of the military style one Levi had worn the night he stripped. If I had to guess, she had modeled it off of his exactly, hat and all.

“What do you want, glasses?” Levi pushed away from the wall and eyed her with a look bordering on annoyance. He was just as thrilled as I was to be interrupted now.

“Well, it sounds like you two are done screaming at each other,” Hanji glanced in my direction and wagged her eyebrows at me. “And it looks like you’re in the process of making up. So should I assume the show is still on?”

“Only one of us was screaming,” Levi corrected her, looking at his nails. “And yes, it is. Not that I was ever planning to cancel it.”

“With the way you two were—”

“What show?” I cut in quickly, although I was only half interested in the answer. I wasn’t about to relive any piece of our argument, and Hanji seemed to be leading it in that direction.

“Oh?” Hanji’s smile grew wider and she turned to Levi. “You didn’t tell him?”

“He knows we’re doing something,” Levi shrugged, glancing to her. “He just doesn’t know what.”

“Oh, that’s going to be fun!” Hanji grabbed the front of my shirt and started to walk towards the back room. I stumbled along behind her, looking to Levi as he walked beside me.

“What is it?” I asked, not even trying to hide the curiosity in my voice. “What are we going to be doing?”

A small smirk touched Levi’s lips and he angled his head to the side as he watched me, his eyes filled with amusement.

“You’re about to find out.”
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Yay for Thursday! ^__^ I'm gonna go ahead and warn everyone right now since so many assumed that this week's update will have the smut... it won't. Trust me, I tried to fit it into this chapter but that just wasn't happening. However, Chapter 42 will be all smut - seriously, the entire thing is nothing but kinky stuff at The Wall. So it's coming. Just not quite yet. And considering the really heavy angst part of the story that might be happening soon... well, a few extra lighter / breather chapters will be a good thing. XD

Thank you all so much for your comments on the last chapter! I'm honestly really glad that so many of you enjoyed it, because I wasn't quite sure how I felt about it at first. I'm happy that you all liked Eren's little show of dominance - I wanted to try to get in that rough titan side somehow. XD So it's kind of a small nod to that.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I am also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY! ^__^

“That’s supposed to be a shirt?”

I stared at the piece of leather with speculative eyes, trying to figure out exactly how I was going to fit my body into it. If it was supposed to fit me, it would do so just barely and it wouldn’t offer much room after that. Not that I was entirely opposed to the idea of form-fitting leather; but I had to admit that I would have preferred to see it on Levi’s ass instead of mine. As it was, I was still trying to get used to the leather shorts that Hanji had finished stuffing me into moments ago.

“It’s not really a shirt in the traditional sense,” Levi spoke up from the corner of the room, a small teasing smirk on his lips. It was obvious that he was enjoying this.

“And what is the traditional sense?” I asked, still eyeing the shirt. Traditional or not, I didn’t think it would ever pass as clothing.

“No shoes, no shirt, no service.” Levi tilted his head to the side, the amusement still in his eyes. “So needless to say, you won’t be getting into McDonald’s any time soon.”

“Not that you wanna eat fries before squeezing into this,” Hanji grinned as she wiggled the shirt in front of me. “And lucky for you, it fits right in with our dress code.”

“I don’t think this actually counts as wearing anything.” I frowned, taking the shirt from her. It was half a shirt at best; I was pretty damn sure the fabric wouldn’t even go so far as to cover my nipples. “What is the dress code here, anyway? Naked?”

“Close to it,” Levi murmured as he looked over his nails. He had painted them the usual black, but added some green for tonight’s occasion. Even if he didn’t say it out right, I knew the addition was for my eyes. The color was almost exactly the same as mine.
“People actually wear a lot at The Wall compared to other clubs,” Hanji added, “Some of them are underwear or less, but Levi didn’t really like that idea. He said it wasn’t sanitary.”

“You tell me what’s sanitary about having tons of naked asses all over my nice chairs, and maybe I’ll reconsider it,” Levi shot back, looking up from his nails and rolling his eyes. “And since when do we do things like everyone else?”

“Since,” Hanji drew out the word as she helped my arms into the top. “Never?”

“Exactly.”

“Well, I guess this is all going to seem pretty normal to me since I’ve never been anywhere else.” I struggled to get further into the leather contraption, wiggling my arms in a pitiful attempt to help Hanji. To be honest, none of this seemed normal at all but I knew it was going to take some time. I could only assume that eventually it would be as second nature to me as it was to them.

“That’s because Levi designed The Wall to have plenty of places to escape to.” Hanji slid the top the rest of the way down my arms as if she had dressed me a million times before, working the leather over my head before smoothing it out on my shoulders. “Other hardcore clubs might have freaked you out a little faster than we have.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I wanted a place that people could come to regardless of their level of expertise,” Levi explained, snagging something off his desk as he walked towards me. “That’s why it’s sectioned off the way it is. There’s a dance club, a bar, a stage with plenty of entertainment…”

“And then there’s the dungeon,” Hanji added, “Which is sometimes the only thing that other clubs have.”

“At least clubs of this nature.”

Levi came to a stop in front of me and then paused for a moment to remove my collar. I opened my mouth to protest, but he was soon fixing another one around my neck. This one had three o-ring attachments, with one in the front and two in the back. I could only begin to image what he had planned for them, but I was willing to bet that it would have something to do with the complicated shirt I was wearing.

“It can be a little frightening for people who are just getting started,” Levi continued, “Coming from personal experience, it was a lot to take in at first. And I don’t just mean Erwin’s dick.”

“Gross.” I rolled my eyes, but gave no other thought to the little comment. I knew I didn’t have to anymore; Levi was mine and his past relationship with Erwin wasn’t going to change that. It wasn’t as if I could expect Levi to never talk about his relationship, and I’d learned over the past few months that jealousy would get me nowhere.

“I tried to make it so that everyone could have something to do here. Even if it was just sitting at the bar and watching a show. It lets them experience the lifestyle without diving into it headfirst if they’re not ready to.” There was a look of approval in Levi’s eyes as he spoke, and I couldn’t help but wonder if his little comment about Erwin had been a test. If it was, it was clear that I had passed. And something about that thrilled me.

“And they’re definitely going to have a show tonight,” Hanji grinned and clapped her hands together, leaning to the side to eye the curtains to the stage.
“How many people do we have watching tonight?” Levi asked as he fixed the black leather cuffs on his wrists.

“More than usual, I can promise you that.” Hanji was still staring at the stage, beaming from ear to ear. I suddenly had a feeling that she’d put more planning into this than she was supposed to.

“So, this is going to be a publicized event now?” Levi guessed, eyeing her with a look of annoyance. “What did you do, hand out flyers?”

“I might have made a little, tiny, small announcement that you would be showing off your permanent pet tonight.”

“And how, exactly, did you make this small announcement?” Levi pushed, his expression growing ever more irritated.

“With a megaphone on the sidewalk,” Hanji said simply, shrugging it off. But by her grin I could tell she was more than aware of what she was doing, so I knew there was no harm done. Not that I was thrilled with the idea of countless strangers witnessing Levi and I doing…

“What are we going to be doing, anyway?” I asked, suddenly realizing that I had no idea what Levi had planned.

“It’s really up to you in the end,” Levi shrugged, but his glare was still fixed on Hanji. “Like I said, this night is yours.”

“He’s just looking forward to showing you off,” Hanji smiled, wiggling her crop at me. “What you’re doing on stage is more of a performance than anything. We don’t do as much of the hardcore stuff outside of the dungeon, although you can if you really want to.”

I was still getting used to the stuff we were doing behind closed doors, and I wasn’t sure how comfortable I would be with a large audience watching me adjust to something new. That, and I could tell that this could potentially lead into a lot of unfamiliar stuff, considering the new collar that was now wrapped around my throat. I was positive it served more of a purpose than just a different type of decoration, and I could only imagine what that purpose was.

“So,” I drew out the word as I tugged on the metal circle at the front of the collar. “If I ask what this is for, are you going to tell me?”

“What do you think it’s for?” Levi countered with an amused curiosity in his eyes.

“I’m guessing something that will tie me up,” I ventured, pausing for a moment to look at the sleeves of my shirt. The end of each sleeve was circled by a metal zipper that looked as though it could close if I pulled the arms of the shirt down far enough. “Does this have something to do with it?”

“Yep.” Hanji grinned and reached out to grab my arm. She was careful of my wrist as she fiddled with the sleeve, unhooking a lobster claw clasp from a small o-ring near my elbow and causing a hidden part of the sleeve to fall down. “Tuck your hand in.”

I tugged at the leather and slipped my hand into the new part of the sleeve as Hanji slid the zipper shut. My hand was effectively trapped inside and I noticed that the true end of the sleeve was sewn shut and attached to nothing other than the clasp. As Hanji worked my other hand into the opposite sleeve, I started to realize that Levi had fashioned me a straitjacket. And I had to imagine that he’d made it specifically for me, considering the leather looked as though it was painted on my body. It was a perfect fit without being uncomfortable or causing any pain. Although I was sure Levi was planning to make up for that in the end.
“And now your arms go like this,” Hanji instructed me as she folded her own arms across her chest.

“Let me,” Levi cut in, taking my arms in a firm yet careful grip and positioning them to mimic Hanji’s. He then pulled the ends of the sleeves behind my back and twisted them up until they hooked into the rings on the back of my collar. He fiddled for a moment with an additional leather attachment that was adorned with metal pieces, winding it around my forearms before attaching the end of the strip to the ring at the front of my collar. If it weren’t currently binding my arms in place, it would have actually made a nice leash.

I tried to wriggle my arms slightly, but quickly realized they were going nowhere. I was sufficiently tied up, and amazingly it was done with no harm to my wrists. Levi wasn’t kidding when he’d said that he could be creative when it came to putting me into compromising positions. I was in one now with no way to get out of it, and I was enjoying it more than I ever thought I would.

I glanced in the mirror and couldn’t help but admire the sight of Levi’s design. When matched with the leather shorts, the top actually managed to look pretty damn amazing. Granted, the entire outfit left most of my body exposed, but I figured that was Levi’s plan. Just as I expected, the top didn’t even so much as cover my nipples; only my arms, collarbone and shoulders would manage to escape the prying eyes of the audience. As it was, the front and back of my so-called shorts were held together only by thin black strings that were crisscrossed up the sides.

Of course, I’m sure they were picked out for that exact design, which matched Levi’s leather pants almost perfectly. They were also laced up the sides to expose a good portion of his skin, and near each eyelet there was a metal stud, lining the length of his legs in an alluring design. Of course, none of it was nearly as captivating as his ass was when he was wearing heeled boots. With one quick look at his body, I could at least be grateful for the fact that I wasn’t the only one half-naked tonight. His chest was bare and his pants were riding so low that they were almost giving him a wardrobe malfunction. They were tied up in the front with a black cord that matched the one lacing up his sides, and I knew that with one good tug I would have the world’s easiest access. Not that I was complaining. In fact, I had every intention of getting my hands on that string when I got the chance.

“You think this will work?” Levi asked, glancing in Hanji’s direction. “Can he get hurt this way?”

“Not unless he struggles a lot, but I can’t really imagine he’s going to,” Hanji shrugged, eyeing my arms. “I mean, with enough friction anything can happen. How far were you planning on taking it?”

“Nothing too extreme.” Levi’s finger moved in a slow circle around the o-ring of my collar as he mused. “At least not for the stage. Not that we’ve gone that far yet anyway.”

“Can you not talk about me like I’m not here?” I frowned, shifting my shoulders slightly in a vain attempt to move my arms. No luck. “Shit…”

A smirk crept onto Levi’s lips as he turned me around to unhook the latches in the back of my collar. He freed up my arms as he undid the attachment in the front, pulling the zippers loose so I could remove my hands from the sleeves. I fidgeted with the clasps, hooking them back into the little metal rings hanging near my elbows. Save for its lack of coverage, I could actually see myself enjoying the shirt.

“What have you done so far?” Hanji poked, not at all disguising the curiosity in her voice. I could tell it was something she’d been wanting to ask Levi for a long time, and I was surprised that she hadn’t done so before now. Unless she had unsuccessfully, which was likely considering it was Levi she was asking.

“A little bit of orgasm control and denial,” Levi listed it off as if he were discussing groceries. “I’ve
tied him up plenty, but none of the really complicated shit.”

“Suspension?”

“Not yet,” Levi shrugged, fiddling with the o-ring on the front of my collar before hooking his finger in it and tugging. “We’re taking it slow.”

“So you haven’t dragged him to the bathroom by his hair and held him under the water while you fucked him with a baseball bat?” Hanji grinned as she said the words, as if they were natural to say. As if it was something that could actually happen between us, and the idea of it made my blood run cold.

“Wait,” I interjected, “That’s a thing?”

Hanji and Levi exchanged a quick look and I caught Levi by the arm, suddenly grateful he had freed my hands. “Levi, that’s a thing? That’s seriously something we’re going to be doing?”

Levi raised one eyebrow as he regarded my expression, angling his head to the side. “Not that I wanted to, but judging by your reaction I’d say that’s something we’re never going to be trying. Not if it makes you look like that.”

“But it’s something we might have done?” I pushed, still feeling a little more than terrified. I had thought that the things we’d been doing were pretty edgy already, but Hanji had just gone and added a whole new dimension of kink that I wasn’t even aware of. And it wasn’t something I was ready for or willing to try. Ever.

“Eren, there’s a number of things that we can do. That doesn’t mean that we’re going to do them.”

“Well, how will I know when we’re going to do something like that?” I tried not to sound as frightened by the idea as I felt, and failed miserably.

“I can promise you right now that we’ll never do something like that. You have my word, understand?” Levi paused for a moment and searched my eyes, a small smirk twitching on the corner of his mouth. “To be perfectly honest, I don’t even like to cause that much pain. Not to that level. Not unless it’s what my partner asks for.”

“But it’s within my limits and theirs, then yes.” Levi murmured, running his nail in a slow trail along the length of my jaw. Despite how unnerved I was moments ago, his touch was hypnotic enough to settle me now. “But if it passes either of our limits, then no.”

“So we don’t have to do anything like that? Nothing that crazy?”

“Eren, we’re only ever going to do things that you agree to with a clear and sober mind. I promise. I will never push you past the limits you set for me, and I won’t ever ask to.”

“But aren’t you going to be disappointed?” I hedged, probing his expression for the answer I wasn’t certain he wasn’t willing to give. “If I don’t want to do something that you want to do?”

“I only want to do the things that you want to do, Eren.” Levi’s hand settled on the back of my neck and his head rested against mine. I didn’t even need to see his eyes to know that there was no lie hiding in his words. “You’re more important to me than all of this, understand? I’ll give up this lifestyle for you if it’s not something that you want. Our relationship doesn’t have to have this. It’s an added bonus, if you enjoy it but it’s not an end all be all to what we have. It’s not a requirement.
“Never think that it is.”

“So if I wanted to stop all of this right now, you’d drop it? Just like that?”

“Just like that,” Levi assured me. “We don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do. We can leave right now if it’s what you want.”

“No!” I shouted quickly, holding my hands in front of me as I waved them. “No, I was just giving a for instance.”

“I know you were. And I was giving you the exact answer that I’ll give if you ever really decide that you’re not interested in this.” He paused and then smirked. “But I can tell that you are.”

“Even if we haven’t gone very far?”

“We’ve gone far enough for you being a novice,” he pointed out, tugging on the ring of the collar once more. “And you’ve done nothing but surprise me every step of the way. You’re a natural, kid.”

“Not that I’m not totally digging all of the lovey-dovey vibes here, but we kind of have an audience waiting for you two.” Hanji waved her crop in the direction of the stage. “And unless you want Rose, Maria, and Sina to take your place, you might want to start heading over there.”

“They don’t even go on for another hour yet,” Levi murmured, glancing over at her, “Trust me, I already told them they would be coming in late.”

Hanji stared at him for a long moment and then sighed, shaking her head.

“I don’t know where you find the time to do everything at work and here,” Hanji marveled, looking around the club. “And then everything with Eren, too. Doesn’t it get exhausting?”

“The brat’s more exciting than exhausting. And I don’t intend to stay with Survey Corp. forever,” Levi shrugged and then released his hold on my collar, “It’s just a matter of getting out of there and leaving it in hands that I trust.”

And those hands didn’t belong to Erwin. I didn’t even need the comment to know exactly what was going through Levi’s mind right now. He’d been thinking about it more and more lately, but he’d only just begun to show me how much it was still bothering him. And even then, it was only through little comments that slipped out by accident. He was trying to keep the pain to himself, and I hated that. I wanted to be able to help him, but I had no idea how to do that without digging up the past I had already considered buried and gone.

“So, have you decided what you’re going to do while you’re up there?” Hanji shifted the conversation so quickly that I had to wonder if she was able to read my mind.

“Not really,” Levi murmured, his eyes distant as he stared at the stage. Even with Hanji trying to change the conversation, it seemed like his attention was elsewhere. “I’m sure we’ll figure it out once when we get up there.”

“Well, you might, but that doesn’t mean Eren will.” Hanji glanced over at me and then shrugged. “But he’ll have you there to order him around.”

“That’s exactly the point. I don’t want this shit to be scripted for me. I’d rather be able to change it as we go.”

Hanji opened her mouth and for a moment I thought I would actually get some support from her, but
whatever she had been about to say was forgotten when her eyes fell on Petra across the club. I still had no idea what was going on between the two of them or how far it went, but I knew I wasn’t happy with it right now. Hanji was the only one here that could vouch for me, and she didn’t seem nearly as concerned as I felt.

Of course, she wasn’t the one who was about to go on stage to do who the fuck knew what in front of a room full of strangers. That wasn’t to say that she hadn’t done it before herself, of course, but I was a complete novice when it came to any of this. I didn’t have her experience, or even close to Levi’s. Hell, I barely had what could be called experience in the bedroom. And I wasn’t exactly thrilled with the idea of showing off my lack of talents in a public event.

And yet this was what I had asked for.

“Having second thoughts?”

I glanced over at Levi, who was staring at me with a knowing look in his eyes. He was more than aware of just how nervous I was, and for a moment I had to wonder if he had felt this way once, too. If he had been just as nervous to go on stage with Erwin, or by himself for the very first time. But it was hard to imagine that he was. I had difficulty picturing him in any situation where he wasn’t completely in control of himself and everything around him. The fact that he didn’t have a routine already mapped out for us was a little unnerving, and not at all what I expected.

I’d gotten so used to taking his directions that I wasn’t sure what to do without them.

“You really don’t know what we’re going to do while we’re up there?” I hedged, eyeing the stage as I tried to hide my apprehension. “You don’t have anything planned?”

“It’s not like we’re putting on a play,” he replied with a mildly amused smile. “What were you expecting me to have for you? Lines?”

“Orders,” I shrugged.

“Oh, I’ll have plenty of those,” he assured me, the corner of his mouth curving. “I just don’t know what they are yet.”

“What if I mess up?” It was the one thing that had been turning in my mind since we got here. I hated to admit it, but I was worried that I would disappoint him by completely ruining whatever it was we were supposed to do.

“You can’t mess up,” Hanji interjected, “Not really, anyway. We have tons of these shows, and everyone does their own thing. No one knows what to expect when they’re watching it, so how will they know if you do something you’re not supposed to?”

“Won’t it be obvious?”

“Not as much as you’d think.”

“And I’m not expecting you to do anything special, Eren,” Levi ran his nail along my jaw and searched my eyes. “This is our night to do with as we please, and they’re just lucky enough to watch me claim your gorgeous ass.”

“We’re going to be having sex in front of them?” I wasn’t sure if I was aroused or terrified by the idea.

“It was just a figure of speech,” Levi clarified and then paused, musing. “But I’m not entirely against
the idea if it gets to that point.”

“Well, it’s going to get to no point if you two don’t hurry up and get on that stage.” Hanji pointed her crop in the direction of the stage and grinned. “Onwards, boys. Let’s give them a show.”

Levi snatched the crop out of her hand and jerked it fast, striking her once across the ass. “You are a demanding little shit tonight, you know that? Keep it up and I won’t give you a show.”

“Well, that’s a lie,” Hanji retorted with a smile still on her face, snatching the crop back from him. “I know how much you’ve been looking forward to this, and you’re not going to throw that away just because I pissed you off.”

“Try me.”

Hanji rolled her eyes and wiggled the crop in front of his face. “Go pick out your music, Corporal. I’ll bring your brat up to the stage when you’re ready and set to go.”

Levi kept his annoyed stare on her for a moment more and then caught my arm, leaning into me as his lips pressed against my ear. His voice was low and deep, a command from my Corporal meant only for me. “Nod if you want to do this, shake your head if you don’t.”

I nodded once and he released me, leaving the room before I could say another word. I watched quietly as he walked to the door that led to the backstage, and then he was gone from my view. It wouldn’t be long until I was on that stage with him, moving to the beat of the music. At least I was hoping I would be able to follow the beat. I would never forgive myself if I flopped around like a dead fish until the song was over.

“You’re going to give yourself a panic attack over nothing, you know.”

I jumped in surprise, momentarily forgetting that Hanji was still next to me. She was watching me with a knowing smile and I couldn’t help but frown. I hated the idea that my apprehension was this obvious, because it meant that I would have no chance of hiding it from Levi.

“It’s kind of hard not to worry about it when I have no idea what I’m going to do once I get up there.”

“It’s just like any of your scenes in the bedroom,” Hanji shrugged. “Nothing different. With all of those you had a clear beginning and an end, right? And you followed Levi’s orders until it was over. It’s the same deal, just with an audience. And you don’t even have to pay attention to them. If you don’t want to, that is. You might find that you actually like being watched.”

“I think I’m going to be too focused on trying not to mess up to even notice if I like it with an audience.”

“I think you’re going to surprise yourself once you get up there.”

I let a sigh rush out of my lungs and watched as the lighting was adjusted on the stage. “Here’s hoping I do.”

“Speaking of surprises,” Hanji continued, a mischievous glint now in her eyes. “I think I know what you can do on stage.”

“Get on my knees and stay there?”

“Oh, I’m sure that’s where you’ll end up,” Hanji agreed, “But before that…”
She walked past me to a row of crops hanging from the wall, running her fingers along a few before plucking one from its hook. She turned back to me and held it out, wiggling it back and forth between her fingers as she smiled.

“This is for you.”

I grabbed onto it and turned it in my hands, admiring this particular piece. I’d had a number of them used on me over the past few months, but I’d never been handed one to play with. Of course, I didn’t need a crop of my own when I was the one who was getting the other end shoved into my ass. The fact that she had given me one now, right before our show, told me exactly what I was supposed to do with it.

And I wanted to. I really fucking wanted to.

“I don’t know if he’ll like this.”

“Judging by what I walked in on earlier, I think he’s going to love it,” Hanji countered, wagging her eyebrows at me. “And so will you, apparently.”

I dropped my hands in front of myself and hid the erection that I knew was growing there, my face flushing. But even without my protruding hint, it was obvious just how excited I was to see Levi on his knees. Or in any position where I could claim him as my own. I’d been craving that since the moment I knew he would allow it, and the fact that I could try it out tonight suddenly had me aching to get on that stage, audience or no audience.

“Ah,” Hanji’s voice drew my attention back to her and I watched as she dug her cell out of her pocket. “Levi’s waiting for you backstage. Do you need me to take you there?”

The fact that I was still sporting a partial that she was more than aware of made me eager to take the trip alone. “I think I can manage.”

“Try not to knock over any tables on your way, Woody,” Hanji commented with a wide grin, wiggling her fingers at me. “Oh, and tell The Corporal he’s a lucky, lucky man.”

The blush was still burning my cheeks when I closed the door to the backstage room.

“A crop?” Levi raised an eyebrow, holding up his own. “Is that supposed to be for me?”

“In a way,” I purred. Or at least I tried to. It was the sexiest voice I could manage in my flustered state, and Levi’s bemused stare told me that I didn’t do a great job of it.

He angled his head to the side as he regarded the crop, a number of emotions passing through his eyes before they finally settled on amusement. A very small smirk curved the corner of his mouth and then he turned his eyes up, staring at me through his thick black eyelashes with a steel blue gaze. He moved slowly, like a predator stalking its prey, crossing the short distance between us.

“If you’re going to bring that on stage, then you better be prepared to use it, brat.”

My mouth suddenly felt dry. I tried to swallow, wanting my voice to sound as confident as I could manage. “So I can use it on you?”

My voice cracked and his smirk grew.

“At least until I take it away.”
I gripped the crop a little tighter and then pressed it against his chest, leaning close as I stared boldly into his eyes. “And if I don’t let you?”

He moved so quickly that I couldn’t even keep track of the movement, snatching the crop out of my hands in the same moment that he snapped the end of a leash onto the front of my collar. He yanked hard and fast, forcing me to bend until I was past his eye level and staring at his chest.

It was a damn fine chest.

“You can flex your baby dom muscles all you want, but it won’t take me long to get you on your knees where you belong.”

His lips pressed against my ear and he continued in a deep voice that took me back to the pleasure, chains, and submission of our bedroom. “And once I do, you’re going to pay for trying to dominate me.”

I fought back the shiver that was trying to force its way through my body. I’d never been more aroused or conflicted, wanting to both dominate and submit all at once. I was aching to get onto my knees and obey, and at the same time I wanted to force him down and make him do exactly as I commanded. I just couldn’t decide which I wanted to do first, and I had no idea if he would even let me do one of them. At least to the extent that I wanted to take it.

“Then I just won’t let you get me on my knees,” I shot back, my voice actually strong for the first time since I’d walked in the room. I stared up at him from my position and watched as approval filled his eyes for a fleeting moment and then disappeared as if it were never there.

But it was.

And I knew I’d managed to impress him.

Levi let go of the leash and I straightened up as he held out his hand, a little device resting in his palm. “Put this in your ear.”

My brow furrowed as I plucked the little piece from his hand and inserted it in my ear, surprised by how easily it fit there. “What’s this for?”

Levi brushed my hair back and fiddled for a moment at my ear, tapping the device once to turn it on. “It’s so I can hear you over the music. Consider it a safety precaution.”

“Safety?” I repeated, touching the device to make sure it was still there. “Are we going to be doing something that dangerous?”

“Probably not.”

I tried to keep the next comment to myself, but it found its way out of my mouth regardless. “I think I’d feel a little more comfortable if I had at least some idea of what we’re going to be doing.”

“I don’t really want a plan when it comes to you. I like how natural we are in the bedroom, and I want the same thing out there.” Levi said simply, brushing my hair back into place. He paused and searched my eyes for a moment, and then rolled his own. “But if it helps you settle, just know that I’ll be giving you directions the entire time with this.”

He tapped the side of my head to indicate the earpiece and I felt a moment of relief. Not that it lasted.

“What if I can’t do what you ask?”
“Everything that I’m going to ask are going to be things that we’ve already done before,” he assured me, watching me as he put his own earpiece in. “Nothing’s going to be new, and it’s all going to be things that I know you’re good at.”

“So I really have nothing to worry about?”

“Not a damn thing, brat,” he replied, nodding in the direction of the stage. “So stop getting your panties in a twist and get that perfect ass of yours out there.”

This time I was more than willing to comply.

“Oh,” Levi stopped me, catching my arm as he leaned in close. “Five quick blinks for our signal. I plan to have your hands tied and your mouth full, so don’t rely on either to tell me to stop.”

A shiver ripped through me before I could stop it, and he urged it along by running his nail down the length of my spine. I heard him laugh softly, the sound both amused and hopelessly erotic, purposely teasing me. I wanted to get out there now, and it had nothing to do with the audience that would be watching and everything to do with the man beside me. He leaned in closer as he reached across me, pressing a button on the sound system to fill the room with an echoing beat that I could feel vibrating straight down into my bones.

It was powerful. Raw. Seductive.

Him.

“No turning back now, kid,” he murmured softly at my ear, “It’s time to show the world that you’re mine.”

“And that you belong to me.”

I shivered when the words slipped out automatically, perfectly.

As if they belonged there.

As if somehow I already knew they were true.
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

Ah, this chapter... I'm very fond of this chapter. For quite a few reasons, actually. XD And I can already guess the reactions I'm going to get for the end of this chapter, but let me just say that there is an explanation. And before you get upset, please think about the pasts of the characters and ask yourself why this happened the way it did. The characters have a plan. XD I was just as upset at first when I found out what was going to be happening.

Yes, I'm talking in code.

ANYWAY! Thank you all so much for all the comments you left on the last chapter - I'm honestly really looking forward to hearing what you all think about this chapter. As mixed as those feelings might be. But still, I'm excited! ^__^ I really do hope everyone enjoys it.

A huuuuuuge thank you to danchou-bitches who shared amazing fanart of The Corporal in his throne! ^__^ Oh! And for anyone who didn't see yet, ask-titanboy69 did an incredible cosplay of long-haired Intern!Eren. Definitely check both out if you haven't already seen them!

Oh, I've also created shirts for The Wall for anyone who is interested. It has the official logo for The Wall on it. You can get all the information about the shirts on my blog! ^_^

Another quick note... The song played in this chapter is 'Meet Your Master' by Nine Inch Nails.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumbl. If you're not already following me on tumbl you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

“Ready, kid?”

Saying I was would’ve been the understatement of the year. I was more ready now than I’d ever been in my entire life. Hell, I was practically vibrating right out of my leather with excitement, and I just barely managed to hide it with a nod. Not that it fooled Levi, of course. The small twitch on the corner of his mouth and the knowing look in his eyes told me he knew exactly how eager I was to get out on that stage and down on my knees. At least to start. I wanted to go out there obeying him, but I was determined to make this more than that. I wanted to show him just how strong I was. I wanted to impress him.

And even more, I wanted everyone to know that he was mine.

If he would let me, of course. I had a feeling that he would only let it get so far before he forced me down to my knees again. This was our first appearance together, and he wasn’t about to let it happen
as equals. Not when he had an image to maintain and a crowd to please. But above that, I knew that he wanted to claim me as his in a way that no one else could. With his collar wrapped tight around my neck, exactly where it belonged. Exactly where I wanted it to be.

Why the hell weren’t we on stage yet?

“Kinksters, young and old, it’s time to turn those gorgeous peepers to the stage!” Without warning, Hanji’s voice came out loud and chipper over the sound system. I jumped and looked over at Levi, who seemed completely unaffected by the sudden announcement, but I should have expected as much. He probably knew it was coming, and by the way his hand tightened on my leash I could tell what would be happening next.

“The Wall has a special treat for you tonight, courtesy of your master of ceremonies,” Hanji continued in a tone that made me wonder if she was somehow more excited than I was. “So sit back, relax, and prepare to feast your eyes on The Corporal and his Dog.”

“Dog?” I blurted out, fixing my stare on Levi once more. “You’re calling me your dog?”

“I thought it was a fitting title,” Levi mused, twisting the leather cord once around his hand before giving it a tug. “Considering you’re on my leash.”

“And here I thought you wanted me to dominate you,” I muttered, “You know dogs don’t do that, right?”

“The good ones don’t.” Levi jerked the leash and yanked me closer, gripping my hip before leaning into me. His lips pressed against the quickening pulse in my neck and I felt them curve into a smirk as he murmured. “But whoever said I wanted you to be good?”

“So you want me to fight you?”

“I want you to surprise me.” He pulled back and started walking in the direction of the stage, leading me by the leash. “If you think you’re even capable of it, brat.”

Capable or not, it had just become my personal goal.

Hanji skipped past us on her way backstage, pausing only long enough to smack her crop across my ass and fix me with a smile. “Remember to enjoy yourself out there, and if you get nervous just pretend it’s only you and him. No one else.”

“Easier said than done.” I leaned to the side and glanced around the curtain, eyeing the mass of people waiting for us. I wasn’t sure I would be able to ignore all of their eyes, even if I wanted to.

“He’ll do fine.” Somehow I knew Levi’s words were actually meant for my ears, but I couldn’t say they did anything to calm me. “Set it to track eleven.”

Hanji gave a thumbs up over her shoulder as she walked towards to the sound system, fiddling for just a moment before the music stopped. There was a beat of silence in which I could hear nothing but the hammering of my heart, and then suddenly we were on the stage. He was leading me out and I was following after him as if my body had been programmed to do so. As if it knew perfectly well what Levi wanted and exactly how to give it to him.

I could hear the crowd buzzing with excitement, their voices carrying to the stage in what felt like a dull roar but was in reality nothing more than a soft murmur. I could feel them staring, their eyes fixated on the leash and the man attached to it, but I couldn’t bring myself to look at them. In my current state I knew that it would take only one glance to send myself running off the stage, and I
was determined not to do that. I was going to keep my attention on the ground as if it were painted with dozens of naked Levis until I could manage to find the level of “I don’t give a fuckery” it would take to meet their eyes.

But if nothing else, I looked submissive this way.

“You’re going to have to calm down,” Levi murmured, his voice carrying directly into my ear courtesy of the electronic device. It took everything I had not to jump in surprise.

“I am calm.”

“You’re lying,” he shot back. “Now take a deep breath and relax. As far as I’m concerned, this is our bedroom and we’re alone.”

“So all rules apply?”

“Every single one. You don’t get off the hook just because we have an audience, kid.” I noticed Levi’s hips move as he turned, and suddenly the music started to play. He must have signaled Hanji, and I was all at once relieved and grateful. The deep rumbling beat pulsing through my body eased me in a way I didn’t expect. I couldn’t hear the crowd anymore; I wouldn’t have been able to even if I wanted to hear them. It was just us on the stage now, doing nothing more than exploring a new place and all the toys it had to offer.

“It’s time to buckle up and ready your ass for me, brat,” Levi purred, a smirk twitching on his lips. “There’s no turning back now.”

His expression suddenly slipped into the cold mask meant only for The Corporal, and I knew then that the games had begun.

Levi jerked the leash and I moved with it, following his lead over to the sleek metal bar he had used while stripping for me. But I would be the one against it now. I knew it already; I could see it in his eyes. He didn’t have to tell me the position I would be taking, or that I would be doing it soon. There was a hunger in his stare that told me he needed this, would want this, even before the lyrics said it for him.

*Bow down in position…*

*Against the polished steel.*

Levi stared down at me as I lowered myself to my knees, and I watched the corner of his mouth twitch once despite the fact that he was trying to maintain his cool exterior. I was satisfying him already, and it took everything I had to keep the smug smile off my face. Even still, I don’t think I managed it entirely. The hint of approval left his face all too quickly and his expression held nothing but command as he put his hands behind his back, pressing his wrists together.

And that was all I needed.

I dropped my crop to the ground and my arms mimicked his motion in almost the same beat as I clasped my hands together to hold myself in place. I already knew he wouldn’t be tying me up tonight, save for the straitjacket and I had a feeling we weren’t at that part just yet. He wanted to give them a show first, nothing but a display that would only graze the surface of taboo. Something for those who weren’t keen on this lifestyle, but had wandered into it anyway. And I was willing to play along.

Not that I had much of a choice.
This is something different...
You’ll like the way this feels.

Levi closed the distance between us and swiped his heeled boot across the floor, kicking my crop well out of reach. I turned to look in its direction, but one swift jerk on the leash brought my attention back to him. He stared down at me with the same expression I’d grown used to in our bedroom games, eyes hooded with lust and lacking any emotion otherwise. He never gave anything away that he wasn’t willing to show me, and I knew he wasn’t going to now. I wouldn’t get anything extra just because we were on stage; he wouldn’t coddle me that way and he’d already warned me of that.

We’re going to play a new game...

Levi’s leg moved with a force and speed that I wasn’t expecting, but it stopped right before my cheek. I stared up at him with surprise in my eyes, knowing without seeing that they were wide with something that bordered on absolute shock. For a fleeting instant, I had been sure he was about to kick me across the face and if it weren’t for the impressive control he had over his body, he probably would have. But he didn’t, and I knew now that he never planned to. He just wanted to shock me with the rest of them, and he had done a perfect job of it.

“You look surprised, brat.”

Levi held my gaze as he moved his leg slowly across my cheek and turned my head to the side, following the kick through at a snail’s pace. But even with my head turned, I couldn’t pull my eyes away from him. Away from the sight of him enjoying himself, having fun, more so than he probably even knew he could. His sharp blue eyes were filled with amusement and he couldn’t keep the smirk off his face as he stared at me, searching my expression as if he were committing it to memory. Just as I was right now.

Because I had never seen him look so free.

And I wouldn’t have traded that for anything.

The music thrummed through my body and my mind clung to the accuracy of the lyrics as I watched his body move. The sight of his hips turning as he lowered his leg was almost elegant, and I found myself temporarily mesmerized. That was, of course, until the crop struck hard beneath my chin and forced my eyes back up to his. His steel blue stare were harder than usual, narrowed with disapproval at my wandering eyes. And normally I would have been struck with the guilt of disappointing him, but right now all I wanted was to admire his body. I didn’t care if I was looking without permission.

He was mine.

And suddenly I wanted to prove it.

“Well, it’s about time.” Levi’s voice was soft and teasing, vibrating into my ear as he stared down at me. Amusement filled his eyes for a fleeting instant and then he struck my chin once more, leaving the crop pressed there this time. He gripped the metal pole with one hand and used it as leverage as he bent down, leaving our lips a fraction apart. I could feel his warm breath mingling with my own and suddenly realized that I was panting with desire.

The sight of his hand held above his head made it look as though he were chained in place, and I wanted to make that a reality. The thought of taking control and forcing him into a compromising position aroused me to the point of pain. I could feel myself straining against the tight leather of my shorts and I knew he could see it, too. He stared down at my twitching cock, bound in leather and
hidden from his view, and then he smirked and arched a perfect brow.

“What nasty little thoughts are running through that head of yours?”

_used to be the leader…
Now comes the time to serve…_

Exactly that. I wanted my leader to serve me, to crawl on his knees simply because I ordered him to do so. I wanted him begging for me, begging for his release, writhing for it until I finally gave him the permission to come. I wanted to be in complete control of his body, as if it were my own. I wanted it so badly that I was almost willing to ignore his orders and take the lead. He wouldn’t need the crop in his hands if his wrists were chained behind his back.

But I couldn’t disobey. As much as I wanted to, I wouldn’t disappoint him. Not now.

“I want to put you on your knees,” I breathed the words, knowing that he would hear me clear as a bell in his ear. I watched as his eyes widened, just slightly and for a fleeting moment, before he composed his expression into an impassive mask once more.

“If you think I’m just going to let you do it, you’re wrong.” Levi’s voice cracked like a whip and his eyes remained cold as he turned, walking towards the center of the stage. “Now crawl to me, brat. On your hands and knees where you belong.”

I started crawling to him as if by his order he had tied strings to my limbs and moved them himself. Although right now I would be quick to obey anything he asked simply because of the look in his eyes. It was there even now, as I stared up at him through my eyelashes with a hungry stare. There was disapproval covering the heated desire in his gaze. I’d crossed a line and even if the crowd couldn’t see his annoyance, I could. It both worried and thrilled me at the same. I hated knowing that I’d disappointed him, but I was excited by the fact that I could unnervew him in this way. I craved it.

And I had a feeling he did, too.

Because there wasn’t just anger in his eyes when he walked away from me; there was an exasperation that told me he was looking for something else. Waiting for me to do more than this. Waiting for me to get off my knees and prove that I could take what I wanted when I felt the need to do so. Whether he told me to or not. And I didn’t need his permission when it came to this; I couldn’t count on him to give it to me. Because he never would.

I had to earn it.

_right around the bend…
Is a coming disaster…_

I crawled across the floor to him, purposefully working in a little twist that moved my hips in a sensual roll with each movement. And as ridiculous as it felt, it was worth every second when it earned me the smoldering lust that was in his eyes. His lips were parted and he stared at me as if he were entranced by the way my body was able to move. And maybe he was. Right now I could only hope that the little display looked half as good on me as I knew it would on him.

And that maybe it would be just enough to catch him off guard.

“You’re a fucking tease, brat,” Levi snapped, his voice raw with arousal. He turned away from me and towards the crowd, tapping the crop against his heeled boot. “If you don’t hurry up and get your tight ass over here, I’m going to make you pay for it.”
"Is that a threat, Corporal?" I purred the words and watched him shiver, "Because it’s tempting me to stay."

Not that I had any intention of doing so.

Desire burned like a hot coal in my belly, and I shot up from the ground before Levi could even think to turn. But I had a feeling that he wasn’t planning to. Even after my arms were wrapped around him, he didn’t bother to make a move. And maybe that was only because he was allowing me to do this, but I couldn’t count on that to last for long. Not if I didn’t impress him soon. If I took too long to do anything at all, he would have me back on my knees and paying for my mistake.

And I was determined not to let that happen.

I snatched the crop out of his hand and for a split second I felt his body go rigid and still against mine. His breath caught in his throat so softly that I wouldn’t have heard it if it weren’t for the device in my ear, and I knew at once that I had surprised him. But I couldn’t revel in my victory. Even more than that, I didn’t want to. I wanted this to be a natural thing, to the point that I didn’t see his submission as a victory but as an expectation he had fulfilled. And I would never manage that if I became excited over every little success I had.

I gripped the crop on either end and pulled it back against his throat, feeling his head tilt towards my shoulder to accommodate the sudden intrusion. And in that moment, I couldn’t help but take advantage of his position. Not when he was so easily exposed. I angled my head and bit onto his earlobe, giving it a tug between my teeth and eliciting a hiss from his lips. I relished the sound and dragged my tongue across the shell of his ear before murmuring in a throaty whisper.

“You’re mine.”

And in that one lingering moment, it was true.

Levi spun so quickly that my mind couldn’t even keep up with the motion. The crop left his throat and my hands fell away from him in the same moment that his fingers twisted into my long hair. He gave a swift jerk and snapped my head back, surprise shooting through every nerve in my body as my legs gave out from under me. And for a fleeting instant, I thought for sure that he was going to let me fall right to the ground. But then his hand gripped my ass, tight and possessive as he forced my hips up against his. There was a heavy throb waiting for me there, and I felt my cock twitch its hello as a raspy moan found its way out of my throat.

*It’s time to meet your master...*

Levi’s breath was hot against my ear as he laughed, the sound low and deep. “Did I scare you?”

I was sure he knew the answer to that, but I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of knowing how easily he had thrown me off guard. I managed a smile and a near-breathless whisper. “Not at all, Corporal.”

“Well, it was a nice try, kid.” There was a hint of approval in Levi’s voice. “But that’s something you’re going to have to work on. And now you need to pay for it.”

His lips twitched once with amusement and then he let me fall to the ground, following me so quickly that I couldn’t be sure if we’d ever been standing at all. And once his hips pressed into mine, I could think of no place I’d rather be than on the ground and beneath his body. Everything else started to fall away, and for the briefest moment in time I actually managed to forget where we were and what we were doing.
But he was quick to remind me.

His nails were like claws on the sensitive skin that was exposed between the crisscrossing laces of my shorts, sending a jolt of pleasurable pain straight into the head of my cock. A cry parted my lips and was muffled all at once by his hand, his fingers grazing the skin of my cheek as he purred at my ear in a voice that was somehow both intimidating and hopelessly sexual.

“Did I say you could bark?”

So I was a dog after all. At least for the moment. And even though I knew that meant I could still have a bite, I wasn’t about to bare my teeth now.

I shook my head as I stared into his eyes and watched as satisfaction sparked within them. It was gone a moment later and his hands were back on my hips, tugging the strings loose. A wave of panic raced through me as I realized I would be bare assed for the whole room to see, but my shorts vanished too quickly for me to argue. Not that he would have even given me the chance; not that he ever planned to. No, this was my punishment for making a poor attempt at dominating him on stage, in front of everyone.

And as the slick, lubed-up handle of the crop entered my ass I realized he truly intended to make me pay for my mistake.

“This is yours,” he murmured in a voice that sent shivers over every inch of my body. I fought back every sound I wanted to make and struggled with the effort. “You can have it back once you’ve earned it.”

He shoved it deeper and angled it sharply, the handle moving fast against my prostrate and sending a wild jolt through my body. I bit into my lip to the point that I was sure I tasted blood and my body bucked right off the ground, but not a sound was heard. Well, as long as suppressed guttural groans of pleasured agony didn’t count.

Even if they did, he allowed me to get away with it.

“On your hands and knees, brat.” Levi’s voice was a strict command that I’d obeyed before he’d even stood back to his full height. Which might have actually been impressive with the boots he had on. At least for him.

He angled his head to the side as he stared down at me, his expression all at once wicked and amused, like a cat trying to figure out how to play with its new toy. Even through the pounding music, I could hear the crack of his crop against his boot, reminding me that mine was currently part way up my ass. I almost had to wonder if they had planned this together; planned for me to mess up in the end. Not that it mattered to me. Not really, anyway. Levi would want to dominate me now that I had pulled that little stunt in front of everyone, and as much as I wanted to tie him up I wanted to be at his mercy even more.

He turned and struck his crop hard and fast across my ass cheeks, just barely missing the protruding piece and temporarily knocking the air out of my lungs as my body moved forward. My skin stung as my cock jerked, my body caught between pleasure and pain without a clue of what to do with it all. And there would be more to follow.

I could count on my Corporal for that.

“Crawl.”

I didn’t even have to ask for the direction. My eyes were set on the metal bar, precisely where he
would want me to be if he were really intending to take this further. It wasn’t as if he would tie me up to the chair; that would lack the stability necessary for what he was going to do to me. That and my new ass accessory wouldn’t exactly work well with the chair. I could feel it turning inside of me as I crawled, taunting me with each bouncing movement of the other end, and I knew I wasn’t ready to feel the full brunt of it forced against a chair. I wasn’t even sure my body could physically handle something like that.

No, he wanted me to be somewhere that would allow him the chance to play while still having me fully restricted. If I could say anything about the bedroom, it was that my Corporal liked to have me tied up tight before starting in on our games. Of course, that was mainly because I was still so new to this and couldn’t seem to keep my body still.

Especially when his hands were on me.

As I reached the bar, Levi grabbed the back of my hair and twisted me around, pushing me tight against the metal and angling me so that I was on my knees. The crop pressed at an angle that had my mind reeling, but he’d positioned me in a way that would push it no deeper. It was curved against the floor and stuck in place; I had no control over it and I knew he wanted it that way.

Shock sent shivers up and down my spine at the amount of force he was putting into this performance, but I couldn’t bring myself to complain. Not that I ever would. I loved it when he was rough with me, and he was more so now than he had been in the past few weeks. He stared into my eyes as he bent down, searching them as he undid the latches at my elbows. He yanked the sleeves free and tugged the zippers into place, sufficiently trapping my arms in the leather. He grabbed the links on the ends of the sleeves and stood there for a moment longer, as if hesitating.

And I knew exactly why.

“I’m fine.”

And that was all he needed. He smirked once and then the coldness returned to his features so quickly that I had to wonder if there had ever been any concern there at all. He stood fully and gripped the bar as he slipped behind me in one graceful movement, and then I felt his hands on my sleeves once more. He gripped the ends and pulled them tight, forcing me to fold my arms as he twisted the leather once on the bar before hooking the latches into my collar.

Moving would be impossible now, at least where my upper body was concerned, and with my current position it wasn’t as if I had much control over my legs either. The most I could do was spread them apart with enough wiggling, and I had a feeling that would serve him better than it would me.

Levi walked slowly around the bar; tapping the crop against his boot as if to remind me that he still had it. To show me that he was still the one controlling the situation. As if there had ever been any doubt.

I watched him move around me, and each time my eyes lingered on the black cord that just barely held the front of his pants together. Its job was difficult now, and the outline of his arousal was clear as it strained tight against the leather that was keeping it in place. It had to be uncomfortable, and suddenly I wanted nothing more than to relieve him.

It was purely selfless, of course.

It had nothing to do with my aching need to feel him throbbing against my tongue.
Levi stopped in front of me and then smacked the crop just beneath my chin, pushing up until I was staring into his eyes. He had the same cold, steel gaze I had seen moments ago, his expression controlled in an attempt to hide the all too obvious arousal that was happening below the belt. And if I hadn’t just been fixated on his hips for the past few seconds I might have actually bought the lie. But as it was, I knew he needed far more than what we were doing now.

And I wanted to give it to him.

Levi ran the tip of the crop slowly along the length of my jaw, eyeing me with a stare that was bordering on amusement. “What do you want to do now, brat?”

I immediately looked down at the string that was holding his pants together and had to force myself to turn my attention back to him. It took everything I had not to ogle at his hips as if he were a fine piece of steak that I was just waiting to devour. All I needed was the permission to dig in, and once I got it I knew there was no chance of me holding back. Not until I had him quivering and panting against me, even if it wasn’t in a dominant state. Even if he used my mouth like he would his hand, for pure release alone.

My cock twitched again and I moaned.

“I want you in my mouth.”

“Is that so?” Levi teased, the words rolling off his tongue in a manner that was so playful I was sure he was going to make me beg for it.

But then his fingers gripped the string, and suddenly it was gone.

His thick member was pulsing inches from my lips, the tempting pink tip already glistening with his excitement. My tongue darted out instinctively, wanting to taste what I knew was there for me, but he was still just barely out of reach. And after a deep, amused laugh left his lips I knew for sure that he was doing this on purpose. Even if he wanted it, too, he was going to make me work for it. Because somehow, to him, seeing me beg was so much better than just getting what he wanted. And maybe someday I would have the chance to understand that.

But right now it just pissed me off.

“Levi…”

The crop struck my left hip so hard that I heard the crack over the music, my entire body jerking in response. The crop pulled out slightly and shoved back in, and I felt my eyes roll back as my mind temporarily slipped away from the room. What had I done wrong?

“What did you call me?”

The sharp sting of his words dragged my mind back into reality and suddenly I realized the name that had crossed my lips. The name that I wasn’t supposed to use now; not when we were like this.

“I asked you a question, brat.”

My lips parted for the word, but the crack of his crop across my right side tore it away from my mind again. I wasn’t sure if I was feeling pain or pleasure anymore, but I was sure I didn’t care. Even more than that, I knew I didn’t want him to stop. Not now, not ever.

“Corporal…”
The crop stopped before its third strike and he tapped it once beneath my chin to angle my eyes back to him.

“Tell me what you want.”

“I want you, Corporal.”

Despite the discipline, my words were still strained with frustration and barely made it past my teeth. And for a moment I was certain that he would punish me by walking away entirely in order to deny me anything I wanted. But I wasn’t the only one that was craving this, and the heated look in his eyes told me that he had reached his breaking point.

Suddenly his fingers were back in my hair again, gripping the strands tighter as his nails dug into my scalp. The lick of pain shot straight down into the head of my cock and my hips jerked forward as I gasped, my mouth wide open and at the mercy of his will.

And he didn’t hesitate.

With one swift jerk, he pulled me forward and forced my head down the length of his shaft. The slick moisture clinging to his tip spread across my tongue as he pushed his way in, guiding my head to where he needed it to be. My body was forced into a position I didn’t think it was capable of, the crop moving inside me and my shoulders burning from being pulled as far from the metal bar as the restraints would allow. And yet somehow he managed to bring me further, jerking my hair and moving my lips up and down his swollen member.

He was using me to please him.

And I was loving every second of it.

“Don’t forget your signal, brat,” Levi’s voice was gruff and nothing but a husky growl as he thrust his hips forward, driving his length deeper on the next push. “You blink if I’m hurting you. If this is too much. Five times, understand?”

I stared up at him, unblinking, and flicked my tongue once across the underside of his cock on the next pull, hollowing my cheeks as I sucked. I watched in pure satisfaction as his eyes rolled back and his jaw strained tight, his free hand shooting out to grip the metal bar for leverage. A tremor worked its way through his body and I urged it on, sucking and licking with what little time I had left. Because even though he was at my mercy right now, I knew it wouldn’t be long until he took over again.

“Oh, fuck… you…” He gasped and gripped the bar tighter, the muscles in his arm becoming more defined than I had ever seen them. It made my knees go weak, and suddenly I was grateful to be on the ground. Not just because I would fall otherwise, but because I knew he was about to take control again.

It shocked me to no end when he didn’t.

He was gripping my hair and forcing me down, but he wasn’t challenging me otherwise. I’m sure to the audience it looked far more brutal than it was, but it was just an act and I was done with it. I didn’t want to just play anymore. I didn’t care what kind of show they had to watch as long as I could get what I needed out of him. They had faded away at this point, along with the music that had changed by now. It wasn’t as if I could hear the lyrics anymore anyway. It was the two of us and no one else, away in our bedroom with nobody to please but each other.

And I needed more than this.
I jerked my head back and in that moment I realized just how much control he was giving me. His fingers slipped from my hair with no resistance at all, and he didn’t bother to grab me again. Not when I was pulling away from him. He was giving me the chance to stop if I wanted to, but I was craving the exact opposite. I wanted him to be in control. I wanted him to be rough. I wanted him to make me feel this into the next fucking week.

His slick cock pressed against my cheek as I stared up at him, and I turned my head to run my tongue against it. His eyes grew hooded and heated with desire as I purred in a deep voice that he would have never heard without the device in his ear.

“You’re not hurting me. You’re not even close to it, but I want you to be. I want you to make me feel this. Show me who I belong to.” I paused and dragged my tongue up the length of his cock, whispering against his tip, “Use me, Corporal.”

Those were the only words I could manage before my mouth was filled with the thick heat of his cock once more. I moaned around the intrusion, grateful for it when he thrust into me with complete abandon. His hand was back in my hair, forcing me away from the bar and further down his swollen member until it was all I knew. It was throbbing against my tongue, pushing against the back of my throat to the point that tears came to my eyes. They were streaming down my cheeks as I fought to accept all of him, urging back the gag reflex as he continued to thrust, burying himself deeper with each push until my nose was pressed tight against his skin.

My scalp was raw, the strands pulled tight and jerked with each unforgiving push of his hips. His nails raked against the sensitive area as he took purchase of more of my hair and twisted it around his fist. I had no hope of moving for my own, no way of stopping him from invading my mouth to the point that I forgot what breathing was. My whole body was strained and I was sure it would break, but even as tears of my exertion ran down my face, I reminded myself not to blink.

Because if I blinked, it would stop. He would take that as a sign and back off, and that was the last thing that I wanted.

I wanted more. I wanted everything that he would give me, even if I snapped. Because it felt too good not to.

Although at some point I would have to wonder if we could reach the peak. Where it wouldn’t get any better.

And then suddenly there was pressure between my legs.

Far more than there had been before, back when my aching cock was straining against its restrictive leather cage. No, this was more than that. This was him. Pushing the toe of his boot tight against my throbbing length and grinding it to the point that I wasn’t sure if I was feeling pain or pleasure anymore. Either way, he had me crying out around him, every sound muffled as he filled the void between my lips with each new thrust.

I was squirming against his boot, pushing into it and searching for more of the sensation running through me. Even if it was pain, it was putting me into a blissful, mind-numbing state that had my body screaming for more. I needed this. Needed him more than anything else. There was nothing left in the room; nothing but us and the satisfying release we both so desperately craved.

I could feel the pressure building in me as I reached my peak, and my hips instinctively arched off the floor to shove tight against the boot in search of my release. But the pleasure I felt from the grinding force was nothing compared to the guttural moans that fell from his lips. Heat and moisture filled my mouth as his throbbing cock gave me every drop it had to give. I felt it sliding down my throat as my own release spilled out of my pulsing tip and onto the floor between us.
And then he was out of my mouth.

He stared down at me through hooded eyes, his body shaking as he held the metal bar with both hands. His lips were parted and he was panting as heavily as I was, waiting for the moment when he would have control of his legs once more. Even when I was able to stand again, I wasn’t sure of how well I would be able to move off of the stage. At least not without making a complete fool of myself.

I licked my lips slowly and stared up at him, fighting back the smug smile I wanted to wear as a victory badge for affecting him this way. And I had managed to do so in front of everyone. It meant something, even if it was just a room full of strangers.

“You look pretty fucking satisfied with yourself,” he muttered breathlessly, a hint of annoyance in his eyes. But beneath that I could see the amusement, and I knew he had enjoyed himself, too.

“I am,” I agreed, deciding there was no point in hiding it.

He rolled his eyes and then the corner of his mouth twitched up in a small smirk. “You should be, brat. I don’t know how I’m going to make it off this stage.”

“You could start by untying me,” I offered, wiggling my shoulders as best I could. It wasn’t much.

“I’d rather keep you this way.” Levi angled his head to the side as he admired my body, taking his time. “But I’m tired of having all these eyes on you. You’re mine, not theirs.”

Levi bent down and unlatched the two hooks from my collar, allowing my arms to fall free to my sides. I felt my shoulders pop and winced at the sound, holding my arms up to give Levi access to the zippered part of the sleeves. He removed them quickly and I stuck my hands through the openings as he reattached the ends of the sleeves to the hooks at my elbows. As exposed as I felt, I had to admit that I actually enjoyed the shirt. Not that it was something I would wear anywhere but at The Wall or in the bedroom, but it had its uses.

Levi grabbed my ass and forced me further up from my kneeling position, drawing the crop out of my ass and eliciting one last moan from me before dropping it to the floor. His lips twitched with an amused smirk as he turned to snatch my shorts from the ground beside us; he must have tossed it with the knowledge that we would need them later. A few quick and skilled string pulls later and I was as modest as I was going to get in this outfit.

As Levi straightened up again, I decided to make use of my hands by tying the string back into place. My fingers felt stiff from being bound and I fumbled a little as I looped the string through the eyelets, but Levi didn’t seem to care. His focus had drifted out to the audience and he was scanning the crowd with an expression that was only half interested in the faces he saw.

Until one caught his attention.

Levi’s eyes widened for a fraction of a second and then his hands shot down to grab my forearms. Even surprised, he was careful of the tender areas on my wrists and he helped me up quickly without pulling at all. I started to turn towards the audience, wanting to see what he saw, but he caught my chin in his hand before I had the chance to look away.

“Your friend’s here.”

The color drained from my face and my stomach bottomed out. “Which one?”

Not that it mattered; I was mortified that anyone I knew would see me with my bare ass on stage.
“Armin.” Levi glanced over my shoulder. “And by the looks of it, I’d say he watched our show.”

I groaned and hid my face in my hands, trying to decide whether or not I should just try to sneak off the stage. But I couldn’t do that to him. Not when I knew he’d come to celebrate my birthday only to find me on my knees with a dick in my mouth. Although, I really don’t know what he expected to see. It wasn’t like it was a PG show with puppets, and he knew I was going to be up here tonight.

But maybe that was the point.

“I’m gonna go talk to him,” I muttered against my hands, keeping them in place as if they would hide the fact that I was as red as a tomato.

“You might not want to do that with your hands over your face, kid.” There was a hint of amusement in his voice that made me wish he were as flustered as I was.

I folded my arms and looked out towards the crowd, searching for the blonde head of hair I knew all too well. “I’ll go grab him and meet you backstage?”

“Don’t take too long. I’m sure Hanji’s already setting up the cock.”

“You mean the cake?”

“Is there really any difference when it comes to her?”

I had a feeling that cock cakes were going to be a family tradition at The Wall.

“Tell her to save me a ball.”

I managed a smile and hoped it did something to hide how horrifyingly embarrassed I felt. Although with Levi I knew it couldn’t. I walked off the stage by taking the stairs at the side, and started weaving through the crowd to find Armin. I had no idea what I would say when I found him, and I was praying that he wouldn’t want to discuss it at all. I’d never had any intention of Armin seeing me that way, and I didn’t know what to do now that he had.

“Eren!”

Armin’s hand caught mine and stopped me in place; I would have walked past him completely if he hadn’t seen me. There was a flush on his cheeks that had nothing to do with being overheated, but his shy smile was enough to tell me that he wasn’t going to bring it up. At least not yet.

“What are you doing here?” I asked; trying to feign surprise as if I had no idea he’d been here at all. It didn’t fool him.

“Well, it’s your birthday so I was kind of planning to come anyway. I mean, Levi invited us all,” Armin shrugged. “But Mikasa’s not coming until after the show. I would have waited, too, but Erwin wanted to…”

“Erwin’s here?” I snapped, cutting him off. My eyes immediately started to scan the crowd. “Where?”

Somewhere in the back of my mind I noticed how the music suddenly cut off, as if stopped purposely. And then a new song started, the sharp beat intimidating and far louder than it was before. Yet I could barely hear it over the crowd’s screams of excitement.

Had they done that for us?
“He went backstage towards the end of the show. Didn’t you see him? He said that he’d…” Armin trailed off and the color left his cheeks as he stared up at the stage.

“You’re gonna hate me for this, kid…”

Levi’s words were as clear as if he were standing right beside me and my blood ran cold at the sound of his voice, filled with nothing but regret. I turned towards the stage, not wanting to see what I already knew was up there but I couldn’t stop myself. Because suddenly I knew. They were the reason everyone was cheering. They were the reason everyone was excited. And I couldn’t avoid the fact that he was up there with him right now. That the music surrounding me, thrumming through the club, was playing as if it was meant for only them.

For the Corporal… and his Commander.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

YAY FOR THURSDAY! ^___^ Wow, there were a lot of comments on that last one. o___o Hopefully you will all get your explanation in this chapter! After you finish reading this, if you still need more of an explanation as to what is going on through the characters' minds you'll be able to find answers on tumblr. I will be tagging some of my thorough responses as "reasons" on my blog. I would put them all here, but they're lengthy and... yea. XD So yes, you'll be able to find those on tumblr if you need them.

A huge thank you to titansmytrigger, aaapple-jax, and danchou-bitches for sharing some awesome fanart of Chapter 42! ^__^ If you haven't already seen the art, you can find it in the art tag on my blog. danchou-bitches actually did the whole ending scene for 42 and it's just amazing! aaapple-jax also did the ending scene in how I'm sure everyone wanted it to go. XD It's great, so please check it out!

AND COSPLAYERS! Oh, the cosplayers this week were amazing! Puppybrateren did an incredible Intern!Eren cosplay, and there is now an ask blog for Corporal, too! Please check out askthecorporallevi (Intern!Levi) and ask-titanboy69 (Intern!Eren) if you haven't already. ^_^ They've been doing asks back and forth, and it's just awesome!

Oh, and of course, thank you for all the comments! Hopefully you'll all continue to trust in Levi. XD He is going through a lot, but he knows what's important.

OH! And the song in this chapter is 'Sin' by Nine Inch Nails.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there! ^_^

ENJOY!

---

Levi

This was where it started.

If I were to look back years later, after everything had gone to shit, I would remember this night. The start of it all. When I had allowed this man to get the best of me and unraveled everything in the process. The night I had given it all up for the sake of holding onto the memories of the past. Things I didn’t need. Things I would survive without. And for all my faults, all my fuck ups, I would still see him as the cause of it all. This asshole that had the audacity to follow me out on stage and corner me into some fucking cock tease show that he just had to have now. In front of everyone. And most importantly, in front of him.

Eren.

He was staring up at me from the audience, looking like a deer caught in headlights, and I was willing to bet that he hadn’t heard a damn word I’d just said. Or if he had, he didn’t remember it.
now. He’d heard my voice just enough to turn and then that was it. It was gone. Once his eyes met
the stage and he saw the man standing behind me, his mind had gone blank. I didn’t have to talk to
him now to know that. I could see it in his expression; hazed, lost, and torn. He was either trying to
shut it all out or wrap his mind around the situation, and I wasn’t sure which I wanted more.

And that was a fucking lie.

I knew exactly what I wanted and just how stupid it was. And yet I wanted it anyway.

I wanted him to understand. I wanted him to know just how much I needed this even when I
couldn’t comprehend it myself. I should have wanted anything other than to stay on that stage, and
yet my mind kept turning back to a man I was supposed to hate. A man I should have been over by
now, but for some shitty reason I just couldn’t give him up. Even after all these years, and the past
few months with Eren, I just couldn’t turn around and walk away. As if he were nothing. As if we
were nothing.

Even if I wanted that to be true.

“I trust you.”

Eren could have twisted a knife in my heart and it would have hurt less than the sound of his voice
uttering those three simple words. Words that should have snapped me back to my senses and
propelled my body off of that stage as if the whole thing were up in flames. But I couldn’t move. I
couldn’t do anything but stare at him and nod.

Because I wanted to do this.

I wanted this moment like I wanted to keep breathing.

And I hated myself for it.

“Tell me not to.”

The words fell off my tongue as if they had no weight to speak of. As if they barely had the strength
to make it past my lips at all. And I wasn’t even aware I had said anything until I heard it for myself.
It was like some small part of me was still trying to turn around. Trying to urge me away from a man
that had dominated my life since the day I was born. A man who had taken my innocence and
wrapped me up around his finger as if he owned me, pulling me tighter every time I tried to gnaw my
way off. Even to this day, I was still fighting to get away.

And that was why I wanted him gone.

Not that I could ever tell Eren that and expect him to understand. He hadn’t lived my life and had no
idea of the kind of hold that Erwin had on me. It was nothing that I even wanted to share. Worrying
Eren would just add to the shitfest that had become my life, and I wasn’t about to do that. Revenge
was just as good a reason as any, even if I knew I could survive without it. Either way, the end goal
would be the same.

It would get Erwin out of my life, and that was all I wanted. I needed an end to this. Because every
fucking day that I saw him was just another day that I felt the chains pulling at my heart. A heart that
didn’t even belong to him. A heart that I had given away, and yet I couldn’t seem to stop myself
from wanting this. Wanting what we had. Wanting all the things that would have been if he hadn’t
turned our world to shit.

I never even realized how badly I wanted all of that until I had a perfect world of my own.
A world that I was currently tearing apart.

Eren was perfect for me, and there was no denying that. The force that drew me to him was unlike anything I’d ever felt. It was as if my heart had been tied to his all this time, and now that I’d found him the string was only growing tighter. Somehow I knew that if I pulled away now, the string would snap and I would bleed out from the inside. I wouldn’t survive losing him, and yet I was risking him even now. Tempting some horrible fate that wanted to tear us apart, knowing all along what it would do.

I had a talent for destroying everything I loved.

“I won’t tell you not to,” Eren’s voice was as clear as if he were standing beside me, and suddenly I wanted nothing more. “It’s your choice. If you really want to get off that stage, then do it. But if you want to stay up there, then go ahead and give them a show. That’s obviously what they want.”

“I don’t think you realize what you’re say—”

“You’re mine,” Eren cut me off; his eyes burning with a sudden intensity that I could see even from this distance. “And it doesn’t matter what you do on stage with him. That’s not going to change a damn thing between us. You’re mine, Levi. Not his. Not anymore. And if you think I don’t know that by now, then you don’t know me. I told you that I trust you, and I’m going to prove it.”

“You don’t have to prove it, Eren.”

“I know I don’t have to. I said I’m going to.” Eren paused for a moment and looked past me, his eyes filled with a not-so-quiet rage. “But I’m not thrilled about the idea of him putting his hands on your body in front of everyone, so I think I’m going to have to break his fingers after this.”

You perfect little shit.

Eren’s stare lingered on Erwin for a moment more and he paused before meeting my eyes again. “You’re not the only reason I want to break his hands.”

Eren’s voice was rough and it only took me a moment to realize why. And it had nothing to do with the fact that I was up there with Erwin; amazingly enough that wasn’t bothering him. No. It was Armin, standing beside him and staring at the stage with an expression that was beyond confused. Which meant Erwin hadn’t told him a thing. He’d left him there to join me here; to make him watch whatever the hell it was he wanted to do.

Not that it surprised me, but I knew Erwin far too well by now. Eren would see what he was doing as cruel, but I knew better. He wasn’t trying to hurt Armin with this. No, this was something more than that. This was meant to be fun. A challenge, even. A game. Erwin had always been about extreme control; it was his favorite kink. And making Armin watch this was just a game for them.

And that was what I was. That was all I was.

A game.

He was using me as a game.

As some fucking foreplay for another man.

And suddenly I wanted to hurt him. Not for Eren. Definitely not for Armin, but for myself. I wanted to dig my claws into him, and not in a way that he would enjoy. He would know after tonight that he couldn’t just use me like this, couldn’t fuck with me this way. I wouldn’t let him. Not anymore. I
couldn’t do this anymore. Even if I had to dig him out from under my skin, I would be free of him.

I wouldn’t let him take another piece of me.

I had a world now, and it wasn’t him.

It would never be him.

“You need this,” Eren’s voice was in my ear again, calmer now. “And believe it or not, I understand. I know you two had something before me, even if I don’t want to think about it. I hate it, but I get it. So whatever this is, revenge or some last hurrah, get it out of your system now. Because after tonight, you’re mine. I won’t go through this again. Next time I drag you off the stage.”

A small part of me wanted him to do that now, but the rest of me knew he was right. I needed this. Even if I didn’t know what this was, even if I didn’t figure it out until halfway through, I needed it. We had been avoiding each other for far too long, hiding in polite conversation, and it had all boiled over now. We were both angry for different reasons and we were dealing with it in the only way we knew how.

Through dominance and submission.

Silence suddenly filled my ears, and I searched the crowd to see Eren walking away. He had turned off the device and was gripping Armin’s hand as he led him to the tables that were too far away to have a good view of the stage. Even if he trusted me it was clear that Eren didn’t want to see this and he wasn’t going to let Armin watch it either. Which meant that anything Erwin wanted to do now would be pointless. He had done all of this for nothing.

And that just amused the living fuck out of me.

The music that Erwin had selected to transition between our scenes was fading away, and I could hear the crowd buzzing with excitement for what they knew would be coming next. He had given me time to decide whether or not I was going to do this, knowing that I might leave him on stage to look like a fucking idiot. But I couldn’t do that and somehow I was sure he knew that. Even if I wanted to torture him by walking away, I wasn’t willing to give up the one moment I had with him outside of the office.

Because aside from the business talk I’d barely seen him at all. And suddenly I wanted to make him pay for that.

I turned slowly to face him and heard the crowd erupt behind me, but every noise vanished the instant my eyes were on his. Cold. Powerful. Dominant. I hadn’t seen him look like that since the last time I’d been on my knees, but I wasn’t going to let him get to me now. I was stronger than that, and I wasn’t his submissive anymore. He couldn’t order me, and I wouldn’t obey if he did. We were two masters stalking each other, waiting for the other to break.

And I should have known he would set it up for me to break first.

A sharp beat filled the air and I recognized it immediately. A song I had played a thousand times over after leaving him.

“You fucking bastard…”

I watched an amused smile cross his lips as he read mine. He angled his head to the side and cocked one eyebrow as if to ask me what was wrong, even though he already knew the answer. He wanted my reaction to this, and I didn’t want to give it to him. I wanted to wipe that fucking smile off his
face, but I knew I would have to earn that privilege. He wouldn’t let me get close without working for it first. He knew I wouldn’t play nice once I had my hands on him.

We both began to move at once as if there were a bar connecting our bodies, forcing us to circle each other like a pair of predators. We were slow, calculating, and daring the other to make the first move. Although I already knew he would be the one to do so. He always did, and I always let him. But that would be where the similarities ended. He didn’t know me now, and I was going to prove that to him.

The beat picked up and Erwin moved with it, crossing the short distance between us with a level of strength and determination that only he could possess. And even though I knew I had him beat for speed, I let him catch me. Because in the end, it was all part of the game. His hand gripped my throat and his thumb stroked over the pulse he found there; so deliberate that I was sure he was memorizing it. Recognizing it. The beat of my heart. Something that had once moved for him and him alone.

You give me the reason…
You give me control…

Erwin’s lips curved as they moved with the music, timed so perfectly that I knew beyond a fucking doubt that he was using this song against me. Because he knew what it meant to me. He knew this song described us and all the shit we’d gone through as if someone had actually written it for us. Every lyric, every beat, every word. It was us. Him and me, and our inability to escape each other. Even now I was still trying, and I knew I would never be able to break away when I had to see his face day in and day out.

He was my constant reminder.

A reminder of everything I had and everything I lost.

He’d ruined it all. He’d ruined me. And I would never be able to forgive him for that.

My hands shot up as if they knew exactly what I wanted to do even if my mind wasn’t following along. My nails dug into his wrists and I pushed, with a strength that impressed even me, forcing him back towards the chair in the center of the stage. The words were leaving my tongue in nothing but an angry growl, following the music just as I’m sure he knew I would.

I gave you my purity…
And my purity you stole.

I shoved with all the strength I had in my body and watched as he fell into the chair, his hands shooting down to grip the sides to ensure that it didn’t topple over entirely. There was surprise in those bright blue eyes and I loved the sight of it, knowing that I had put it there, knowing I had managed to shock him. And I wanted to do so much more. I wanted to have him wondering who the hell I was and how I was able to change so drastically without him realizing.

I wanted him to know that he had lost me.

I grabbed a fistful of his hair as I circled around to the back of the chair, jerking the strands so hard and fast that it couldn’t have been done for show. His head snapped back and pain momentarily crossed his features; pain I had caused and was more than grateful for. I wanted his body stinging with the memory of me. I grabbed his throat just as he had held mine moments before and my nails dug back into his skin yet again. I stared down at him and he met my gaze, too many emotions on his face to count. So many that I had to look away.
Did you think I wouldn’t recognize…
This compromise?
Am I just too stupid…
To realize?

Erwin grabbed my arm tight and jerked it free of his neck, twisting so quickly that I couldn’t keep up with the movements. He yanked me down into his lap and pressed my back tight against his chest, his arms banding around me like a vice while his lips found my neck. They curved there as if he were amused by my attempts to dominate him. As if I was nothing more than a trained pet that was acting out. It was the same amusement I had felt on stage with Eren when he had tried to take control of me. I had put him in his place so quickly just as Erwin did with me now.

But unlike Eren, I would never stay.

I wrenched myself out of his arms and turned, straddling his lap as my hands found his hair once more. I twisted two fistfuls between my fingers and pulled back so far that his neck was strained, his Adam’s apple bared to me. I wanted to bite it, but I resisted the urge and focused on making his scalp bleed. If nothing else, I was determined to leave marks on him. Ones he wouldn’t enjoy.

I bent over him until our mouths were a mere inch apart, keeping us that way through force as I gripped his hair tighter. Even if he wanted to touch me, he wouldn’t be able to. And I could only hope that frustrated him as much as it did me. Because I had wanted to touch him this way, before he ruined it all. And now, no matter how much my body yearned for it, I couldn’t have it. I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t give into him.

And I wouldn’t betray Eren.

Stale incense, old sweat…

“And lies, lies, lies…” My fingers curled and my nails dug into his scalp as I growled the next words to the song, holding his stare and praying like hell that he could see the hatred in my eyes.

Erwin’s hips suddenly rolled up and pressed into mine, driving his stiff erection against me and ripping a gasp from my throat. I cursed my body for reacting at all, hating him for arousing me this way. I didn’t know what the hell kind of game this was, but suddenly I wasn’t sure if it had anything to do with Armin. Erwin hadn’t looked once at the audience, and if he was trying to get him to watch then he would have made sure that he was. Which meant this was about something else entirely, and the thought of that chilled my blood faster than anything else could.

I had to leave.

I pushed out of the chair and started walking towards the curtain, determined to get the fuck away from whatever the fuck he was trying to do. I wasn’t about to publicly ruin my relationship with Eren by giving into him. As much as I missed him, I hated him more. I couldn’t deny that I still needed him, but I wanted nothing more than to live without him.

It comes down to this…
Your kiss, your fist…
And your strain…
It gets under my skin.

I shouldn’t have been surprised that he followed, but when his arms found their way around my waist my heart leapt into my throat. I spun with my fist and he caught it in his hand, raising one perfect eyebrow and regarding me with an expression that was all at once concerned and intrigued. I
was angry with him, and he knew it. Angry enough to hit, angry enough to run and yet somehow I was still here. Somehow I let him stop me.

And that was all the permission he needed.

Erwin grabbed my hair and forced me down to my knees as if I weighed nothing at all, but I was sure that my body was complying through some shitty instinct he had worked into me years ago. He twisted his hand once in the strands of my hair, tightening his grip before he started walking across the stage. He didn’t wait, but he never would. It was follow or be dragged with him, and I had learned that long ago. I knew it so well that my body did it now, even as my mind screamed against it.

Within, take in…
The extent of my sin.

He reached the metal pole I had tied Eren to during our performance and lifted me up by my hair. I followed suit and stood, jerking my head to the side to force myself out of his hold. And he allowed me my freedom, but only for as long as it took to get his hand around my wrists. He’d always been larger than me, and the strong grip of his long fingers was more than enough to push my wrists together. He trapped me there as his other hand gripped my chin, angling my head until I was staring into his eyes.

You give me the anger.
You give me the nerve.
Carry out my sentence…
While I get what I deserve.

His fingers stroked over the skin of my right wrist and pain momentarily took over his expression. And I knew exactly why, knew without asking, but it was something we never talked about. Something he never acknowledged, even after the many times that I’d caught him staring. But he was going to say something now and I knew it. I could feel it like it was pulsing through my veins before the words even left his lips.

“Levi…”

“Don’t.”

He paused for a moment, as if he were actually reconsidering. But I knew that wasn’t the case.

“You don’t wear it anymore…” His fingers brushed against my skin in a slow, circular motion as his eyes searched mine. “I wish you would.”

My lips curled with anger and my eyes narrowed, the words snapping out of my mouth. “I don’t wear it anymore because I don’t belong to you.”

“I wish you did.”

The words tore at my heart even as I tried to ignore them, and I forced myself to look out at the audience. Out towards the green eyes I knew I would find there. He was watching us.

“I’m his.”

“You think that’s really true?”

I’m just an effigy to be defaced...
The words overlapped ours, matching us perfectly. Our current situation. He was replacing me and I was replacing him, and we were both struggling to keep it that way. Or at least I was. I had no idea what he wanted anymore or what he was trying to pull, but I wasn’t about to give him another chance to ruin everything. Even if my body was giving in to him, that was all he would get. A few moments on stage before I tore down what was left of us.

And I would.

He wasn’t a life I wanted anymore. I had been on my knees for him once, but that wasn’t where I belonged. It wasn’t where I wanted to be. Even now, as he pressed me into the metal bar and my body relented, something felt wrong.

My skin was crawling.

The idea of submitting to him made me feel sick, and I was sure he didn’t know it. Right now he thought this was a game we both wanted, but he was wrong. I didn’t want this anymore. I didn’t want to be his.

I wanted Eren. In every fucking way that I could have the kid. I wanted to own him just as much as I wanted to belong to him. Because nothing else compared to the way I felt when I was with him. Nothing even came close. He made me feel more than alive, more than just breathing. He helped me remember what happiness was, and when I smiled with him it was real. Everything with him was real. Every single emotion I never thought I would feel again. Bad and good. Anger, joy, agony, passion.

Love.

Even if I couldn’t say the words to him yet, I knew they were true.

I was in love with him.

And I wasn’t going to lose that.

And if I can’t have everything...

Erwin’s voice was deep at my ear, following the music as if this was the reason he was here. This moment. This line that I knew all too well. The one line that ran through my head every fucking time I entered his office with the intent of doing anything but work. When I wanted him past the point that I could refuse myself. When I needed him more than logic could deny.

And he knew that.

He knew how to use this moment against me, how to blur my mind away from whatever reality I wanted to hold to. He was able to drag me back into the past, back into a time that I was happy with him. When he was all I knew and that was all I wanted. And for the smallest moment in time, when he was staring into my eyes and I was looking into his, I wanted that again.

Erwin drew closer and the words rolled off his tongue just as I knew they would, the sound deep and inviting. More intoxicating than I wanted to admit. “Well then just give me a taste…”

I started to slip away, forgetting what I was supposed to hold onto. Forgetting the reason I was up here in the first place or why I had tried to fight it at all. Why it even mattered.
And as I watched his lips come close to mine, my mind hazed and one single thought rang clear above the rest.

I’m going to lose it all.

-------------------------------------------------------

Eren

I couldn’t watch.

That wasn’t to say that I didn’t trust him, of course. Oddly enough, I trusted him more now than I ever had before, and it took seeing the two of them on that stage to realize it. At the time I expected every nagging, insecure thought to flood my mind until I was crushed by the weight of it all, but it never came. The only thing I felt as I watched Erwin walk across the stage towards Levi was pity.

Erwin was a man hanging onto something he no longer had. Something he would never have again. Something that belonged to me.

And I realized then that I had changed.

I knew him now.

It was the first time I had ever accepted the fact that Levi was mine, fully and completely. I’d accepted that to the point that I had no reason to fear, because I knew I wasn’t going to lose him. Neither of us would allow that to happen, regardless of what Erwin tried to do. This was just a show for the audience and nothing more.

And by the look on Levi’s face, he wasn’t even enjoying it.

“I think you’re being a little too understanding with this.”

Armin was watching me from across the table, chewing at his bottom lip as his eyes darted once towards the stage. He quickly looked away again and focused his stare on the bar, his chest rising and falling in a slow and shaky breath.

And suddenly I felt no pity for Erwin at all.

“Armin…”

“But I guess I am, too, right?” Armin continued, keeping his eyes away from me. “I mean, he probably wouldn’t stop for me anyway, but…”

I hooked my foot in the leg of his chair and slid him to my side, pulling him against me until there was really no need for two chairs at all. “Say the word and I’ll kill him.”

Armin rolled his eyes and looked up at me, the ghost of a smile on his lips. “I don’t want you to kill him. To be honest, I don’t even know if I should be upset.”

“He’s on stage with Levi. Why wouldn’t you be upset?”

“Why aren’t you?”

I paused for a moment and then turned to rest my head against his, my attention drifting back towards the stage as I answered. “Because I know he’s mine. And I know he won’t hurt me. I know how he feels, and the fact that he asked me if he could do this means he really needs it.”
Armin leaned into me and his arms circled around my waist, his body starting to relax. “And that doesn’t worry you?”

It probably should have.

“No,” I admitted, watching Levi’s expression as it twisted into anger. Nothing he was doing on stage resembled anything other than hatred. It actually made it an enjoyable show to watch. Everything about it reminded me of just how much he wanted the life he had now. The past was nothing. “I don’t know why he needs it, but he does. And maybe that should worry me, but it doesn’t. Somehow I know he’s not going to do anything past this. It’s like something he needs to get out of his system.”

Armin made a soft sound in the back of his throat that sounded something close to agreement, and I pulled him closer. Somehow I knew my words had helped him, even if I wasn’t trying to comfort him where Erwin was concerned. I didn’t even want to defend the bastard, but at the same time I didn’t want Armin to be in pain over this. As much as I hated to admit it, these past three months had been the happiest I’d ever seen Armin. Up until tonight the two of them had seemed like the perfect couple. To the point that it made me feel a little sick. Everything had been great for them and even if I didn’t approve of Erwin, I didn’t give a shit if it meant Armin would be happy.

Which was the only way I was able to convince myself to say the words.

“Maybe it’s something they both need to get out of their systems.”

Armin was silent for a moment and then he sighed, his body sagging into mine as he stared down at the table.

“I thought they were over this,” Armin spoke softly. “At least until recently. Erwin’s been acting a little differently. Like he’s got something on his mind that he can’t get past.”

“Same with Levi.”

Armin tilted his head against my shoulder and stared up at me, not even attempting to hide the concern in his eyes. Not that he ever would when it came to me.

“Do you think they want each other?”

“Not in the sense that they’re going to leave us.” I paused and watched them move across the stage. Levi was on his knees and I felt a sharp pang of jealousy that I wasn’t the one to put him there. “Levi said he’s known him since he was a child. Even if he wants to bury their past, I’m sure it can’t be as easy as he thinks. It wouldn’t be easy for me if I had to do the same with him.”

“You used to worry a lot more than this.”

“And I almost lost him because of it.” I angled my head to the side and Armin turned to look at me. “Whether I like it or not, Erwin is a part of his life. And until that changes, I’m not going to spend every day worrying about what they might be doing. Levi’s never hurt me before and out of everyone I know, he would never betray my trust. I don’t need to worry with him.”

Armin frowned at that, and for a moment he actually looked mildly offended. “I wouldn’t betray your trust either, you know.”

I should have known he’d have a comment for that one.

I bit back a small smile and ran my fingers through his hair, ruffling the strands. “You don’t count.”
Armin rolled his eyes and pulled away to fix his hair, glancing at the stage once more before sighing. “I guess I shouldn’t let it get to me either. You should have seen his face when he saw the two of you up there. When Hanji announced you as Levi’s, I thought he might snap the table in half.”

“And that’s a reason not to let it get to you?”

“Like you said, he’s a part of his life,” Armin shrugged and glanced over at me. “And to be honest, I really don’t think he’s thinking this through right now. He saw Levi and he just kind of snapped.”

“And that gives him the right to do this to you?”

“He’s not doing it to me. This isn’t to hurt me,” Armin watched me with certain blue eyes that were clear of the pain that had been in them before. “If he meant to hurt me, then it would be different. But this isn’t that. He’s hurting right now because he’s watching a huge part of his life walk away without him. It can’t be easy. It wouldn’t be for me if I had to let you go.”

Armin’s words held so much conviction now that I was certain there was no doubt in his mind. No way of swaying his opinion. And for a moment, I had to marvel at how he was able to swing from devastated to confident in a matter of minutes. It was one of his many traits that impressed me the most. Once Armin was sure he’d figured out a situation, his mind went into a cold calculation that worried only about the facts. Erwin was hurting, and he was acting out because of it. As far as Armin was concerned, that was all that mattered.

“I know how you feel about him, so I know you can’t see him like I do,” Armin paused for a moment and his eyes lingered on the stage, “But I can tell this isn’t easy for him. Even from here, he looks like he’s in pain. This isn’t him trying to get him back. This is his way of saying goodbye to Levi. This is him letting go. One last show before he cuts him off.”

I shrugged. “What am I, twelve? My birthday comes every year. The fact that I was born on this day doesn’t make what they’re doing any better or worse.”

“You know that’s not what I meant.”

I smiled slightly and glanced at the stage. “Our show was better.”

Armin flushed so deeply that the red color flooded his face, and he quickly looked away. “Yea… your show was… yea…”

I didn’t even bother to hide the wide grin that spread across my face. The embarrassment I felt knowing that Armin had seen me up there was nothing compared to what he felt while watching. And somehow I found that more amusing than anything else.

“Did I look good?” I teased.

“Damn it, Eren!” Armin’s blush deepened and he swatted at me. “Don’t say things like that!”

“Is that a yes?”

“If you tease me, I’ll have to tease you back,” Armin warned.

He may as well have triple dog dared me.

I grinned wider and leaned into him, watching the cherry red spread to his ears. “What was your
Armin squared his shoulders and let out a little huff before turning to face me, his expression neutral despite all the color in it. My stomach flipped at the abrupt change and suddenly I realized I’d made a mistake by challenging him. Armin was impressive when he had to be.

“When you came all over his boot.” Armin shot back, his expression completely controlled. “You should have heard the sounds you made.”

And now it was my turn to blush.

I felt my entire face heat up and I forced myself to look away, clearing my throat as I muttered, “It was mostly on the floor. I don’t think he’d have been too happy with me if I came on his boot.”

“You came a lot.”

I shot him a look and caught the twitch of his lip as he tried to suppress a shy smile. “Do we have to talk about this?”

“You’re the one who pushed it.”

“Lesson learned. Don’t push the hidden perv.”

“Perv?” Armin’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Who just put on a show in front of a crowd of strangers?”

I rolled my eyes and didn’t bother to stop the grin that spread across my face. It had been quite the show, and I was still inwardly celebrating over the fact that I’d done so well.

“He looks upset,” Armin spoke softly, drawing my attention back to him. I followed his eyes to the stage, my gaze lingering on Levi’s expression. Livid was a better description. He had just shoved Erwin away from the pole and was stalking towards the curtains that led to the backstage.

I had a feeling the show was over.

“I don’t think he wanted to do this. At least not in the way Erwin wanted to.” I paused and then shrugged; looking down at the piece of cake Hanji had brought over to the table shortly after we sat down. She’d taken one look at the stage and stormed off in its direction. I hadn’t seen her since.

Armin was silent for a long moment as he watched me pick at the cake, his brow furrowed in concentration. He was thinking through something, and I wasn’t sure whether or not that was a good thing.

“You said he’s been acting weird lately,” Armin glanced up at me. “What’s he been doing differently?”

“He’s been going back to the whole thing with Erwin. That deal. The revenge.” Everything I thought we were done with. “He hasn’t said anything directly, but I can tell it’s been eating at him.”

“But you’re too old to do it for him now.”

“He told me he wouldn’t let me anyway,” I shrugged. “Not that it matters. He already said he wouldn’t do anything as long as you’re with Erwin. He won’t hurt you because he knows it’ll hurt me.”

Armin opened his mouth to speak and then shut it just as quickly, staring off for a long moment.
Finally he asked in a whisper I barely heard. “Do you really think he needs it?”

I should have known what he was going to do, but my mind was too focused on Levi to realize.

“I do… I just don’t think he’s ever going to tell me that. I’m scared he’s just going to let it eat at him.” I shook my head, my heart aching at the thought. There was still so much there that I didn’t know and I knew that was something I was going to have to change. “How can you be so angry, hate someone for so long and then just let it go? How can you need something so badly one day and then live without it the next?”

“Maybe you gave him something else to live for.”

I smiled faintly and then shrugged, glancing back over at Armin. “Or maybe it’s only a matter of time.”

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Levi

That was too fucking close for comfort.

I had no idea how I had managed to get off of that stage, pull away from the song and him, but here I was. I could still hear the crowd behind me and I could still feel the heavy beat of the music as it lingered, but I kept myself rooted in place. I wouldn’t go back out there to him. I wasn’t about to let him confuse me again; not when I had so much to lose. When I had things that I wasn’t willing to lose or risk. Even if I just had.

“What the hell were you thinking?” Hanji threw open the door to the backstage and started walking towards me with an expression that was well beyond pissed.

“Thinking?” I threw the crop down on the table and grabbed a towel. I needed to wipe the scent of him off my skin. “I’m pretty fucking sure what I did up there couldn’t be called thinking.”

“It’s his birthday, Levi! His birthday and the day you claimed him, and you do this?” Hanji continued, ignoring my response. “Are you insane?”

“Probably,” I snapped back, my tolerance wearing thin. “And for your information, the kid gave me permission.”

“Probably,” I snapped back, my tolerance wearing thin. “And for your information, the kid gave me permission.”

“And that makes it okay? He gave you permission to dry hump your ex-boyfriend on his birthday. Take two seconds and actually think about what you asked of him.”

“I didn’t do any of that with Erwin.” I flung the towel down on the desk and turned to face her. “If you didn’t notice, I wasn’t exactly having fun up there.”

“You shouldn’t have been up there in the first place, Levi. You should have gotten off that fucking stage and gone to Eren like you were supposed to.”

“And since when do I do anything I’m supposed to?”

“Since never.” Hanji shrugged, “And usually I let you get away with it, but not this. Not when you might lose him.”

“I’m not going to lose him!” The words were more desperate, more of a shout than I meant for them to be. And in that moment I realized just how much the thought terrified me.
“I really hope you don’t. Because he’s perfect for you. You understand that, right?”

“Of course I understand that,” I muttered, staring at the towel lying on the table. “I don’t know why I did it. I don’t know what I was thinking. I don’t know why I…”

My jaw tightened and I fisted my fingers into my hair, pressing the bottom of my palms into my eyes. “Damn it, why do I let him do this to me? Why can’t I get over him?”

Angry as she might have been, that was all it took to break her.

Hanji’s arms were around me in an instant, just as I knew they would be. And I didn’t know just how much I needed that familiar warmth until I was wrapped up in it. Her arms were the few I allowed around me, and probably the most comforting next to Eren’s. She was home to me, even when I had no other home to go to. She was one of the very few to see me fall apart, and she was always there for me when I did.

“Because you’ve known him since you were a kid. You admired who he was before you even knew him, and you fell in love with him once you did. Emotions like that don’t just switch off, no matter how much you want them to. It doesn’t matter who else walks into your life. He’s always going to be there in one way or another.”

“I can’t see him anymore.”

“Then leave. Make The Wall your fulltime job and cut him out of your life. You don’t have to ever see him again if you don’t want to.”

“I’m not going to leave the company in his hands when he’s the reason my father is dead.”

“Then we’ll find another way to get rid of him.”

A short, soft laugh found its way past my lips and I shook my head. “You sound like you’re plotting murder.”

“Maybe just some light torture and then we can banish him.”

“Banish him where?”

“To the bottom of the ocean with a boulder strapped to his feet.”

“Well, that doesn’t sound pleasant…”

Hanji froze at the sound of the voice I knew too well, and she turned in the direction of the stage. If she looked angry before, she was livid now. “Get out. You weren’t even supposed to be here tonight. No one here wants to see your face.”

I didn’t have to turn around to know who she was talking to. She’d been as cold to him as I was since the day he betrayed me, and I was always grateful for that.

“I really don’t think that’s for you to decide.” Erwin walked towards us, snagging a towel from the shelf. “It’s Levi’s club, not yours. And I need to talk to him.”

“Then you can make a fucking appointment. I’ll pencil you in right now for never.” Hanji held out the crop and her eyes narrowed. “And as far as you need to know, I’m his and he’s mine. Right after Eren. And if I want your ass out of my club, then that’s where it’s going to be.”

“Hanji—”
“Don’t say my name like you know me,” Hanji cut him off, “Like you have any right to talk to me. Levi isn’t the only one you hurt tonight and if you think for one goddamn second that what you did to that boy out there is okay, then you don’t deserve him.”

“I wasn’t trying to hurt Armin.”

“I don’t care what you were trying to do, I’m telling you what you did do.” Hanji jerked the crop as she spoke, treating it like an extended finger. “And you lost the right to talk to him tonight. I don’t care what you had planned or what you wanted to do, you’re going to leave and you’re going to do it now.”

“I’m not just going to—”

“Leave him here? Yes, you are. You absolutely are. You’ve hurt him enough tonight, and you’re going to grovel for it tomorrow.” Hanji shoved the tip of the crop against his nose and leaned close. “If I see you go near him tonight, you’re not going to recover from what I do to you.”

Erwin’s hand snapped up and he grabbed the crop in a tight grip, his mouth opening for words I didn’t need to hear.

“Erwin,” I interjected before either of them could say anything else. With Hanji in this mood and Erwin as angry as he was, neither of them was going to stop until I stopped them myself. “Just go. I’ll talk to Armin for you and we’ll discuss this tomorrow.”

Erwin opened his mouth and then shut it, regarding me for a long moment before he finally nodded. He fixed Hanji with one last look and then released the crop, turning and walking in the direction of the door. And even before he stopped, I knew he wouldn’t just leave. There was still so much left unsaid between us. So many questions and so many words that neither of us had the energy to say right now. Not after tonight. Not after everything.

He paused and glanced back at me, holding the doorframe with one hand. “This had nothing to do with him. I didn’t bring him here to hurt him. I wasn’t even planning to do this when I got here, and I hate myself for making him think that I…”

“Why did you do it?”

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, propelled by the curiosity raging inside me.

“Because when I saw you up there with him, when Hanji declared you as his, I just…” Erwin fell silent and he stared down, gripping the doorframe tighter than before. “Tonight was the first time it felt like it was really over between us.”

“It’s been over between us.”

“It hasn’t,” Erwin continued, lifting his gaze to meet mine. “And you know it, too. I can see it in your eyes. It was never over. There’s always been a chance for us, and I had no idea I’d been holding onto that until tonight. Until I was sure I lost you.”

“You were always going to lose me.”

Erwin held my eyes for a long moment but he said nothing more. The most I got was half a nod and then he was gone. The door was closed and I was left with an emptiness I hadn’t felt in months. One that almost sent me after him, but I kept myself rooted in place. As desperate as he might have been to have me, I knew he still wanted Armin. And for some reason, that hurt. We had replaced each
other before we’d even healed and now there was no sealing the wound. Not without removing him entirely, and now I knew there was no other choice.

Because if he decided he was willing to destroy everything else, I didn’t know if I could fight it. He’d outwitted me time and again, played with my heart in ways I didn’t understand, and it didn’t matter that I was happy. It didn’t matter that I’d found the one I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. He would find a way to tear it all down, and I would once again be alone. Because I could never be happy with him, even if I chose him in the end. Erwin would never be what I wanted. What I needed.

I had what I needed, and he was a beautiful green-eyed little shit that should have stopped me before I fell this deep.

But as deep as I was, it didn’t matter. I wouldn’t lose him, and I knew he wouldn’t let me go. He was the strongest person in my life and even if I let myself fall apart, he would be there to bring me back together.

At least that’s what I told myself.

“If don’t know what the hell you think you’re doing,” Hanji whispered. “But you better figure it out before you lose everything that matters.”
I never wanted this to end.

My nails ripped down his back like I was trying to prove a point, but I had no idea what it was. Hell, I couldn’t even remember my own name right now and that wasn’t a surprise. That was him and what he did to me every single time I was wrapped up in his arms. Swallowed up by him as if there was nothing else in the world save for our two connected bodies. We could be the only things left in this shitty ass existence and I would be happy for it. There was nothing else I needed. Nothing I would even consider. Nothing but him. Just him. Like this.

For as long as I was lucky enough to have him.
A desperate cry tore from my throat and his name fell off my lips like it was a whispered prayer. If whispers could leave your throat raw while they echoed off the walls in the room. Somewhere in the back of my mind I realized he was shouting my name, too, but his voice was the only thing I heard. The words didn’t matter and they didn’t register as anything other than a deep, alluring sound. It wasn’t even fair that he could leave me a shivering mess just by saying my name. All of the other tricks weren’t necessary, but I sure as hell appreciated them.

As it was, I wouldn’t be walking right for the next week.

“Levi…” His lips were at my ear, curving into a perfect smirk as his nails dragged across my ass.

“Again.”

His chuckle was low and deep. “You’re insatiable…”

“You already knew that,” I growled, digging my nails into his hips. I gave one good jerk and he moaned, thrusting further into me. “Now hurry up and fuck me, old man.”

“That’s not the way to convince me.” His lips were at my throat now, his tongue brushing along the vein. “And you’re going to have to work on that tone of yours. I won’t allow you to talk to me that way.”

His last words were spoken with a sharp edge, just sharp enough that I knew I had crossed a line.

“I’m sorry, Commander.”

He drew back to stare into my eyes, his own filled with satisfaction. Satisfaction I had put there. I’d managed to please him, and the thought of that made my heart race. Almost as much as the sight of him did. His hair was a mess, trained into place by my fingers and an entire night of twisting and pulling. I had a hard time keeping my hands off of him, even when I was directed to do so. He said it was because I was new to the lifestyle, but I knew better. Even though we had barely begun, I already knew that I wanted to be the one to dominate him.

But he wasn’t about to allow that, and I was willing to give up anything to stay.

Even if it meant submitting.

“You did well tonight, Levi,” Erwin murmured softly, his eyes searching mine.

“You mean aside from disobeying everything you said?”

A smirk twitched on the corner of his mouth and he pinched my lower lip between his thumb and finger, giving it a small tug. “You’ll get there.”

My tongue darted out and brushed against his thumb, and for a brief moment I saw the light of lust in his eyes once more. But it wasn’t enough for him to continue; not when he had decided that we were done for the night. I already knew there was no way of convincing him otherwise, had learned that quickly enough, and yet I hoped every time that he would give in to me.

“I have something for you.”

They were the only words that could drag my mind away from sex, and they did so just barely.

“What is it?”

Erwin thrust forward once more, pulling a surprised cry from my lips before he covered them with
his own to silence the sound. I felt them curve against mine, and then his thick arousal left my body, leaving me empty and aching to be filled by him once more. He pulled off of the bed and crossed the room to the dark cherry wood dresser that housed his best toys. Toys he hadn’t used on me yet. Toys I was dying to see.

Maybe we weren’t done for the night after all.

I turned in the bed and propped myself up on one elbow, watching in excited silence as he searched through the drawer. I didn’t even bother to hide my smile because I knew he couldn’t see it with his back turned. It was the only time I allowed the emotion to cross my lips while in his presence. I wasn’t sure what he would think of me if he saw it, and I had worked so hard to maintain my indifferent attitude while around him. For some reason I didn’t want him to know how happy he made me. I wasn’t sure if it was because I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction or because I thought he wouldn’t care.

“What are you staring at?”

The smile fell from my face as if it never belonged there, and my expression smoothed out into one of bored indifference. I raised one perfect eyebrow and rolled my shoulders as casually as I could manage in my position, glancing off to the side as I did so.

“I wasn’t staring.” I paused on the words, trying to decide if they sounded disobedient or defensive. I didn’t want him to know I cared. “I was just admiring the view.”

“Is that all you were doing?” Erwin eyed me speculatively, reading me like a book he knew all too well. I wasn’t able to hide from him no matter how much I tried, and yet I couldn’t stop myself from making the attempt.

“It’s hard not to stare at your ass.” I shrugged again as if it didn’t matter and then pushed myself up into a seated position, holding out my hand. “What do you have for me?”

Erwin grabbed my hand the second it was offered to him, his long, skillful fingers brushing in a slow circle around the skin of my wrist. He stared at the invisible path they made, his eyes lingering for a long moment of contemplative silence before he finally looked at me. He held my eyes as if he knew he had me captive and then, so slowly that I knew it was deliberate, he lowered himself down onto one knee.

“Erwin, what the fuck do you think you’re—”

“Quiet.” It was an order. One I knew I couldn’t argue with, and I followed it so quickly that my teeth snapped together. It was enough to satisfy him. “This isn’t what you think it is. At least not in that sense. Not fully. Not yet.”

Not ever.

They were silent words in my head, but they hovered in the space between us like they belonged. I knew I could never be his because he would never give her up. He had a perfect wife and perfect children in a happy little home that didn’t involve me. No matter how much I wanted it to. I was his secret. Dirty, quiet, and meant to be hidden.

No one ever married their secrets.

“She doesn’t mean anything to me, Levi.” Erwin spoke the words so suddenly that I had to wonder if I’d said anything out loud. “She might have a ring on her finger, but that’s it. It doesn’t mean anything. It’s just a lump of metal that binds me to a world of responsibilities that I never wanted.”
“Whether you want it or not, it’s your life. So what’s the point in—”

“No, Levi. You’re my life.” The words fell off his tongue so easily that I wanted to believe them. I could feel my heart hammering in my chest, giving into the way he could make me feel. I wanted to believe it. I wanted that so badly that it made me sick to think of anything else.

I felt the black leather on my wrist before I saw it, and by the time I looked down it was already latched in place. A black double band, so simple it was almost elegant, held together by the symbol for eternity. And even then I knew I shouldn’t have cared, but at that time it was the only thing that mattered to me. That sign on my wrist, the same reflected on his, both of them reminding me that we belonged together.

“This is what I want, Levi.” Erwin’s voice held so much conviction that it was impossible not to believe. I watched his lips touch my wrist and the leather resting there, and then his eyes met mine. “You are eternal to me.”

There were so many words I wanted to say, so many emotions running through my body that I was sure I would explode. I wanted to tell him how much I cared. How much it mattered. How much it meant that he would give this to me.

But instead I hid it all behind a smirk and cocked my head to the side. “Don’t be such a fucking sap, Commander.”

Normally the words would have earned me some kind of punishment, but he let it pass now. Even before saying them, I knew he would. Even if I tried to hide it, he knew everything that was going on inside me and just how difficult it was for me to show it. He let me hide behind my vulgar words and cocky smile because he knew it made me feel safe. Because he understood me. He knew me. He knew me almost as well as…

A pair of beautiful green eyes filled my vision and tore my world apart. Eyes I should have known. Eyes I shouldn’t have forgotten. That green was the only thing that mattered. Mattered more than the bracelet on my wrist. More than the man kneeling in front of me. More than a life I knew I could never have. That green was more important than all of it.

Because it was my life.

It was everything.

I gripped the bracelet and tried to pull it off, desperate to free my wrist and finding myself unable to do so. The leather was searing my skin, burning hot and leaving marks wherever it touched. It wasn’t supposed to belong there, but it seemed determined to stay. Determined to burn its scar as deep into my skin as it could get, so I would never forget that it was there. That at one point it mattered, no matter how much I tried to deny it.

I had been his.

And even to this day I was still trying to break free.

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“No!”

My eyes snapped open and I grabbed my wrist, my hand pressed flat and tight against my chest. I could feel my heart racing beneath my palm; beating so fast that I almost thought I would never get it under control. I forced my eyes shut once more and focused on my breathing, letting the air push in
and out of my lungs until my heart finally found its rhythm. It did it quickly this time, as if it had been trained to do so. Which, technically it had. This wasn’t the first time I’d had the dream since meeting Eren, and it had been surfacing more since that night. Every time I closed my eyes, I could see the bracelet, feel his touch, hear his voice.

“It’s about time you woke up.”

Even now.

I spun around on the couch and glared at Erwin with an expression that I was sure bordered on murderous. “Get out.”

“And let you wallow in your self-loathing?” Erwin eyed me from the desk, balancing my letter opener with its tip pressed against the wood. It was a little blade with a gun handle for a hilt. “I’d rather just stay and piss you off.”

“I don’t care what you’d rather do.” I snapped, “Get the fuck out of my office.”

“That’s not going to happen.”

“It will if I call security.”

“Well, wouldn’t that be interesting,” Erwin mused, fixing me with a smile. “Escorting the president of the company out of your office. Why don’t we just call them now?”

I rolled my eyes and let my head fall back against the couch, pressing one hand over my face. I didn’t have the energy to deal with this right now. “Don’t you have someone else to bother? A company to run? Interns to corrupt?”

“I think we’ve both done enough of that.”

Well there was no arguing with that one.

“As for managing the company,” Erwin continued, dropping the letter opener onto the desk. “I guess I will have to pick up the slack since you’ve been sleeping all day.”

“It wasn’t all day.”

“It was close enough.”

I pulled my hand away to fix him with a glare, but he was staring at the window behind him. The sun was still high in the sky. There was no way I had slept more than two hours, and my body was ready to back up that statement. As it was, I’d barely managed to sleep these past few nights. Either the dreams were waking me up or I was refusing to go to bed, and that second part was mostly because I didn’t want Eren to hear me. The wrong name and the wrong sounds in the middle of the night would just add to everything I’d already done.

And I wasn’t about to make this worse.

“I can’t understand why you’re punishing yourself,” Erwin spoke after a beat of silence, standing from the chair.

“Isn’t it obvious?” I muttered, running a hand through my hair as I looked to the side. It was clear that he was going to stay, but that didn’t mean I had to look at him.

“Oh, I know why,” Erwin continued. I could still feel him staring at me from across the room. “I just
“You don’t have to,” I shrugged, keeping my eyes trained on the door. I was waiting for it to pop open, but I knew it would still be a few more minutes until Eren’s lunch break.

“Actually, I do.” I could hear his footsteps, but I didn’t bother to look his way. I’d seen him enough in my dreams to last me a lifetime. “I know this is my fault. And believe it or not, I actually don’t want to ruin things between you two.”

“Well, that’s bullshit,” I angled my head to the side and almost turned in his direction, but not enough to see. “And for your information, the brat and I are doing just fine.”

“How angry is he?”

“At me?” I turned back to the door. “Not at all. But at you…”

“Well, that doesn’t surprise me.”

“It’s not like he was ever fond of you anyway.”

I could practically feel him nodding his silent agreement. “What happened after I left?”

“I took care of him.” I couldn’t keep the annoyance out of my voice. He should have known what I would’ve done. What I had planned to do before he walked out onto that stage. “Something you prevented me from doing in the first place.”

“I didn’t force you to stay up there, Levi.”

“We both know that’s not true.”

I heard the soft click of his tongue and then footsteps again. He was going to the bar. “And does he know that? Does he know why you stayed up there?”

“It’s not exactly something we sat down and talked about.” Although I was sure it was something we would have to do. Hanji’s words had been repeating themselves in my head for the past two days, and at this point I was worried it would only get worse. I didn’t know how to have the conversation with Eren, and instead I was allowing it to torture my mind. It had been popping up in my dreams and occupying every thought.

How the hell was I supposed to explain my feelings to Eren? Why did I even have to when I knew they wouldn’t make a difference? I had chosen him. Even if I felt for Erwin, it wouldn’t change anything. I knew what I wanted.

“Well, if you didn’t talk about it, then what did you do?” Erwin pushed, still probing for information. There was another reason he wanted to know this.

And I was happy to torture him with it.

“He took me to the dungeon and marked up every inch of my body to make sure it was his.” I murmured, looking over my nails as if I were rattling off a history fact. In truth, that night had been amazing. Whatever Eren had seen on stage was enough to push him into a dominant state. Enough that it even impressed me. I could still feel his hands on my body and hear his voice in my ear, growling…

Mine, mine, mine.
I had expected Erwin’s show to be foreplay for Armin and it had turned out to be exactly that for us. Not that I ever intended to do that again. Even if it had delicious consequences, it wasn’t worth the guilt I felt now. Eren could say it didn’t matter until he was blue in the face, and I would continue to feel like the scum of the Earth for not getting off that stage when I had the chance. I never needed that dance with Erwin, and unfortunately it took doing it to figure that out.

And it was too late now.

“He forgave you?” Erwin took a sip from his glass and paused. “Just like that?”

“According to him, there’s nothing to forgive. And besides, it’s not like I did it without permission.”

The glass hit the table a little too hard and I spun around on the couch to look over at him. He had his hands pressed against the marble of the bar, his shoulders hunched over and his head hanging. Even from here, I could see the agony on his face, and suddenly I knew what all of this was about.

“So this is about your little blonde,” I mused, angling my head to the side. I was almost happy to see him in pain over the mess he’d made. “Let me guess, he hasn’t talked to you at all, has he?”

“Oh, he’s talked to me plenty,” Erwin spoke softly, keeping his head bowed. “Every day and every night. All we’ve done is talk.”

“And what? You’re upset that it’s nothing more than that?” I asked, raising a brow. “What the hell did you expect him to do? Hop back into the sack on the same night?”

“It has nothing to do with being physical.” Erwin shook his head and met my eyes. “It was like that with you, but it’s not with him. This is so much more.”

Well, didn’t that just sting like a bitch.

My jaw clenched for a moment and then I controlled my face, looking away. “Right. Then what’s the problem? You’re getting all of you share bear time with cuddles the blonde, so what’s your fucking issue?”

“I have to make it up to him.”

I angled my head to the side and glanced at him. “No shit, Sherlock. We both have to grovel. But what the hell are you gonna do? Buy him a plane?”

“That’s not what he’s asked of me.”

“He asked for something?” Suddenly I was intrigued. “What did he ask for?”

Erwin was silent for a long moment and then he shut his eyes. His arms were trembling and his jaw was tight, and the words were strained to the point that I barely heard them. “Something I never thought I would do.”

I stared at him and felt the blood run cold in my veins as I realized exactly what he was planning to do. The same thing I had begged him for again and again, only to be refused every single time. He was going to give up that happy home and he was going to do it for someone that wasn’t me. And even if I didn’t want him anymore, even if I was done with that part of my life, the thought that he would pick someone else so easily and after such a short amount of time…

Made me want to kill him.
“Her?” I breathed the word, staring at him with cold eyes. “You’re going to give up everything for him?”

“I’m going to give up my past for him.”

“So, what? Is that supposed to include me?” I snapped, the anger coursing through me now. “Or do I not even factor into your past?”

“No, you’re part of my past,” Erwin whispered, his expression darkening. “And yes, you too.”

“Really?” The words were more pained than I wanted them to be. “You’re just going to give me up like it’s nothing? Is that what he asked for?”

“No, he didn’t ask for that.” Erwin shook his head slowly. “Even if he wanted it, he never would. Believe it or not, the kid likes you. He’s not about to hurt you or Eren.”

“So this is your choice.”

“Yes, it’s my choice.”

I nodded slowly and glared at the door, sure I could set it on fire with my stare alone. I had never felt this angry or betrayed before, and it was tearing me apart inside. I didn’t want him that way anymore. I didn’t love him anymore, and yet I didn’t want him to do this. I didn’t want him to give me up for someone else so easily. It wasn’t fucking fair that he could just throw me away when I could barely go a day without seeing him.

He was giving it all up, and he had never done it for me.

Never even considered it.

“You wouldn’t give her up. After all those times you said you were going to, you were never actually planning on it, right? We were never going to have a life together. You never wanted that. And you know what? The same fucking thing is going to happen to Armin.” I shook my head and stared at him with all the hatred in the world. “But the kid’s smarter than me, Erwin. It’s not going to work on him. Eventually he’s going to see that. Eventually he’ll know there is nothing more painful than belonging to you.”

“You haven’t belonged to me in a long time. You said that yourself.”

Anger twisted around in my gut and I forced myself to look away. If this was his attempt to get under my skin, I hated myself for allowing it to work. Even still, I wasn’t about to give him the satisfaction of knowing that I actually gave a fuck if he left me or not.

“I’m surprised he’s giving you the time of day after what you did.”

“You and me both,” Erwin spoke softly, his attention turning to the window. “I know I don’t deserve his forgiveness, no matter what it is I give him. But if I have a chance for it…”

“Yea, I get it, okay?” I shook my head and rubbed at my chest. “Fuck.”

“I’ve never snapped like that before. I’ve never gotten to the point where I didn’t have any control over my actions.” He was saying words I didn’t want to hear and I had a feeling it was leading to somewhere much worse than this. “But I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that it was over you.”

The words made my heart race and I hated them for it. There was no reason for that now. He didn’t
want me, and I sure as hell didn’t want him.

“Don’t say shit like that,” I snapped. “I’m not interested in hearing what you have to say about me. About us.”

“There is no us anymore.”

The words were a blade and they cut me deeper than I expected them to, but I wouldn’t let him know that.

I stared at the door and my jaw tightened. Where the fuck was Eren?

“You’re right. There’s not.” My words were clipped and my jaw was tight, but I hid every other emotion when I met his eyes. “So what are you still doing in my office?”

“You’re distancing yourself from Eren.”

I opened my mouth and snapped it shut just as quickly, turning to stare at him with an expression that was almost primal with its anger. “Eren is everything to me, and the last thing I would do is push him away. You don’t know what the fuck I’m doing, so don’t talk like you actually understand.”

“But you are pushing him away,” Erwin smiled sadly and I wanted to tear his lips off his face. “Trust me, I can tell. I was on the other end of it once.”

You still are.

I looked away from him and pushed up from the couch, trying to decide if the door was the best option. But I knew he would only follow me there. I couldn’t take this anymore. A few more seconds and I would lash out to the point of no return. I would say things I would regret. Do things I didn’t want to do.

“Levi.”

I felt his hand on my shoulder and the touch sent a burning rage through me faster than anything I had ever known. I spun around and grabbed his wrist, using all of my force to push him away.

“Don’t.” The word was a growl on my tongue. “Don’t put your hands on me. Don’t touch me anymore. You’ve fucked this all up.”

Erwin lowered his hand slowly as he stared at me, a thousand emotions in his eyes as he spoke softly. “I know I did, but I don’t want to just leave it like this.”

“You don’t get a choice. You don’t get to decide how this ends just because it’s not what you want.”

“I don’t want this to end, and this isn’t me giving up,” Erwin cut me off, “You’re a part of my life, Levi. You always will be. I don’t want to lose you.”

“You already did!” The words ripped out of my throat, but I didn’t care how loud I was now. It was like the dam had finally broke and everything was rushing out of me without any chance of holding it back. “Why the hell did you have to do that to me? Why, Erwin? Why this? Why now? Were you just waiting until things were perfect? Were you waiting for me to be happy just so you could come in and ruin it all?”

“I didn’t want to ruin anything for you. I told you, I wasn’t thinking.”

“You were thinking about something,” I snapped. “It might not have been logical, but it was there.”
“It was you.”

“God damn it!” I snapped my teeth together and my hands clenched into fists at my sides as I turned away, wanting to hide the fact that he could get to me this way. Even still. Even now. Even after all these years.

A deep sigh left his lips and he continued in a voice that was so calm I wanted to hurt him for it. “I don’t mean that the way you think I do.”

“Then how do you mean it? What other possible way was I supposed to take that?”

“You haven’t been talking to me, Levi. Not for months. Not about anything that wasn’t business.” He paused for a moment, and in the silence I wanted to scream. “When I saw you up there with him, it tore me apart. I knew it was finally over between us, and even if I was willing to accept that I couldn’t do it without having one last time with you. Even if it was just a dance. Even if it was nothing more, I needed it.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but the words were stuck in my throat.

“We never had an end,” he whispered. “And maybe you don’t need that, but I do. You meant too much for me to just shut the door on us as if you weren’t my whole fucking world.”

This was his goodbye. He was doing it now.

The entire performance, the thing that had messed with my mind for two days, was just a farewell. One last time for him to put his hands on my body before he moved on to another. Before he decided that what he had now was enough. That it was more than enough to satisfy him, and I was no longer necessary.

I was free to move on now.

And for a moment, I didn’t want to.

“You ruined it.”

The words barely made it out of my mouth and they trembled to the point that I knew my whole body was shaking. Suddenly I knew how he felt. What it was like to have your entire past ripped away before your eyes, before you were even ready to move on. Not that I would have ever been ready. I didn’t know until this point that he still had a hold on me. Despite the countless nights I’d spent in his arms years after I had claimed it was over, I never realized I was still hanging on. Holding to a hope that one day this would be better.

And now it never would be.

“Levi…”

“You ruined it all. You destroyed every fucking thing that we had. You tore it all apart.” The words fell from my lips as if they were pouring out of my heart, each one broken. “But the thing is… when I look at you, I can still remember what it was like to be yours. I can still feel it in my bones. And part of me still wants that.”

I turned to face him, holding the front of my shirt in one fist as if I could protect the heart beneath it. The one he’d already broken. I couldn’t even bring myself to care if he saw the pain and anger in my eyes now. I knew he could hear them in my voice anyway. There was no hiding what he’d done to me and for once I didn’t want to. This was my goodbye and I would leave with him knowing just
how much he’d hurt me.

And just how much I didn’t need him now.

“I hate it. I hate it more than anything, because I actually have something to be happy for. I have this beautiful, stupid brat that wants me for some fucking reason I can’t understand.”

Even now I didn’t understand. I didn’t know why he wanted me, even after he had proved it time and again. Eren wanted this despite all of the shit that came with me.

“Every morning when I wake up with him at my side, I think about how fucking lucky I am that he gives me the time of day. That he actually wants me. That he’s willing to put up with all of the shit that I put him through. And the fact that I can’t give all of myself to him because you still have part of me makes me hate you that much more.”

“Why, because you care about me?” Erwin searched my eyes and shook his head. “I’m with Armin, and I still love you. That doesn’t mean I care about him any less. We’re not given a finite amount of love, Levi. It’s not wrong to feel this way about two people.”

“It is for me,” I muttered, suddenly too exhausted to do anything else. I’d said what I needed to say, and now all I wanted to do was leave. “I’m not going to do this anymore, and neither are you. You can’t have any more of me. Not my heart. Not my body. Nothing.”

“I’m not asking for those. I know they don’t belong to me anymore.” Erwin reached out and I drew back. He paused and lowered his hand back to his side. “I just want you in my life.”

“And I just want you out of mine.”

Erwin’s expression broke me apart inside and I realized then that he never truly intended to give me up. And I wasn’t sure whether his words had been a bluff or if our past was just a physical relationship, but I knew it didn’t matter now. I wanted this to be over, regardless of what he wanted. I needed to get him out of my life and even if that meant leaving the company I would do it now. I wasn’t going to risk what I had anymore.

I wasn’t going to risk Eren over this.

I went for the door and he didn’t stop me. I knew he wouldn’t now. I’d managed to crush him with my words and it didn’t even feel like a victory. All I felt now was sick. I wanted to be out of that room and out of this building. Away from him and everything I knew. I couldn’t handle being near anyone right now and I didn’t even want to try.

Not that the universe cared much about that.

I slammed into Eren’s chest so hard that I started to stumble backwards, but his hands caught me before I had any chance to fall. For a fleeting instant, he looked surprised and then suddenly it was replaced with more concern than I had ever wanted to see in those eyes.

“Levi, what’s—”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Eren.” I cut him off, shrugging out of his hold. “I need to go.”

“What do you mean you need to go?” Eren’s attention darted to the door and then turned back to me. “What happened? Why are you shaking?”

“It’s nothing.” Even my words trembled, but I didn’t let that stop me. As desperate as I was to be in
his arms right now, I needed to be alone even more. I knew I was seconds away from falling apart or snapping entirely, and I wasn’t about to let him see that.

“No, it’s definitely something,” Eren pushed, grabbing my arm when I tried to pass him. “Levi, tell me.”

“I don’t want to talk about this, Eren.”

He opened his mouth to speak and then his eyes settled on the door, remaining there for a long moment before he finally looked back at me. His hands curled into fists at his sides and his jaw tightened. The concern was gone as if it had never been there at all, replaced with a determination that was so strong I could see it burning to the very depths of his green eyes.

And then suddenly I didn’t see his eyes at all.

“Eren!” I tried to twist free of his grip as he threw me over his shoulder, palming my ass to hold me in place. If I wasn’t already this angry, I would have actually been impressed with the brat’s strength.

He didn’t say a word as he started walking down the hall, his muscles strained as if he were devoting all of his energy to this. And I wasn’t making it easy for him. I struggled as I tried to break free of his hold, just as determined to get away as he was to keep me, but he held strong. After a moment I had to wonder if I was actually fighting as hard as I could, or if I really wanted him to take me away.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Taking you out of here whether you like it or not,” he grunted the words as he tried to hold me still, hitting the button for the elevator. “Because otherwise I’m going to go in there and tear his arms off.”

“He didn’t touch me.”

“I know he didn’t, but he hurt you and that’s reason enough for me to beat him with his fucking arms anyway.”

“You’re overreacting, you shitty brat. Put me down!” The words were a growl on my lips as I twisted back to grab his arm. He jerked me once and pushed me closer to his neck. I could have sworn I heard him laugh. “Eren! Damn it, I’m not kidding. I don’t want to—”

Eren pulled me off his shoulder and shoved me into the corner of the elevator the second the doors opened.

How was it that we always ended up in here?

I stared up at Eren as he set his hands firmly against the walls on either side of my shoulders, locking me in place. Not that I was going to try to fight him now. I didn’t think I would be able to when I was staring up into those eyes. I’d avoided looking at him as much as possible, and the sight of him now was almost enough to make my heart hammer right out of my chest.

Good fucking god, the brat was beautiful.

“I’m taking you to lunch.”

So he just carted my ass into the elevator for a snack?

“I’m not hungry.”

“Neither am I.” Eren shrugged and then paused just long enough to hit the button for the ground
floor. “But we need to talk about this. And we can’t do that here.”

The fact that we had to talk about it at all was almost enough to send me back into my office, but I knew Eren would just follow me there. The look in his eyes, determined and strong, told me I didn’t have a fucking chance of getting out of this. We were going to talk, and I knew he wouldn’t let me leave until I had gotten everything out.

And by then I wouldn’t want to.

The only question would be whether or not he would still want me after this.

“What? So we’re going to talk about this at some fancy fucking restaurant?” My tone was sharp, but I was already giving into him. “Tell me, brat, how is that any better?”

“Who said anything about being fancy?” Eren raised a brow and for a moment there was amusement in his eyes. “Have you met me? My fancy is Colossal’s and somehow I don’t think that’s in your taste.”

“So where are you taking me?”

“Home.”

Now it was my turn to be amused. “We don’t have that long of a lunch break.”

“I’m pretty sure that the vice president of the company will be able to work something out once he gets his head out of his ass.”

My eyebrows shot up as if they wanted to fly straight off my head, and I couldn’t decide whether I was pissed off or impressed. It was rare for Eren to talk to me that way, especially now, and I wasn’t sure what it meant for us.

“Excuse me?”

“Look, I don’t know what the hell is going on right now, but obviously we need to talk about it.” The concern in his eyes made me want to tell him everything now. I didn’t want secrets between us and until now I had no idea I’d been keeping them.

“I’m not going to let this get worse.” Eren continued, his words strained, “I’m not going to lose you. I don’t care what it is. I don’t even care if you’re in love with him, just fucking talk to me about it, okay?”

I felt my eyes widen before I could stop them, but I had no other choice when he said those words. Words I never expected to hear out of his mouth, especially when he was telling me they didn’t matter. Not that they really did. I had felt that way once and it was lingering now, but it was nothing compared to how I felt for him.

I was head over fucking heels for this kid.

This perfect, beautiful brat that knew me better than I knew myself.

“I’m not in love with him anymore.”

And I wasn’t. He was a part of my life and he always would be in some way, but the feelings I had for him now weren’t the same. They weren’t what I felt all those years ago, back when I still wanted to be his. I’d been confused before, but I knew what I wanted now that I was staring into his eyes.
Erwin was my past and he would stay that way. As deeply as I felt for him, it didn’t compare to what I was feeling right now.

Here in this small elevator. With the only man I wanted in my life.

And it wasn’t Erwin. It could never be. There was never any chance of that.

I was always going to choose Eren. That was where my path would lead and it was the only place I wanted to go. The only place I wanted to be. The only place I would ever call home.

I didn’t need to hold onto my past anymore.

I was staring into the eyes of my future.
YAY! THURSDAY! And I think I might be just a tad earlier than usual with this update, too. XD

Ah, this chapter... I have many feelings about this chapter. Hopefully you'll all enjoy it! I'm personally fond of the end, but I think that's mostly because Levi was not too keen on talking about his emotions. But the boys needed to have this talk and... well, you'll see. XD I'm actually very excited for the next chapter for a number of reasons. One of those being a special POV.

Thank you all so much for the comments you left on the last chapter! I'm actually going to answer the two main questions I got right here. XD

**Will you be writing Erwin / Levi's past relationship?**

Yep! I actually have a prequel planned that will focus on Levi and Erwin - it will definitely be an Eruri fic. So for anyone interested in that, please stay tuned.

**Will you write out Eren's domination scene in full?**

Possibly, but it won't be an update in this actual fic. There's a lot of stuff coming up in *The Intern* that I want to focus on right now, and smut isn't really one of them at the moment. However, if I do write out that scene in full, I will either post it as a separate thing like *The Valentine*, or it will be up on the tumblr blog 'The Wall' which is linked on my blog.

A huge thank you to thenewinshayneity for sharing three beautiful fan art pieces of Eren, Armin, and Corporal! If you haven't already seen them, please check them out! ^__^ We've also had some new cosplayers for *The Intern* this week! Please check out ask-a-armin for Intern!Armin and askinternhanji for Intern!Hanji! ^__^

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

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This wasn’t how it was supposed to go.

Back when I stared up at the two of them on that stage, I’d felt a moment of intense fear that somehow gave way to complete understanding. I hadn’t even wanted to understand at the time. Hell, I wanted to go up on that stage and drag him off and leave a blood stained Erwin behind. That was what I thought I would do. That was what everyone expected me to do. Even him.

But I didn’t.

Two days later I was still trying to figure out why I had sat in that audience and watched him. Why it
had been so easy, too easy, to know he was up there with him and not do a thing about it. I had watched Armin fume over Erwin until he was able to get his emotions under control and his mind set in place, but I hadn’t felt the same way. I wasn’t even upset.

At first it terrified me. I’d thought for a moment that somehow I’d become indifferent to him. It wasn’t really like me not to fight for what was mine. But then I realized it was exactly because of that. Because he was mine. Fully and completely. More than anyone ever had been or would be. I had no reason to charge up on that stage and drag him off because he wasn’t really up there anyway. His body was moving through the motions of a song, dancing his farewell to a past he didn’t want, but his heart was in the audience with me.

I had no reason to fear because I knew I wasn’t going to lose him. Not to Erwin. Not to anyone.

And it wasn’t that I didn’t care that he was on stage with him. Part of me cared about that more than I wanted to admit, more than I would admit, but it didn’t matter. None of that mattered the moment I saw that look in his eyes. A look that was begging for me to understand. A look that told me he needed this even more than he was aware. He needed this ending.

Because he was still in love with him.

Even if he wanted to tell me that wasn’t the case, I knew it was. I didn’t need to be standing outside the office when they had their conversation, but it sure as hell helped. Of course at the same time it made everything that much worse. I hated the fact that he still felt anything for him. I wanted to pretend that it wasn’t true at all. I wanted to give myself the permission to fall apart and scream, to treat this as so much more than it needed to be.

When really it was nothing.

I understood his need for revenge now, and it had less to do with his father than I thought. It was true that he wanted to put the company in someone else’s hands, but that was only because he wouldn’t leave it to Erwin alone. He didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of letting him win in the end, but at the same time he wasn’t about to stay. Levi needed to get away from him because he was finally ready to let go of the past. All of the other times where Levi had tried and failed were all because he hadn’t been ready to move on.

But he was ready now.

And it was because of me.

Of course, that was if he didn’t try to let me go before then. He’d done everything these past two days to make our relationship seem perfect, but there was a darkness lingering beneath the surface of every gesture. A deep-seated guilt in his eyes that hadn’t faded away since that night, and it had gotten to the point where it was terrifying me now. I’d expected him to talk about it, and yet he’d done nothing but shove it further down inside. He was burying his feelings rather than worrying me, and I was sick of it.

I wasn’t a fucking child and I wouldn’t let him treat me that way.

I was going to get every word, every worry, every fear out of his throat no matter what they were. Because I didn’t care at this point. I couldn’t work with silence, and I sure as hell wasn’t going to let him ruin himself any further.

“Talk.”

My voice was sharp enough to be a command and I was actually proud of it. I’d managed to grow
stronger these past two days and it was mostly because I was beginning to realize just how comfortable I really was. Both with him and this lifestyle. I could order him now.

Or at least fall to my knees trying.

Levi paused two steps into the apartment and turned to stare at me as he tugged his cravat loose.

“Well, you really are a demanding little shit today, aren’t you?”

“I watched you walk out of your office shaking and you told me to go away,” I shot back, “How exactly were you expecting me to react after that?”

“I’ve learned not to expect anything with you, kid,” Levi murmured, giving one final pull at the cloth before letting it hang around his neck.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing offensive, if you’re taking it that way.” Levi eyed me for a moment and then started walking in the direction of the kitchen. “Which clearly you are.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Am I supposed to read your mind?” I followed after him, feeling a sudden anger boil inside me. “Because honestly, that’s all I feel like I’ve been doing lately.”

“Are you going to get on my ass now, too?” Levi reached into the cabinet and snagged two glasses. “It’s been a long day already and—”

“It’s only lunch time.”

“And it feels like it’s been a fucking year.” Levi smacked the glasses down on the counter and stared at me. “What do you expect me to say?”

“You had plenty to say to him,” I shrugged and glanced in the direction of the window. I didn’t want him to know just how jealous that actually made me feel, even if I had no reason to be. Erwin wasn’t getting the silent treatment and I was. I hated being in the dark like this. “I don’t see why you can’t talk to me.”

“I can’t talk to you because you’re not even looking at me.” Levi was silent for a moment and then I heard the fridge open. And close. He was filling the glasses. “You want me to be honest with you, but you’re not exactly doing the same with me. How can you expect me to open up with my feelings when I don’t even know how you feel?”

“I already told you how I feel.”

“No, you’ve told me how you think I want you to feel,” Levi snapped back, opening the fridge once more. I kept my eyes trained on the window, scared they would betray me if I looked at him. “And that’s not even real, Eren. I don’t want a lie.”

Our entire relationship had been built upon one, so it would make sense if we were living in one now.

Even still, I didn’t think that I was lying. I thought I was okay with this. I never meant to do any of this to please him.

“I really fucked you up, didn’t I?”

I turned away from the window and glanced at him, watching as he leaned into the kitchen island
and fixed me with a stare that held one too many emotions. I hated that look in his eyes. I was almost willing to do anything to make it go away.

And maybe that was why I did it after all.

“You didn’t do anything,” I shook my head and then shrugged. “I did.”

The words felt like they belonged on my tongue and I didn’t understand them at all. I shook my head and touched my lips, staring down at the floor as confusion wrapped around me. Why did I say that?

“No,” Levi murmured, setting his glass down. “No kid, you didn’t do a damn thing. You didn’t do anything wrong. The only thing you’ve done is trying to make me happy. And that’s the problem.”

“How is that a problem?”

“Because you’re sacrificing your own happiness for it and I don’t want that.” Levi paused for a moment and in the silence I had to look up. His jaw was strained tight and he was staring down at the counter, lost in contemplative thought. “I’m sorry I did that to you in Paris.”

The fountain flew through my mind instantly, but that couldn’t have been what he meant. That had been my fault, and I knew it.

“I messed up in Paris.”

“And so did I,” Levi said simply, lifting his eyes to meet mine. “I’m not saying you were in the right, Eren, but I was definitely in the wrong. Like it or not, you’re a kid, and I didn’t handle that the way I should have.”

“But after what I said…”

“They were just words,” he cut me off. “And yea, they hurt like a bitch, but that’s no excuse for what I did. It’s not like you intentionally tried to hurt me. You just said the wrong thing and I took it the wrong way.”

I shook my head slowly as I walked towards him. “What does that have to do with now? How did that fuck me up?”

“Because you’ve been scared to doubt me ever since.”

I wanted to be confused, but all at once I knew it was true. At least partially. I had been treading carefully since that day, and it was only because I knew the reason we had come so close to ending was because of my own doubts. He’d felt like I didn’t trust him at all, and I almost lost him because of it. I’d been doing everything I could not to make him feel that way again, but I didn’t realize it had gotten in the way of my own feelings.

Because I didn’t really think it had.

I still knew what I wanted. I wasn’t fooling myself. And I wasn’t about to lie just to please him.

I was jealous of Erwin, even if I didn’t want to admit it. It was impossible not to be given their past. But even still, I knew that Levi was mine. That was still the driving force behind my willingness to give Levi his last moment on stage. It hadn’t just been because I was worried he would think that I didn’t trust him anymore. I wasn’t about to live my life in fear over something like that, even if it was for Levi.
FUCK WHAT HAPPENED IN PARIS. I WAS STILL MY OWN PERSON WITH MY OWN CHOICES, AND I WASN’T GOING TO LET HIM DIMINISH THAT.

“T’M NOT SCARED TO DOUBT YOU.” I SET MY HANDS DOWN ON THE ISLAND BETWEEN US AND LEANED CLOSE. “BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHAT? I DID DOUBT YOU FOR A MOMENT UP THERE. I’D BE LYING IF I SAID I DIDN’T. BUT WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU EXPECT? HE’S YOUR EX. OF COURSE I’M NOT GOING TO BE THRILLED ABOUT IT.”

“THEN WHY DIDN’T YOU STOP IT?”

“T’LL TELL ME YOU DIDN’T NEED IT.”

Levi opened his mouth, but the words didn’t come out. I already knew they wouldn’t because they’d be a lie if they did.

And Levi hated lies more than anything.

“That’s why I didn’t stop it.”

“That’s your logic?” Levi shook his head, his expression beyond perplexed. “That doesn’t even make sense, Eren. Aren’t you worried that I’m going to leave you for him?”

“ARE YOU?”

“No.” The word rushed out of Levi so quickly that I knew it was the truth. Even though I had already known the answer before he said it. “No. God, no.”

“Then I don’t have any reason to worry.” I stretched my arms out across the island and set my hands on his. “And believe it or not, I already knew that.”

His hands instantly latched onto mine, our fingers lacing together. “I don’t see how you can’t be jealous over him.”

“Oh, I’m jealous,” I replied with a small smile, tilting my head to look down at our hands. “But I know what’s mine and I know I’m not going to lose it.”

Levi flinched and tried to pull his hands away, but I held them tighter and met his eyes.

“I need you to talk to me, Levi,” I searched his gaze and squeezed his hands, unwilling to let him go. “Even if you think you’re going to say things I don’t want to hear, I need to hear them.”

“Why would I upset you that way?” Levi looked down at our hands and his jaw tightened once more. “You’re just going to act like they don’t bother you and then they’ll be eating at you, too.”

“You don’t really believe that.”

Levi lifted his eyes to mine and raised a brow.

“Well, I mean, if you did then you wouldn’t have said that on stage.” I shrugged, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. Which to me it was. I had figured it out days ago. That night, in fact. It was the whole reason I let him do it in the first place. “You were worried that I was going to hate you. If you really believed that you messed me up in Paris, then you wouldn’t have to worry about things like that. You’d be able to hurt me and I’d stay anyway but you don’t actually believe that, do you? That’s not what this is about. You just don’t want to say it.”

“Armin’s had a real influence on you, kid.”
“I just like to think that I’ve gotten better at reading you,” I smiled and shrugged. He was starting to ease into my touch now. “And just so you know, you didn’t mess me up in Paris. I’m stronger than that. This isn’t about some need to please you. This is about me actually trusting you. Whether you think you deserve it or not.”

Levi searched my eyes for a long moment, the silence stretching on between us until I was worried he’d given up speaking entirely. But then he shook his head and looked down, his thumb brushing against mine.

“I still should have handled it differently.”

“Well, you can’t do anything about that now. It’s in the past. Over and done with.” And it was. It had been for months and I’d grown from the experience. As painful as it had been at the time, I wouldn’t change a thing about it. We needed that, just like we needed this now. “So do something about this instead.”

A sigh rushed out of his lips and he glanced up at me. “Are you sure this is what you want, kid? You might not like what you hear.”

“Well, you can’t do anything about that now. It’s in the past. Over and done with.” And it was. It had been for months and I’d grown from the experience. As painful as it had been at the time, I wouldn’t change a thing about it. We needed that, just like we needed this now. “So do something about this instead.”

“A sigh rushed out of his lips and he glanced up at me. “Are you sure this is what you want, kid? You might not like what you hear.”

“I wonder about that,” he murmured, sliding his glass over and holding it between his hands. He stared down at the amber liquid and angled his head to the side. “I don’t want you to take things the wrong way.”

“I’m pretty sure I’ve heard it all at this point.” I took another sip, watching his expression darken. “And seen it all, after The Wall.”

“What do you mean you’ve heard it all?”

I faltered, realizing I’d let something slip. I hadn’t intended to tell him that I had heard everything outside the door. I had a feeling that would only make things worse. “Well... I...”

“I’m sorry,” he cut me off, still staring down at his drink. “I didn’t mean for you to hear any of that. Fuck, I didn’t even mean to say any of that.”

He took a swig from his glass and met my eyes, and in them I could see the truth. And I was okay with it. “Yes, you did.”

He held my gaze for a moment longer and then finally he set his cup down. “Yea. I did.”

“Did it help?”

“Are you really asking that?” Levi cocked one eyebrow, watching me with a bemused expression. “You heard everything I said to my ex, everything I’m feeling, and you want to know if it helped?”

My brow furrowed slightly. I didn’t see why it was such a confusing question. “Is that a no?”

“No, it’s a fucking yes.” He slid the drink away and shook his head. “I just don’t understand why you’re concerned.”

And here I thought it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Because I love you.”
“Even after what you heard?” It was clear in his eyes that he didn’t believe it. He was still waiting for me to decide that I didn’t want to stay with him after all. That what he had done was unforgiveable and I was better off without him.

“Was hearing that supposed to make a difference?” I shoved my glass down onto the marble and crossed the kitchen to him. I was sick of having the counter between us. I didn’t want anything standing between us, space or otherwise. “It’s only been a few months, Levi. I can’t expect you to scrub him away from your life just like that. He’s been a part of you for so many years, and I know that doesn’t just go away. I fucking hate it. I hate him and I hate that this is even an issue, but I get it.”

“Why?” The word came out sharp and fast as he slammed his fist against the counter, spinning around to face me. “Why are you able to understand this? How can you just overlook what I did?”

“What you did?” I walked towards him, shaking my head as if it could clear the confusion. I had no idea he’d been this angry. No idea that he’d been bottling this all up. There was so much self-hatred in his eyes it made me sick. “Levi, what do you even think you did up there? Do you think you had a live sex show? That you forced me to watch? You just danced. That was it. I mean hell; you’ve even done that with Hanji and Petra. It doesn’t mean anything, it’s just a show.”

“But it meant something with him,” he spoke through clenched teeth, his arm trembling as he gripped his fist tighter. “It meant something and you know that.”

“So what if it did? You already said that you don’t want him. And if you did, then you’d be with him. It’d be too fucking easy and I know that. If you wanted him, he wouldn’t refuse you. And you know what? I don’t even blame him for that. No one in his right mind would give you up.”

The truth spilled from my tongue like it was nothing. Words that should have upset me, but they didn’t. Actually, they did the opposite. The fact that they weren’t together now told me just how much he wanted to be with me. Because I knew it would be that easy. Levi could have him in an instant, but he didn’t want that life. He wanted this one.

“Please don’t put me on a fucking pedestal.” Levi pulled his arm away from the counter and took his drink with him, his brow creased with annoyance. “Not after what I did to you.”

“Levi, you didn’t do anything,” I stressed each word, wanting nothing more than to beat him over the head with them. “You danced, and not even well enough to make me jealous. I mean, hell, you didn’t even look like you enjoyed it.”

“That’s because I didn’t.” He threw back the rest of the drink and then slid the glass into the sink. “All I could think about was you.”

“Then you weren’t really up there with him.”

Which was exactly how I saw it. Erwin didn’t dance with Levi on stage, I did. I was the one who had been up there with him that night, and even when I had to sit and watch he was still with me. I couldn’t be jealous over nothing.

“I was still up there,” Levi muttered, turning to wash the glass. I tried to fight the amusement off my face, but I lost. Even angry and emotional, he was still ready to clean. “I don’t see why it matters whether I enjoyed it or not. Honestly, I expected you to hate me either way.”

“I was never going to hate you, even if you did like it.” My stomach turned at the thought. “Although I’m glad you didn’t.”
“You and me both, kid.” He dried the glass with a towel, taking his time. I had a feeling he was trying not to look at me.

“You really thought I was going to hate you?”

“I was worried you were going to think I set it all up.” He angled his head to the side and shrugged, eyeing me. “I guess I’m just used to you reacting more than that.”

“I probably would have a few months ago.” I admitted, “Everything was still new then, and I didn’t trust us yet. But I do now. And honestly, what do I even have to be jealous for? What reason do I have to throw a temper tantrum just because you danced? I could do the same thing with Armin and you wouldn’t say anything.”

“That’s different,” Levi rolled his eyes. “You don’t feel that way about Armin.”

“I feel enough for him that I could,” I shot back. “So what if I did? Would that make a difference?”

“Even if you loved the little mushroom, it’s not the same.” He set the glass down and turned to me, folding his arms. “You haven’t been cornering each other in the office and talking about a relationship you never really ended.”

“Would you hate me if I was?”

Levi stared at me for a long moment and then the corner of his mouth twitched. “You’d have to do more than that to get me to hate you, kid.”

“Then why do you feel like I have to hate you for this?”

“Because I hate myself for this.” He pushed a hand through his hair and looked to the side. “Honestly, I thought it was done. The fact that it’s still happening now just makes me sick.”

He pushed away from the counter and started walking towards the living room, and I followed him as if we were connected.

“Then we’ll get rid of him.”

He gave a short laugh and glanced at me. “You sound like Hanji.”

“Well, good,” I grinned, knowing that was a compliment coming from him. “Then I have a partner in crime.”

“I’d rather your asses not end up in jail.” He paused and leaned back against the couch with his legs crossed at the ankle, looking over his nails. “Although I’m sure Hanji could handle herself. At least more than you could.”

“That’s only if we get caught.”

My smile grew as I walked towards him, determined to leave no distance between us. Especially not now that I could see the playfulness in his eyes and feel it buzzing in the air. It was the most normal we’d been in two days and even without saying anything, I knew this talk had helped him. He’d been perfect with me before, but he was real with me now. Whatever pain had been there was starting to heal over. We had fixed it. At least where our relationship was concerned.

And now the only thing that remained was Erwin.

“Knowing the two of you, that’s the most likely outcome.” There was a small smirk on his lips now
that had my heart skipping. “You’d probably trip in the blood and make it look like someone finger painted the room.”

“I’d make the little turkeys just for you,” I teased, holding my hands up and wiggling my fingers. “I mean, if I’m going to get caught then I might as well make it look good.”

Levi rolled his eyes and grabbed the back of my head, jerking me down to his height to claim my lips in a kiss that was far too brief. “Let’s try to keep your hands out of the blood, okay? I’d lose my source of entertainment if you were locked up.”

“Source of entertainment?” I raised a brow, “What the hell am I to you, a TV?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” His voice was sarcastically sharp. “I already have at least five of those, and you’re not even big enough to be a TV.”

“Look who’s talking.”

A smirk curved his lips and he raised a brow, watching me through his lashes with a look I knew far too well. He angled his head slowly to the side and stepped closer, closing the space between us. “I could make you pay for that, brat.”

“I’m not sure that’s a threat,” I murmured, eyeing his lips. They looked so good I was almost ready to give in. But I knew this was a distraction. He was trying to throw me off the conversation, and he’d done it so seamlessly I almost didn’t notice at all. Of course, sex was always an easy way to derail me. But this was more important. “Levi…”

“There’s nothing else to add. Trust me, if there was I’d tell you.”

And somehow I knew that was true. Everything I heard behind the door and everything we said here was everything he felt inside. There were no secrets between us, at least not on his end, and that was the most I could ask for. As long as I knew what he was feeling and as long as he kept telling me, I knew I could handle this. No matter what direction this turned in, I could find a way to keep him from falling apart.

Because he had always held me together.

And I had to return that favor.

“So we’re okay?”

Levi regarded me for a moment and then suddenly he grabbed my shoulders, spinning our bodies around so quickly that I had no choice but to obey. He slammed me down onto the couch and pushed his body into mine, the thick pulse between his legs urging me to forget everything else. Everything but this.

“Kid, we’re fucking perfect.” His voice was a purr at my ear now, his lips curving into a smirk. I could feel the world blurring around me, and I couldn’t bring myself to care.

Because right now there was only us.

And we really were fucking perfect.

“But I’m still going to make you pay for that comment.”

I felt his nails digging into my hips and suddenly I wasn’t sure whether I was supposed to be aroused
or terrified. Although knowing him it would be a little of both. He had a way of twisting the pain and
pleasure until I didn’t know what I was feeling, and I’d found myself craving that lately. As much as
I enjoyed trying to dominate him, I felt so much more when I was on my knees. He was a master in
more ways than one, and I knew I would never be able to compare.

But that didn’t mean I didn’t have any control.

“You called me a TV…” It was a pathetic protest at best and he knew it, but it was my way of
spurring him on. I’d learned over that past few months that I wasn’t supposed to argue with the
Corporal, and in my defense I didn’t. Not technically, anyway. Not enough to earn me an actual
punishment. Just enough to piss him off and dig those nails a little deeper.

And he never disappointed.

A strangled sound caught in my throat as my cock pressed into my pants, strained tight and begging
for release. Levi angled his head to the side and glanced down between us, a wicked smile curving
his lips and filling me with dread. Shit.

“Did I, Jaeger?” He gripped the sides of my pants and jerked them down, leaning over me with his
lips a breath away from mine. If I had thought my pants felt tight before, it was nothing compared to
now. It sent a stinging pain through me, excruciating with its demand. “I remember calling you a
source of entertainment. Which obviously you are.”

A guttural sound stirred in the back of my throat and I felt my cheeks flush at the sound of his voice.
“C-Corporal… please…”

He made a soft sound of amusement in the back of his throat, regarding me like a cat would its prey.
If he let me go now, it would only be because he found something better to do with me. And I was
getting the feeling that I wouldn’t like that. At least not entirely. He’d allowed me to play master for
the past two days, and it seemed he was making up for lost time now.

He was going to have fun with me.

And I wanted that more than anything, regardless of what it was.

“You’re going to strip for me, brat.”

Except maybe that.

“Strip?” I tried not to make a face, and by his smirk I could tell I failed. “You’re not serious, right?”

“I’m pretty sure if I try to take your clothes off now, there’s not going to be anything left.” A hiss left
my lips as I felt his nails dig in again, and I realized he was trying to prove a point. “It’s more for you
than me.”

I had a feeling that was complete bullshit.

“I don’t even like what I’m wearing, and I have more in the bedroom.” I murmured, purposely
keeping my voice low and deep. I watched him shiver and suppressed a satisfied smile. “Strip me,
Corporal…”

And for a second, I actually thought he would.

But I should have learned by now that I never won in the bedroom.
“On second thought…” I felt his breath hot on my neck and knew I could never sound like him. That low. That deep. That sexually arousing. I probably sounded like fucking Mickey Mouse in comparison. “Maybe it is more for me than you.”

He jerked me suddenly and I hit the floor, scrambling up to stare at him in surprise. I didn’t even realize the couch wasn’t under me anymore until I was sitting here on my hands and knees. How he could move that fast, I would never know. He was lounging on the couch now, his legs crossed at the ankle and his arms behind his head. There was a smug smirk on his lips and he angled his head to the side as he raised one perfect eyebrow.

“Don’t make me tell you again.”

I opened my mouth and shut it just as quickly, knowing I had no chance of getting out of this one. Pulling off my socks, I tossed them in the direction of my shoes by the door. It wasn’t like I would need them anyway. I pushed myself up and stood, pausing for a moment to dig in my pocket for my phone.

If I had to do this, he was going to enjoy it just as much as I did.

“What are you doing, brat?”

“Putting on some mood music,” I muttered, swiping my thumb across the screen. “Unless you wanted me to strip in silence.”

“I swear, brat, if you put on fucking Barney or Spice Girls…”

“Have you been looking through my phone again?” I glanced at him, an amused smile teasing my lips. “Seriously, what the hell do you think I listen to?”

“Barney and Spice Girls.”

I rolled my eyes and caught sight of his smirk before returning my attention to my phone. My finger paused over the title ‘Whipped Cream -- Ludo’ and I had to stifle a laugh. I already knew exactly what I would be doing, and this just so happened to be the perfect song for it. Because I’d learned long ago that I wasn’t a sexy stripper. Hell, I hadn’t even come close after hours and hours of practice. And I thought Levi knew that, but apparently he had forgotten.

And this would be his reminder.

I tossed my phone to the side and onto a chair as the song started up, striking a pose with my arm out to the side as I did so. I threw my left hand behind my head and slowly ran it down through my hair as I bounced my hips from side to side. Literally, it was the only thing I was good at when it came to this and I was prepared to use it plenty. Even if Hanji told me it didn’t count.

A second button followed the first and I gripped the sides of the shirts and pulled them apart to reveal my chest as I worked my hips in a slow circle, knowing I was far more ridiculous than sensual and not really giving a damn. All I cared about was the smile that was slowly growing on his lips, and I could actually see it full force when I started to slowly thrust my hips forward with the song.

And they weren’t seductive thrusts by any means, but that was kind of the point. I chose this song
and this dance with the full intent of looking as absurd as possible. And as I gripped my hands into fists and jerked them at my sides with each painfully slow thrust, I knew I’d accomplished just that.

“Fuck, Jaeger, this isn’t what I meant…”

Levi rolled his eyes and shook his head, but there was no annoyance there. Everything had been too serious lately and I was sure he needed this just as much as I did. I was the only one he could really laugh around, aside from Hanji and Petra, and he hadn’t done it in days. And now he would. Even if it meant spoiling the mood, I knew it would be worth it.

And I was sure he wouldn’t want to fuck me after this.

I might actually have to judge him if he did.

I ripped the shirt the rest of the way and the buttons popped off in all directions as I threw my head back dramatically, pressing my chest out as far as it would go. Which would have probably been impressive if I had anything to show. I swung the shirt once around my head, waggling my eyebrows as I tossed the lump of fabric at his face. Or at least I tried. He was too fast and caught it easily in one hand, balling it up and throwing it in the direction of the kitchen.

“Well, that’s trash now.”

It sounded like he cared as little as I did about the shirt, and even if he was mad I knew I was forgiven the second his eyes were on my hips. Yet another button gone and I was rolling down the zipper, my hips still bouncing with the music. If anything, it was an easy beat to follow and the dance was meant to be obnoxious. I had to say I was doing a perfect job.

I dropped my pants and sent them sailing in the direction of the shirt. I heard them hit and focused my eyes on Levi, hooking my thumbs into the band of my boxer briefs. He raised one eyebrow as if to ask me if I was absolutely insane, and I pulled on the band with each thrust as a response. I felt beyond ridiculous and part of me wanted to crawl into a deep hole and die, but the smile on his lips made all of that fade away. He was the only thing that mattered.

It was the first time he’d been like this in days and I didn’t want it to end. More than anything, more than breathing, I knew that I wanted to keep that smile there forever.

I ripped off my boxers and threw them aside, not bothering to watch where they would land. I wasn’t planning to use them anytime soon, and I was sure he wasn’t going to let me. Even if it was only because he was punishing me for this show.

And I was perfectly fine with that.

The music continued around me, but as his eyes stilled on my arousal I felt it fade away. There was a hunger in his eyes that was quickly replacing the amusement and I felt my cheeks flush as my heart began to race. He was staring at me like I was a dish he wanted to eat, and all I wanted right now was to be devoured. Suddenly the song didn’t matter. The dance didn’t matter. I didn’t care how stupid I must have looked. I needed him now.

And I was going to have him.

“Get your ass over here, you—” Levi’s words caught in his throat and his eyes went wide as he shot up straight on the couch, staring behind me.

“OH MY GOD!”
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

YAAAAAY! IT'S THURSDAY! ^__^ Which means everyone gets to find out who walked in on that lovely striptease. Although most of you already guessed it. XD I was actually surprised with how many people got it right. o_o Or mostly right. There is technically more than one person there... but everyone more or less guessed who screamed at the end.

This chapter will also be in two separate POVs, and I did mention that one of them is special. Not so special that you haven't heard them before, though. So I'm sure you can probably guess who it might be at this point. XD

Oh! And if you haven't already seen it, ask-titanboy69 did the dance at the end of Chapter 45! It's on my blog under the Intern Cosplay tab. You can also find all the other pics of the Intern cosplayers there as well. ^__^

Also, since I figured I might as well mention it here, I will be going to Otakon this year! ^_^ If anyone would be interested in meeting up, please let me know on tumblr!

Thank you all so much for all of your comments on the last chapter - I know, that cliffhanger was a little evil. I was actually going to add an extra line that would tell you who it was but my roommate begged me not to, so you can thank her for that one. XD Although the cliffhanger wasn't a bad one - hopefully you'll all enjoy the scene it leads into. ^__^

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Eren

I knew that voice.

Honestly, I didn’t even need to see the expression on Levi’s face to know that I shouldn’t turn around. That it would be the worst possible choice I could make in a situation like this. I should have just run at full speed into the bedroom and saved us all a lifetime of emotional scarring and therapy. It would have been the best option in the end, if I could have just gotten my legs to cooperate. Of course, the only thing they seemed intent on doing was spinning me around.

“No, no, no!” Mikasa cried out, her hands flying over her eyes as she turned away. “Why the hell did you have to turn around? Damn it, Eren! My eyes!”

And her eyes weren’t the only ones on me.

Petra stood there, clutching two bags in her hands, her eyes wide and wandering. She blinked a few
times and then looked down and away, a blush staining her cheeks as she cleared her throat. “U-uhm… we brought… food.”

“You should have told us we were having sausages!” Hanji’s smile was stretched wide from ear to ear, her hands on her hips as she surveyed the room as if nothing was wrong. “I would have brought some buns.”

I heard Levi snicker from behind me and spun around to face him.

“Oh wait, there they are!”

I jerked the one cushion out from under Levi’s feet and shoved it up against my hips. My cheeks went beet red as Levi’s smile grew, amusement shining in his eyes. It would have actually been a beautiful sight if I weren’t currently standing bare-assed and erect in front of a room full of people. Of course, the second problem was quickly taking care of itself; I was pretty damn sure I would never be aroused again after this.

“Can we not talk about sausages while my brother’s dick is out?” Mikasa shouted, pointing to the side. Her other hand was still pressed against her eyes. “Eren, go put on some clothes or something! Anything!”

“Right!” I shouted and darted over to where I was almost positive I threw my boxers. I flipped over the back of the chair, my hand pressed against my ass as if it would give me some modesty, and stared at the empty floor.

They weren’t there.

“Shit!”

“I believe your pants went that way, kid,” Levi smirked, pointing his thumb in the direction of the pile. But I already knew that was just my shirt and pants. I had made such a display of flinging my boxers away that I didn’t bother to make sure that they actually ended up in the same pile.

“Yea, but my boxers are—”

“Why do you need boxers?” Mikasa cut me off. “Just put on your pants!”

“Without underwear?”

“Eren, I don’t care if you stick it in a goddamn paper towel roll, just cover it up!”

Levi pointed at me before I could even think to move, fixing me with what was supposed to be an intimidating stare. The amusement in his eyes ruined it. “Don’t you dare fuck my paper towels, brat.”

I wasn’t even sure if it was possible for my embarrassment to get any worse, but for some reason everyone seemed determined to prove me wrong. Even still, the look on Levi’s face actually made it worth it. I was willing to suffer this humiliation if it meant he would laugh again.

I rolled my eyes and bit back my own smile, walking towards the small pile and snatching my pants from the floor. “It wouldn’t fit anyway.”

“Oh my god!” Mikasa shouted, practically hopping in place with the force of her disgust. She shook her hands at her sides, but kept her eyes closed. “I did not want to know that!”

“But it’s true.” Hanji grinned, “Levi’s a lucky, lucky man.”
Levi slowly angled his head to the side, eyeing my hips with a lingering hunger that would have actually caused me a problem if I weren’t still mortified.

Mikasa put her hands back over her face and groaned. “I think I need to lie down.”

Levi glanced over at her, raising a brow. “I’d offer you a cushion, but I really don’t think you’d want it.”

“Bite me, shortie,” Mikasa snapped back. “You should have warned us before I got an eyeful of my brother’s junk. I’m going to have to use bleach to get that out of my head.”

A smirk twitched on Levi’s lips. “Second drawer under the sink.”

Mikasa pressed one hand flat over her eyes and flipped him off with the other. “Don’t even start with me right now. You’re still on my shit list.”

“Mikasa…” I frowned, jerking my pants up to my hips. Everyone else had forgiven him at this point, but she couldn’t seem to let it go. Not that I was really surprised. Even before I had decided to tell her, I knew she was going to react that way. It almost made me want to keep it to myself, but I figured we had enough secrets floating around between us already.

And she was bound to find out anyway.

“Are you dressed yet?” she muttered, keeping her hand pressed over her face.

“Yea, yea,” I rolled my eyes again, bending down to snatch my shirt up from the ground. Not that it would do me much good with half the buttons torn off. “Zipped up and good to go.”

“You were good to go before the pants,” Levi mused, eyeing my hips for a moment before looking away. There was a darkness in his expression that told me Mikasa had managed to get to him after all. It made me want to throw the couch at her.

“Not everyone feels that way,” Mikasa looked over at Levi as she folded her arms. She glanced once in my direction to check for pants and then turned her attention back to him. “Why would you get him naked now anyway?”

“It seemed as good a time as any,” Levi shrugged, not bothering to meet her eyes. “Besides, why do you care? You grew up with him. Is it really that big a deal?”

“Wouldn’t it be if you saw Hanji that way?”

“I have seen Hanji that way.” Levi fixed her with an unamused stare. “And she’s not my sister.”

“Then it’s not like you can understand anyway.” Mikasa shot back. “You don’t have any family.”

Levi stood up from the couch so quickly that I almost thought that he might actually do something, but the rest of me knew better. His jaw tightened and his hands clenched into fists as he turned, walking away from the couch and heading out of the living room. Hanji held out her hand and then drew it back just as quickly, exchanging a brief look with Petra that I couldn’t understand. Not now. Not when I felt this angry.

And I was sure the look I gave Mikasa would have been enough to paralyze her if she weren’t already walking after him.

“I didn’t mean it that way.” There was enough regret in her voice that it almost convinced me. “I just
meant in the traditional sense. Like siblings you grew up with.”

Levi continued in the direction of the kitchen and pulled open one of the drawers, never once looking at her. I was amazed he hadn’t left completely. The soft sound of clinking filled the silence as he set out the plates and utensils, Mikasa standing at his side. Even with her inches away, he didn’t look. Not even when he spoke in a cold and controlled voice. “What did you bring to eat?”

“I don’t have a family either.”

His hands stilled on the plate as he set it down, the silence filling the entire room as if it were a physical thing trying to smother us all. He stayed that way for a long moment, his head bowed slightly and his shoulders tense.

“I’m sorry I said that,” Mikasa continued, her voice soft and wavering. “I shouldn’t have. I didn’t even mean it like that and I…”

Levi turned to look at her and she met his eyes before looking down, muttering. “I know how it feels.”

Levi reached out and tapped her chin once before turning back to the dishes. “We make our own family. And ours is standing over there.”

Mikasa met my eyes as if she were finishing his thought, defining exactly what family meant to them. And it was me. I was their family and they were mine, and everything else after that just didn’t seem to matter.

“I’m still sorry.”

“I know you are,” Levi held out the dishes and angled his head to the side. “Make up for it and put these on the table. Then we’ll call it even.”

She took the dishes from him and opened her mouth to speak once more, but seemed to think better of it. She met my eyes with an apologetic stare as she walked over to the table, and the most I could do was shrug. We both knew I couldn’t stay mad at her after a display like that. Especially if Levi wasn’t. They’d shared something in that moment that I couldn’t quite get at, and it wasn’t something I could judge.

Hanji and Petra seemed to understand that, too. They waited until Mikasa was already setting up the table to walk over to Levi, and when they did neither of them looked angry. I’d almost expected Hanji to tear Mikasa apart for that statement, but she didn’t so much as glare. Petra set her hands on Levi’s shoulders and leaned into him, whispering something at his ear. He nodded once and looked at her, and suddenly the pain was gone.

I wasn’t the only family he had.

And I couldn’t be more grateful for that.

I walked over to Mikasa and snatched half the plates from her hands before she could even think to protest.

“I don’t need your help.” She grabbed for the plates and I held them out of her reach. “Seriously, Eren. I’m pretty sure he needs you more than I do right now.”

“It’s not really convincing when you look like that,” I pointed out, stepping to the side before she could make another go for the plates. “Besides, I’m pretty sure Hanji and Petra have it covered.”
“I feel like such an idiot,” she muttered, turning away from me and setting down a plate before surrounding it with utensils. “I mean sure, I’m mad at him, but not like that. I didn’t want to hurt him.”

“You shouldn’t even be mad.” I glanced at her as I set down another plate, watching her shrug.

“I know I shouldn’t. I just don’t like that he did that to you.”

I reached out and caught her wrist, her eyes meeting mine. “He’s punishing himself enough. He doesn’t need you to do it, too. Stay out of my business and let me handle this.”

She stared at me for a moment and then pulled her hand away, setting down the last plate. “Just don’t get yourself hurt, okay?”

I rolled my eyes and dropped the last plate onto the table. “Believe it or not, I’m old enough to handle myself now.”

“Are you trying to scratch up my table, brat?” Levi walked over with two cups in his hands, eyeing the wiggling plate until it settled.

Hanji stopped at his side and let out a gasp. “That is mahogany!”

Levi fixed her with a look and raised one eyebrow. “Really? Was that necessary?”

She grinned and held out a glass to me. “Petra and I watched it last night.”

“I’m pretty sure she’s been trying to find a reason to use that line all day,” Petra added, setting her glass down on the table.

“Why am I not surprised?” Levi murmured, placing one of the glasses in front of Mikasa.

“Because you know me too well at this point.” Hanji plopped down in a seat and sighed, tilting her head back. “It’s such a shame, too. I liked being a creature of mystery.”

“Trust me, that hasn’t changed.” Levi poked her forehead and pushed down as he walked past, taking a seat as well.

I sat down beside him and snatched one of the containers, feeling my stomach rumble at the sight of the food. I didn’t even realize how hungry I was until I knew I was moments from eating, and now I felt ravenous. I scooped the pad thai onto my plate, momentarily lost to the conversation happening around me. Everything finally felt normal for the first time in days, and I was relieved to be surrounded by their carefree banter. Even Levi seemed at ease.

“I’m actually surprised you were still here,” Hanji commented around a mouthful of noodles. “I was kind of expecting to walk in on an empty room, not Eren’s dick.”

I choked on the gulp of water in my mouth and hit my chest as I turned my head to cough. Levi rubbed my back, amusement entering his eyes. I’d actually managed to forget that experience for a few minutes there.

“I think it’d be better for Eren’s health if we don’t talk about that one,” Levi paused and looked over at Hanji, arching a brow. “Why’d you even come up if you didn’t think we’d be here?”

Hanji rolled her shoulders casually. “We were supposed to meet for lunch, remember? After I didn’t hear back from you, I figured you might be here.”
“Are you going back to work after this?” Petra glanced up from her plate, twirling her noodles around her fork. “It’s a long lunch break for you, isn’t it? Would there be any point?”

“None at all,” Levi lifted his glass, speaking around a sip. “And I wasn’t planning to.”

Mikasa’s brow furrowed as she watched Levi take a drink. “Why do you hold your cup like that? It’s so weird.”

“Traumatic childhood experience.” Levi waved his hand dismissively and I had to wonder if he was kidding. What kind of traumatic experience would anyone have with a cup?

“Speaking of traumatic,” Hanji glanced over at me and smiled. “We didn’t really mean to walk in on that. We figured Levi got our message.”

Levi set down his glass and his hands went to his sides, brushing over his pants. “Shit.”

“Something wrong?” I tilted my head to the side, watching his hands duck into the pockets only to come out empty handed again.

“I must have left my phone at the office.” Levi shook his head and pushed up from his seat. “Looks like I have a reason to go back after all.”

I looked up at him, my fork left forgotten in half a plate of food. “Do you want me to go with you?”

“Don’t be silly, kid,” he smirked, pushing a hand through my hair to tilt my head back. “I won’t be long and they just got here. Find a way to entertain them.”

“Preferably clothed.” Mikasa muttered around her glass.

I shot her a look and rolled my eyes before fixing my attention back on him. “Are you sure?”

“It’s not like I need you to protect me from the big bad corporate office.” Levi snagged his keys off the counter and glanced back at me. He eyed me for a moment, amusement in his eyes before he angled his head to the side. I could feel my heart skipping in my chest even before the words came out of his mouth. Like somehow I knew they would. “Besides, if you stay here it gives me something to come home to.”

I felt a blush flood my cheeks and watched a smirk twitch on his lips as if he were actually waiting for it. Which he probably was. Somehow he had figured out just how much those words meant to me, and he wasn’t against using them to throw me off guard. Not that I could say I minded it in the least. Even if he was teasing me, the sentiment was still there and true. I really was something for him to come home to.

And that meant everything to me.

-------------------------------------------

Armin

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

Erwin paused for a moment, his finger hovering over the button as if he were actually considering my question even though we both already knew the answer. I didn’t really need to ask to know what he would do, but for some reason I felt like I had to. Like it was a common courtesy to ask someone
if he wanted to destroy his life. As if doing so would give him the chance to back out now when he had already come this far.

As if I would actually let him if he wanted to.

“I don’t really have another choice, do I?” There was a small curve on his lips that told me he knew exactly what was going through my head, even if neither of us would say it. “I have to do this.”

“You don’t have to.”

It was a lie and we both knew it. Even if he chose to back down now, it didn’t mean I wouldn’t follow through anyway. I’d gotten the evidence I needed months ago and today was just a formality. A way of giving him the chance to pull the trigger and prove something to me in the process. Either way, I was going to get him away from Eren. But on the upside, if he chose to do it himself then it would mean something for the both of us. It would mean that he could keep me. That I wouldn’t have to fall apart at the end of this all. And I didn’t want to.

Because as much as I hated to admit it, I didn’t want to lose him.

It’d taken one painful night to realize it for myself, but I’d finally reached that point. The point where I knew I wanted to be his. For more than just a month or two. I wanted what we had to be real, and I knew it wouldn’t be unless I got through this first. We could never happen until he was finally able to say goodbye to his past and move onto our future. I knew that now. He’d proven it to me when he walked up on that stage without my knowledge.

And I was making him pay for it now.

“I don’t have to, huh?” There was a soft laugh in his voice that had no humor at all, and he turned slightly in his chair to fix me with a stare that told me he knew it was a lie. Just another thing I felt I had to say, even if I didn’t mean it. “Well, we both know that’s not true. Not when I’ll lose you if I don’t do this.”

“That’s still another option.”

And technically it was, but I would still do it anyway. The only difference was he wouldn’t have me in the end.

“If losing you is the other option, then there is no other option.” His finger struck the enter key as if it were an everyday task and not the end of everything. “I need you in my life.”

His words were so simple and yet they sent my heart racing in a way only he could. Sometimes I had to wonder if he actually did it on purpose, but most of the time I knew I didn’t care. Not when he could make me feel this way. As if I were the only one who mattered to him, even when I had plenty of evidence to support the exact opposite. But that would all be changing soon enough.

He wouldn’t be in his life anymore.

And I knew it had to be that way.

I had tried to deny it for months on end, even when Levi’s name continued to creep its way into our conversations. It was impossible to ignore how much he loved him, and I would be a fool to believe it would just go away. There was no erasing a past like that and I knew it would only get worse from here. Even if Eren trusted in Levi, I wasn’t willing to take the chance. He could gamble with his heart all he wanted to, but I wouldn’t let him get hurt in the end. It was like baby proofing a room for a kid who was destined to run into corners. I was eliminating the threat before it could ever have the
chance to hurt him.

Unfortunately that threat happened to be my boyfriend.

Not that I would ever call him that to his face. Not that I would be able to without blushing and stuttering like a madman. But that was essentially what he was to me. We were together now, officially in so many ways, and it had actually been going well up until two days ago. That night when he had left me alone in the crowd only to end up on stage with him. As if it had actually been his plan all along, even though I knew that wasn’t the case.

And I’d realized that the moment I stepped through the door the next day.

He’d given me the night, although at the time I was sure it was because of Hanji. But I should have known she wouldn’t have scared him off, no matter how angry she might have been. He would have come to me if I asked, but I didn’t. I couldn’t bring myself to look at him that night, even though he was all I could think about. I went through a thousand stages of jealousy, anger, regret, hatred, and agony over and over only to wind up at a kind of understanding that I never thought I would have.

When I finally came home and saw the relief in his eyes, I realized it was the only thing I wanted to see. At the time he didn’t know whether or not I would forgive him; he was relieved simply because I was there. I had come home to him when he never expected to see me again. He had spent an entire night agonizing over the fact that he had lost it all, his past and his future, and then I came back.

Any anger I had been holding onto at that point melted away, and I knew I’d forgiven him before he even started to grovel. Not that I stopped him from doing so anyway. Forgiven or not, he had hurt me and I knew I would have to make him pay for that. I needed the explanation that came with his apology, and afterwards I actually understood. He was a man in pain, losing the one thing he’d always wanted, and he snapped. Even if I hadn’t had the experience myself, I could imagine what it would be like. Far too well, in fact.

He wasn’t the only one who had watched a future disappear.

And that was one thing I knew I could never share with Eren.

It actually made me feel guilty; to ask Erwin to do something I knew I could never do. Not that I could ever ask him to give up Levi, but losing the company was the same thing to him. He was losing their connection, their chance to see each other every day, and his relationship would soon fade away with it. And even if that was the intended result, I didn’t want him to lose Levi entirely. Not when I knew just how much he meant to him. Not when I knew it would be like losing Eren for me.

“I’m sorry it’s come to this.”

And I was. I truly was. Even if I was threatening everything we had to see this through, I wasn’t happy for it. I didn’t want to force his hand and destroy his life, but I knew there was no other choice now. Eren had made that clear when he told me Levi needed this. Not that I really cared what Levi needed, but if it threatened his relationship with Eren then I knew what I had to do.

Because no matter how much Erwin meant to me, Eren would always mean more.

But in all fairness, I had a feeling I was second in his heart as well.

That was one thing we had in common; we were both the second choice. The future neither of us would have chosen, but the one we were both still happy to settle for. Both destined to watch the men we loved run off with each other into a life that made them much happier than we ever could.
The only difference was that I would never try to twist Eren away from the life he wanted.

Quite the contrary, I was willing to give up everything to make sure he had it.

“It was always going to come to this.” Erwin’s voice was soft, his eyes distant as he stared at the screen. The file was almost finished now. “I just never had a reason to let go before you.”

“This isn’t just about me.”

Erwin angled his head to the side and stared up at me from his chair, arching a single brow and regarding me with an expression that showed me yet again how easily I could impress him. “That’s true. It’s not.”

“I don’t see why you feel like you have to hide it.” I rolled my shoulders casually and glanced over at the screen. “I already know how you feel about him, and I told you it’s fine.”

“You say it’s fine, but you were already in one relationship where you were betrayed.” Erwin paused and then turned back to the computer. “I don’t want to be your second one.”

“You’re not going to be.” I leaned forward and set my hands on his shoulders before allowing them to slide down to his chest, bending until my head was resting beside his. “You wouldn’t do this for me if you were just going to hurt me in the end.”

“Didn’t we just establish that I’m not just doing this for you?” He angled his head towards mine and gripped both of my hands with one of his, holding them against his heart. The beat was slow, soothing. Exactly what I needed to feel right now.

“I know it’s not all for me,” I murmured with my lips pressed against his neck. “But some of it is.”

“Most of it is.” Erwin corrected, squeezing my hand. “But I know this will help him, too.”

“Do you really think it will?”

“I don’t know what else I can do at this point.” Erwin shrugged, gripping one of my arms and tugging me around before pulling me down into his lap. “I’m handing the whole company over to him. I’m stepping down. As far as he knows, I’m giving up my family. It’s a life ruined and that’s what he’s wanted for me.”

“I don’t think he’s going to want it once he has it.” I muttered, resting my head against his chest. Levi didn’t seem like the type to cause so much pain to a person he truly cared for. He was angry right now and there was no denying that, but once he actually tasted his revenge I wasn’t sure it would be something he wanted.

“He’s getting it regardless.” Erwin stared at the screen, his fingers drifting slowly through my hair. “He needs it to move on.”

“And you’re not going to tell him that your wife already left?”

Erwin angled his head to the side and stared down at me. “If I do that, then he’s going to know that Eren knew. And then everything they have will unravel.”

I hated the idea that their relationship could be so fragile, but somehow I knew it was true. Erwin had told me on more than one occasion just how much Levi despised lies, and the one that Eren had been carrying was more than enough to destroy them both. He would never forgive him if he found out that Eren had been lying from the start. He would see that their entire relationship had been built on a
lie, and all of the trust would disappear after that.

Erwin and I had both agreed that it was the one thing Levi couldn’t find out about.

Even if he didn’t want to let Levi go, Erwin wasn’t about to sabotage his relationship with Eren. And amazingly, I knew that wasn’t just because of me.

“So you really think this is all going to work the way you want it to?” Erwin tugged on my hair to pull my attention back up to him.

“It has to.” I shrugged, a little smile pulling at my lips. “Besides, it’s not like it’s all that complicated. He already told Eren what he wants to do, and we’re just putting the loaded gun in his hand. All he has to do is aim.”

“And you really think he’s going to do that when you’re at stake?”

“I don’t matter to him.”

“You matter to Eren,” he tugged my hair again and smirked against the pain of his next words. “And Eren is everything to him.”

“I’m giving him my permission.” I added, tilting my head back into his hand. His nails were on my scalp now, and suddenly it was hard to focus. “Once I talk to Eren, he’ll know to agree to it, too. It’s not like the video’s going to go anywhere after it gets into your hands.”

“Nowhere except for my collection.”

I rolled my eyes and fought back a shy smile as I looked over at the screen. “It’s done.”

“So it is,” he spoke softly, reaching forward to eject the disc. He took a moment to snap it into a jewel case and then waved once over my head. “Do you want this one, or would you rather use the one you already have?”

I froze with my fingers pressed against the case, staring at him in stunned silence before whispering. “How did you know that?”

“Because I like to think I know you,” he said simply, pressing the case into my hand. “And I don’t need security cameras in here to know what you were going to do.”

I gripped the case and moved out of his lap, holding it against my chest as I searched his eyes. “How long did you know?”

“I knew before you even did it.” Erwin paused and glanced at the evidence clutched in my hands. “I’m not angry, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

That was exactly what I was thinking. “Why not?”

“Because I knew you were going to do it all along.” He shrugged, turning to the computer and navigating to the main screen. “Even back in Paris, when I’m sure the idea first popped into your head. You were planning to use that tape from the beginning.”

“I wasn’t going to use it unless it was necessary.”

“It was always going to be necessary,” he countered, turning back to me. “Even if you don’t want to admit it, you knew that. I never had a choice in this because I gave it up for you.”
I paused for a long moment, staring down at the case in my hands. He had agreed to this from the very start, despite knowing exactly what I would do to him if I had to. He had decided to trust me, even when he knew I would break that trust. And he was letting me know it now, for no other reason than to tell me it didn’t matter. To put us on the same page, because that was where we belonged. There was no reason to plan things apart when we worked so well together.

I knew all this, and yet I couldn’t stop the words from coming out of my mouth.

“Do you hate me?”

“Exactly the opposite.” He met my eyes and when I saw the smile on his lips, I knew what he meant. My heart knew it, too. “It’s nice to finally be with someone who can keep me on my toes.”

I didn’t bother to hide my smile, holding up the case. “I can say the same. I wasn’t expecting this.”

“I wasn’t planning to tell you at first.” Erwin eyed the case for a moment before turning his attention back to me. “But I don’t want any secrets between us.”

“Then we won’t have any.” I glanced down at the case and a sheepish smile crossed my lips. “And I’m going to use this one. It was better than the last one.”

“After all our practice, I would hope so.”

A blush stained my cheeks and I rubbed at one as I glanced to the door, noticing a familiar person stepping out of the elevator. He was back from lunch, which was surprising at this point. He had spent so long out of the office that I figured he had decided to call it a day.

“He’s here.”

“I figured he would be,” Erwin mused, “He left his phone in the office.”

I nodded slowly, trying to ignore how heavy the case suddenly felt. I wasn’t expecting to do this so soon.

“Now’s as good a time as any.” Erwin continued, tilting his head to the door. “I’ll stay in here while you talk to him. You can come to me after.”

I took a deep breath and gave a shaky nod before grabbing the handle. “Wish me luck.”

“People like us don’t need it,” he replied, a smirk toying on his lips. “You’ll do fine, Armin.”

I opened the door, and just before I closed it I heard his voice again.

“Good luck.”

Levi paused the instant he saw me walking out of the security room, his eyes narrowing in suspicion as he angled his head to the side. “Armin?”

“Levi.” I said his name as if I were actually surprised, and forced on a welcoming smile. “Is Eren back from lunch, too?”

“Eren’s taking the rest of the day off.” Levi answered simply, still eyeing the door. “What were you doing in there?”

I glanced over my shoulder at the door and took a deep breath before turning back to him. “I was getting something for you.”
“For me?” Curiosity and suspicion were dueling for position on his face now. “What could you possibly be getting for me in there? You don’t even have access to that room.”

“It wasn’t even locked.” I shrugged so easily it actually looked casual, walking over to him. “For being a security room, it isn’t really secure.”

“Normally it is,” Levi muttered, eyes on the door. “Someone must have left it unlocked.”

“Well, then it worked out for me in the end,” I replied, holding out the case and managing to draw his attention back to me. “Because I needed to get this without anyone knowing about it.”

“And what is this?” Levi asked, catching the case between his finger and thumb. “It’s not even labeled.”

“I didn’t think ‘Sex Tape’ would be a good thing to label it as, and there’s really nothing else to call it.”

It was as blunt as I was willing to get, but it worked like a charm. All at once, Levi released the case and his eyes widened just slightly as he took a step back. He knew exactly what it was, and this was precisely the reaction I had been expecting to get from him. Everything he wanted placed into his hand, and he was going to reject it anyway.

“Armin, I don’t know why you think I want that, but—”

“Eren told me everything.” I cut him off, knowing it was the only way. “I know what you need and why you need it. And I know that he can’t do it for you anymore, but I can.”

“No, you really can’t.”

“Yes, I can,” I pushed, holding out the case again. “It’s right here. I already did it.”

“Kid, I don’t care if you made me a feature-length film with a goddamn soundtrack, I’m not taking it.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re Eren’s best friend.” He replied, just as I knew he would. He pressed his finger against the case, and pushed it further away. “And I’m not going to use you that way.”

I took a deep breath and shoved the case forward again, pressing it into his palm. “I’m giving you permission to use me that way.”

He dropped his hand away from it and took a step back. “You don’t know what you’re offering, and I have somewhere to be. Put that in the trash where it belongs and don’t talk to me about this again.”

He turned towards his office and somehow I knew he wasn’t going to look back. Even if I had everything he wanted, everything he needed, it was going to take more than this. I should have known he wouldn’t just take it from me, even with my permission. Because he didn’t need mine, he needed his.

“Give it to Eren, then.”

Levi paused and looked back at me, arching a brow. “I don’t know what kind of kinky shit you’re into, but I’m not letting Eren watch that.”

A blush instantly filled my cheeks and for a moment I forgot what I wanted to say. “No! No, that’s
not what I meant! I…”

“Then what did you mean?”

“I mean give it to him and let him decide,” I forced the words out past the embarrassment racing through me now. “You already have my permission, but let’s face it. You don’t care if you hurt me. You care if you hurt him.”

Levi stared at me for a long moment before letting a sigh rush out of his lungs. He pushed a hand through his hair and cursed under his breath, walking towards me and closing the small distance between us. And for a moment I was positive I had convinced him and he had come to take the tape after all. But then his hands found my arms and his forehead pressed against mine.

“Eren means everything to me, and I think we both know that.” Levi spoke softly, his eyes holding mine. “But that’s not the only reason I won’t use you. If you think I’m willing to hurt anyone I’m not in a relationship with, you’re wrong. I won’t hurt you and it’s not because of Eren. It’s because you don’t deserve that kind of pain.”

He patted his hand against my left arm and released me just as quickly, pulling away and leaving me so surprised that I almost wasn’t sure of what to say next. I hadn’t expected him to refuse me after that, but I still had more to go off of. We had one thing in common, and that was Eren. And we were both willing to do anything for him in the end.

“Tell me you don’t need it, then.” I shot back, gripping the case in my hands. “Tell me you don’t need to get him out of your life.”

Levi opened his mouth and then shut it a moment after, glancing back to his office. “I’m going to get my phone. Eren’s waiting.”

“Tell me you don’t need it.”

“You know I need it,” he snapped, his eyes turning back to me. “But I’ll figure out another way. I don’t need to use you.”

“Yes, you do.” I held out the case, feeling my last chance slipping away. “And this is it, right here. You can use it and be done with it all.”

And that was all I wanted at this point. I was willing to say anything I needed to in order to get it into his hands, because I knew that it was no threat to me. Erwin would pretend to be reluctant at first, but he would sign everything over to Levi in the end in exchange for the tape. It was never going to get past their hands, but I knew it had to at least get that far if any of this was ever going to happen. Levi wanted him out of this place, and Erwin was willing to leave if it meant he could give him what he needed most.

But none of that worked if he didn’t take the tape.

“If I use that, you’ll lose Erwin.”

“Good.” I forced the word out like I actually meant it, trying to ignore the pain that shot through every inch of my body. “After what he did to me, I could use a little revenge.”

“Is that what this is then?” Levi asked, nodding to the case. “Revenge?”

“Something like that,” I shrugged. “But it’s more for Eren than anything.”
“Do you not want him anymore?”

“Erwin?” I frowned, hesitating for only a moment. “No, I still want him. I care about Erwin and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t.”

“Then why risk him like this?”

“Because you need this to move on.” It was simple and yet so complicated. “And if you can’t decide to use this on your own, then give it to Eren and let him decide. He knows me better than you, and you already know that he’s not going to hurt me. He’ll make the best choice when it comes to this.”

“And if he decides not to use it?”

“Then I won’t push it anymore and you can trash it if you want to.”

Levi stared at the case for a long moment and then met my eyes. And when I saw the look in his, I knew I had won. “Why are you really doing this?”

I answered with the one truth I knew. The one thought we shared. The one thing that could make this work.

“Because Eren is the only thing that matters.”

Chapter End Notes

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I'm going to add this in as an end note since there seems to be some confusion, and there's really no way the characters are going to delve into it deeper than they already have.

The tape/disc/DVD that Armin and Erwin are discussing is a sex tape. As discussed in Chapters 4, 6, 7, 13, 16, and 31 (although it is mentioned in other chapters as well), Levi's whole plan was to use a sex tape against Erwin to get him to leave Survey Corporation. If Erwin refused to leave, Levi would show the video to Erwin's wife and ruin his marriage. But as Eren, Armin, and the readers know, Erwin's marriage is already over.

Erwin is doing this for Levi and Armin, and he has agreed at this point to leave the company and Levi's life in order to move on. He's doing this by allowing Armin to approach Levi with the evidence that Levi will, hopefully, use against Erwin. Essentially, Erwin and Armin are working together to see that Levi gets the revenge he thinks he needs and Levi is, unfortunately, the one left in the dark in all of this. He's the only one that thinks it's actually real - everyone else has been lying to him.

I just figured I'd add that in here since I'm guessing it might not be clear to those who have been following the story for a while and might have forgotten Levi's original reason for approaching Eren.
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

Ah, Thursday updates... I tried to get this one out a little earlier for someone who happens to be leaving for Japan. Hopefully it's up in time and if it is... HAVE FUN IN JAPAN, YOU AWESOME READER YOU! ^___^

I'm happy everyone enjoyed the last update, even if it might have been a tad confusing at first. Hopefully it's all been cleared up now, though! I know a few of you are anticipating a bit of angst and I will warn you that this chapter does get angsty. But hopefully you enjoy it anyway. ^_^

A huge thank you to aaapple-jax and thenewinshayneity for sharing their beautiful fan art of The Intern this week! ^__^ If you haven't already seen it, please feel free to check out the 'Intern Art' tab on my blog.

AND COSPLAYERS! So many amazing cosplayers this week - even an Eren and Levi answering gifs TOGETHER! ^__^ If you get the chance, please check out corporalnoticesyou, corporalnoticeme, and petra-the-wall for some amazing cosplays. There are many others, too. If you want to see / follow any of them, all of their pictures and answers can be found under 'Intern Cosplay' on my blog.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

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Levi

“What the hell am I supposed to do with this?”

I wasn’t even aware the words were coming out of my mouth as I turned the case over in my hands and stared at the blank face of the disc again. I’d done this more times than I could count in the past two days and I still hadn’t come to a decision. Hell, I hadn’t even come close. The most I’d managed to do was to throw it into my desk, but it didn’t take long for it to work its way back into my hands. Back into my mind where it seemed determined to stay.

Even if I didn’t want to keep it there.

I wasn’t sure what to do at this point. Everything I wanted, a life without him and this company, was placed into my waiting hands and yet here I was pushing it away. Refusing it when it was the one thing I could actually say I wanted. Next to Eren, of course. And that was the problem, wasn’t it? Doing this meant risking his best friend, and I knew our relationship wouldn’t survive a hit like that. He would never trust me again if I betrayed him that way, and I knew far too well what it was like to be on the receiving end. Even if I didn’t, I knew full well that I wasn’t willing to have a relationship without trust.
Lies and betrayal were the two things I would never allow between us, and it wasn’t as if I could expect him to accept them from me.

If I did this, it would have to be with his full knowledge and consent and I wasn’t sure he would give me that. Not where Armin was concerned. Not even if the little blonde mushroom was the mastermind behind it all, which apparently he was. It wasn’t as if I underestimated him, but I never expected this from him. Of course, it was hard to anticipate this happening when I had no idea he was even aware of this little mess. Not that I should have been surprised. It was Eren, after all. They were best friends and they shared everything.

And if I weren’t so sure of Eren’s heart, I might actually be a little jealous of that.

Not to say that Armin wasn’t a worthy adversary. If I had to lose Eren to anyone, it would be him. It wouldn’t be willing, but at least I would know beyond a doubt that he would be happy and loved. Cherished, even. I didn’t think anyone could love Eren as much as I did, but I was willing to bet that Armin came close. A little too close, possibly, but that didn’t matter in the end. As much as Eren loved him, it wasn’t romantic.

I had a feeling it would never be.

But I wasn’t about to test any of that by giving Eren a reason to hate me. As much as I didn’t want to talk about this tape, as much as I didn’t want to ask him for this favor, I knew I had to. I didn’t have a choice when it came to this, and it took two days of arguing with myself to arrive at that conclusion. Because I couldn’t just ignore it. I couldn’t destroy it and not even try. In the worst case scenario, Eren would say no and I would willingly hand over the evidence. And that risk was worth the chance that he might say yes. That I might be able to convince him to use this tape as nothing more than leverage to get Erwin out of our lives.

Because that’s all the tape would be in the end. Something to twist Erwin’s arm and nothing more. I would never let it get to the point that it would be anything that could harm Armin.

And that wasn’t just for Eren. I wasn’t about to hurt that boy for my own sake.

Even if he didn’t seem to believe that himself.

I tossed the case onto my desk and slid my feet off the wood, leaning forward to press my thumb into the button beside my phone. I didn’t bother to wait for the familiar voice to come in on the other end.

“Nifa,” I was probably the only one in the whole damn office to call her by her first name, but I had decided long ago that it was far too unique not to. “Call for Mr. Jaeger and have him sent up to my office now.”

I couldn’t hold back the smirk that curved my lips on the name. It was so damn formal, but I had to admit that I got a small thrill from it. A few weeks ago we’d decided to add some office play to our daily games, and I had a little too much fun playing boss. Seeing Eren’s naked ass bent over my desk almost made me want to keep this boring as shit desk job.

“He’s in a meeting with all of the interns right now,” Nifa’s voice had a lilt of amusement that had me wondering if she knew exactly what went on behind my office door. “Should I ask Mr. Zakarius to send him up anyway?”

“Yea, sure. Tell Mike it’s urgent.” I paused, looking over my nails as I continued in the most casual voice possible. “I have a raging problem here and I need him to take care of it immediately.”

“Right away, sir.” There was definitely a smile in her voice. We must have been louder than I
thought.

I released the button and leaned back in my seat, folding my arms across my chest as I eyed the door. Knowing Eren, he wouldn’t take that long. The kid was already looking for an excuse to get out of the mailroom every chance he got, and he was probably twice as ready to bolt out of a meeting. He didn’t seem like the type who could sit still for long. Unless I was the one telling him to do so. Even then his talent for following orders was shaky at best.

It was something he had to work on.

And I was more than willing to teach him.

Of course, that would have to wait until after today. As ready as I was to bend him over right now, I knew we had to discuss this shitfest first. Even if his answer turned out to be a resounding no, I would need to hear it before I could move onto the next thing. Otherwise the tape would be a lingering stain on my mind, constantly popping up when I didn’t want it to.

“You needed to see me, sir?”

Eren leaned against the doorframe and watched me with an expression that was meant to be controlled innocence and was nothing more than a suppressed smile. He never managed to pull off the act of the doe-eyed virtuous little secretary, but he sure as hell tried his best. And in my opinion that was far sexier than any act. It was real. It was Eren.

And in the end, that was all I wanted.

“You can drop the act now,” I leaned back in my seat and watched his expression fall into one of confusion. “I didn’t call you in here for that.”

“Why not?”

I wanted to bite that sumptuous little pout of his right off his perfect lips, but I knew I had to keep my ass planted in my seat. If I went over to him now, this discussion would never happen. Not today, anyway. With the mood I was currently in, if I got my hands on him now I wouldn’t be able to let go.

“Because I’m not always a raging hard on like you, kid.” That was such a fucking lie and we both knew it. “Besides, I need to talk to you about something.”

“You need to talk?” Eren paused for a moment and dug his phone out of his pocket, checking the screen. “Don’t you usually just text me for something like that?”

“I had a feeling Mike wouldn’t let you go that easily today.” And that was part of the reason. Eren could usually duck out if he had to, but Mike was less understanding when it had to do with something as important as a meeting. Not that I ever found those to be very important at all.

Eren frowned, stepping into the office and letting the door shut behind him. “So you made me sport a partial in the elevator for nothing?”

“Just a partial?” I angled my head to the side and eyed Eren’s hips. “I must be losing my charm.”

Eren rolled his eyes and walked over to my desk, folding his arms. “You could have just texted me and I would have figured my way out of there. Honestly, it would have been less embarrassing. After the look I got from Mike, I’m pretty sure he knows something is up.”
“Oh, I can pretty much guarantee it. Why do you think he doesn’t give you shit for coming up here?” I caught the end of Eren’s tie in my fist and gave a quick yank to bring him closer. He dropped to his knees as if he had been trained to do so.

Such a good dog.

“I figured it was because you’re the boss.”

His words were nothing but a seductive purr spoken around a smile. He knew exactly what he was doing, and I was letting it work.

“Damn right I am.”

I jerked his tie again and circled the fabric once around my fist, setting my foot against his shoulder and pressing my knee into his side. He stared up at me from his spot, effectively trapped between my legs and positioned so perfectly that I nearly forgot why I asked him to come up here in the first place.

I knew this would happen the second he was within my reach, and I couldn’t count on him to bring me back to the matter at hand.

Not when he knew he could get laid instead. Not that I blamed him. I wanted it too, but I knew I needed this more.

I pushed back and stood from my seat, releasing his tie in the same moment. “Maybe you should go sit on the couch.”

“I’d rather sit on you.”

I glanced back at him and a smirk twitched on the corner of my mouth. He was so damn tempting when he was on his knees. “I already said I need to talk to you, brat. I’m not about to let you distract me.”

He lingered on the floor for a moment more and then stood, frowning. “Is it that important?”

“Even if it wasn’t, I’m sure you’re happy for the excuse to get out of the mail room.”

“That doesn’t really count.” Eren shrugged, flopping down onto my chair and leaning back with his hands behind his head. He looked anything but corporate with that wide grin plastered across his face. “I’m always looking for a reason to get out of work.”

“Oh?” I leaned against the desk, eyeing him with a hint of amusement. “Well if that’s the case, then I’ll tell Hanji to move your dance lessons to midday.”

Eren’s face instantly fell, as I knew it would. After seeing the little display in my apartment, Hanji had decided that Eren had a hidden desire to take on the fine art of stripping. For the past two days, she had been snatching him out of my apartment for secret lessons that I supposedly knew nothing about. Eren hadn’t been able to find the courage to tell her no, and the whole thing was too fucking hilarious for me to stop it myself.

“On second thought, I think I’d rather stay in the mail room,” he muttered with a frown. “I’m still sore from yesterday.”

“I figured you might be.” I paused and snatched the case from the desk. “Hanji can be relentless.”
“What’s that?”

“The reason I called you up here.” I turned the case once in my hands, letting him see the disc inside. “Armin gave it to me.”

The color left Eren’s face so quickly that I knew beyond a doubt that he had at least some idea as to what this was. Even still, he kept his expression so controlled that I could tell he was trying to hide it. His eyes widened infinitesimally, only for a moment, and then all at once his face returned to normal and he glanced to the side as if nothing was wrong. As if he had no idea what I was holding in my hands.

Why would he do that?

“Why would he give you a DVD?” He actually sounded confused. “Is it something to do with work?”

I set the case down between us, eyeing Eren’s expression carefully as I spoke the next words. “It’s a sex tape.”

The shock was there, but it wasn’t nearly enough. Not enough to be convincing. Not enough to tell me he didn’t know already. He turned in his seat and stared at me, his brow furrowing as if it was supposed to. Had Armin told him already? Was he just waiting for me to ask?

“With Erwin?”

That was at one question I expected to get from him, even if the answer was obvious.

“Yes, with Erwin,” I rolled my eyes and slid the case across the desk to Eren. He caught it in his hand before it could fall off completely. “I would hope your little friend wouldn’t just hand me random sex tapes. That would be a weird kink.”

“And this isn’t weird?” Eren held the case up between two fingers, watching me. “Why would he give this to you?”

“You’re a horrible liar, kid.”

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, but I knew I didn’t want to. Whatever the fuck Eren was trying to do was pissing me off more than I cared to admit. I hated lies, but I hated them more when they came from him and I could tell he was lying to me now. He knew exactly what he was holding in his hands and why it was there. He just didn’t want to say it.

He stared at me for a long moment and then finally looked down at the case, frowning. “I don’t want you to feel like you have to ask me for this if it’s what you need.”

“You already know it’s what I need,” I paused, hesitating over the one thing that was stopping me from thrusting that disc into Erwin’s face. “But he’s your best friend.”

“He’s my best friend,” Eren agreed, setting the case back on the table. “But he gave it to you, and I have to believe that he did it for a reason.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that Armin isn’t the type to take a huge risk without having some idea of what the outcome will be.” Eren nodded to the disc sitting between us. “If he handed that over, it’s because he knows what Erwin will do.”
“I’ve known Erwin a lot longer than your friend, and I don’t even know what he’ll do.” And I wasn’t willing to risk Armin to find out.

“I don’t think that really matters when it comes to Armin.” Eren hesitated for a moment, staring at the tape. “He’s always been good at reading people. Even people he hasn’t known that long. He always seems to know how they’re going to react, even if they don’t. He’s never been wrong.”

“And this could be the first time that he is.” I shot back. “Do you really want it to be with something this big? When it means he could lose everything? Are you really going to put your friend on the chopping block for that?”

Eren’s fingers stilled on top of the case and he stared up at me. “Don’t you want to get rid of Erwin?”

“Not when it means risking you.” As badly as I needed this, it couldn’t possibly be worth that. “I don’t care if I’m the one that gets hurt, Eren. But I’m not going to let anything happen to either of you.”

“You’re not.” Eren slid the case across the desk and I felt my skin start to crawl. There was something wrong with all of this. “It’s our decision, right? Armin gave you permission.”

“I don’t need Armin’s permission.”

And the one I needed I never expected to get. The fact that he was giving it to me now felt wrong. It wasn’t supposed to go this way. He was supposed to refuse me because Armin was his best friend and he would never risk him. That was exactly what I expected from Eren. He should have smashed the tape and begged me not to use it.

Why was he doing this?

“If you need my permission, then you can have—”

I crossed the desk so quickly that I was almost certain I’d gone over it. I grabbed the top of my chair and leaned him back, locking him between my arms and giving him no other choice but to stare up at me. He didn’t even try to look anywhere else. He already knew I wouldn’t let him.

“Eren, what are you hiding from me?” I searched his expression, certain I would find something hiding there. But I didn’t. “Whatever it is, just tell me. Please.”

Don’t let it ruin us, kid.

I couldn’t say the next words out loud. I didn’t want to think there was anything that could destroy us, but I felt like there was something hanging between us right now. Something with enough power to rip everything apart, and the fact that I didn’t know what it was terrified me.

“What makes you think I’m hiding anything?”

Because you are.

“You wouldn’t risk Armin.” It was the only proof I had next to a hunch, and I knew it was more than enough to be plausible. Even Eren had to admit that this was weird for him. He had been so adamant against using Armin before and suddenly he didn’t have a problem with it now. “Even if you trusted his decision, you wouldn’t. You wouldn’t risk him unless you knew beyond a doubt that there was no risk.”
Which meant he knew something I didn’t.

“But there is no risk.” Eren frowned, staring at me as if I were missing the most obvious thing in the world.

“And why is that, kid?”

“Because you’re the one in control.” Eren looked away only long enough to stare at the tape and then his eyes were back on mine. “You’re using it against him, but it’s never going to leave your hands. Even if he refuses to do what you want, it doesn’t mean you have to use it. And I know you won’t.”

“Why is it so easy for you to believe that?”

“Because I trust you.” Eren shrugged, a small smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “You’re not going to hurt Armin and you’re not going to hurt me.”

So that was it. That was why he was able to agree to this. Eren was sure of the outcome because he knew I would be the one to decide in the end. Even if things didn’t go my way, he knew I wouldn’t push it to the point that I ruined Armin’s life. They were both safe in this little game because I wasn’t about to risk either one of them. And he knew that. Eren wasn’t trusting in Armin’s ability to read others. He was trusting in me.

“You’re right,” I released the chair and snatched the case up from the desk. “I wouldn’t hurt either of you.”

“So there’s no risk.” Eren shrugged, standing. “You may as well use it and see if it works. There’s nothing to lose.”

“Armin might lose his relationship,” I muttered, turning the case in my hand. “But I’m guessing that’s a positive outcome for you.”

“That’s my favorite outcome,” Eren grinned and then paused, eyeing the door. “Not that I want him to get hurt. I just think Armin could do better.”

“And for once I agree with you on that.” I held the case out to him and waved it up and down. “Here. Take it.”

Eren frowned, catching the disc between his thumb and forefinger. “Didn’t we just decide that you’re going to use this?”

“We did,” I agreed, releasing the tape. “But it’s been two days and he might have changed his mind about it.”

“I doubt that.”

“Either way, take it to the little mushroom. Make sure he knows the risk involved.” I shrugged, folding my arms. “Not that there’s much, but he might actually give a shit if he loses Commander Crapbag.”

Eren rolled his eyes. “He’d be the only one. It’s a win-win for the rest of us.”

I didn’t bother to keep the smirk off my lips. I was sure this was one reason Eren was more than happy to use the tape. “Talk it over with Armin. If he doesn’t want to use it, destroy it. If he does, bring it back to me.”
Eren nodded once and glanced briefly at the door with an expression I couldn’t read. Even if his explanation made sense, I still felt like there was something hanging in the space between us. Something he was hiding from me. Something he didn’t want to say.

“Armin’s probably getting off for lunch now and we already have plans to eat,” Eren turned back to me and smiled, the distant look gone from his eyes as if it had never been there. “I can bring it back to you after.”

“Don’t be so sure of yourself, kid.” I smirked as if nothing was wrong. “He might say no.”

“I really don’t think he will.” Eren’s lips brushed once against my cheek and he turned to go.

And suddenly it felt like goodbye.

I caught him at the door, grabbing the lapels of his jacket and jerking hard until there was no hope for space between us. My mouth claimed his as if it was for the first and last time, drinking in his taste like I needed to memorize it for eternity. I felt him groan against me and I gripped him closer, my heart racing with the need to do so much more. But there was no time for that now.

I released his tie and shoved him towards the door, an amused playfulness in my eyes. “Hurry up with lunch and get back to me, brat. No more than thirty minutes. I’ll make your ass pay for every second I have to wait after that.”

I watched in satisfaction as a shiver worked its way through his body and he bit into his lower lip, watching me with hooded eyes. And then he was out the door without another word, leaving me alone in the office with one lingering thought hanging in my mind.

What the hell are you up to, kid?

Eren

I’d done it again.

I’d allowed the lie to find its way past my lips once more, and it was a wonder that I hadn’t choked on it by now. I expected it to be lodged in my throat at this point, but for some reason it just came easier. Every time I uttered the lie it slipped out so convincingly that I was almost able to believe it myself. And I wanted to believe it. Because if I could actually believe beyond a shadow of a doubt then it wouldn’t be a lie anymore. It would just mean that I was in the dark like everyone else.

And I wanted that more than I wanted anything.

But I guess I was getting the same thing now, wasn’t I?

I stared down at the case in my hands and gripped it tighter as if it might actually get away if I didn’t. Armin had just given me everything, and I was sure he knew it. This could bring an end to it all; the lie and the pain of the past snuffed out by a single tape. All I had to do was convince myself to use it, and surprisingly Armin wasn’t the one I needed to talk to for that. I already knew it would be pointless to go to him with the disc in my hand. Even without seeing him I could hear his voice in my head, swearing up and down that it would be fine. To do it. Even if it meant risking everything he wanted.

Because Armin would do that for me. There wasn’t a doubt in my mind that he would lose it all if it meant keeping me happy.
And I wouldn’t let him do that.

He’d done this for me without saying a word, but the second Levi held up that case I knew exactly what it was. Exactly what he’d done. Armin had been planning this for a while and I didn’t need to talk to him now to know that. He knew the risks involved. He knew what he was doing. But even if he was willing to lose everything I couldn’t let it happen until I knew the whole story.

And there was only one man I could get that from.

The last man I wanted to see right now. The one I had been avoiding at all costs for days on end because I was sure I would rip his head off if I saw it. And our time apart hadn’t done anything to help my anger, if anything it had made it that much worse. After seeing Levi walk out of his office shaking it had taken everything I had to keep myself from going after him. Talking to him now would probably be impossible, and I wasn’t sure either of us would make it out in one piece.

But I knew I had to try.

I took a deep breath and my hand stilled in a fist against the door. Knocking seemed so stupid. It wasn’t as if I was really going to let him keep me out.

And so I pushed my way inside.

“What the hell are you planning with this?”

The accusation was strong enough to make anyone look up, but he didn’t even spare me a glance. His eyes remained on the document in front of him, and he moved only enough to reach out to the glass beside his hand. He took a slow sip and the ice shifted in the cup, filling the silence with a soft clink. He lowered it back to the table and still his eyes did not meet mine.

So I slammed the door shut.

And he didn’t even jump.

Stupid, cocky, arrogant…

“Have you gone deaf in your old age?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that. I think I would have heard the knock if there was one.” Erwin paused and angled his head to the side, fixing me with a smile that was so welcoming it made me sick. “What can I do for you, Eren?”

I held up the disc as I walked towards his desk. “This. Did you have anything to do with this?”

“I think you need to be a little more descriptive than that.” Erwin leaned back in his seat and folded his arms, eyeing the case with an expression that held no confusion at all. He knew.

“You don’t need me to say it.”

“You know damn well what it is.” I shot back, throwing the disc down onto the table between us. “You don’t need me to say it.”

He stared down at it for a moment and then raised one thick eyebrow. “I know it’s fragile.”

I rolled my eyes. If he was trying to say that was all he knew about it, I was going to have to make him eat it. “It’s not broken.”

“I still wouldn’t toss it around like that.” Erwin paused and pressed his finger against the case, sliding it over. “Levi wouldn’t be happy if you brought back a broken disc.”
And there it was.

“So you know what it is?”

“I know you can’t use evidence against me if you break it.” He lifted his eyes back to mine. “Yes, Eren. I know exactly what it is.”

“And Armin knows that you know?”

“I would hope so, considering we made it together.” A small smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth and he shrugged, leaning back once more. “And I don’t just mean the contents. Armin was with me when I made the copy. I put it in his hands.”

I wrinkled my nose against the images of them doing anything past a PG rating. As far as I was concerned, they were Bert and Ernie and living on Sesame Street. “And you know what he’s going to do with it?”

“I wouldn’t have given it to him if I didn’t already know.”

There was a bite to his voice that went straight under my skin, digging at the nerves.

“Well, it’s possible that you didn’t know.” I snapped, letting my anger leap onto my tongue. His presence alone was setting me on edge and I was barely holding myself back now. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he tried to hurt you with this. I didn’t actually expect him to put so much trust in you after what you did on stage.”

“After what I did on stage?” Erwin regarded me for a moment and a small, amused smile crept its way onto his lips. I could feel my mind snapping at the sight of it. “You mean when I put my hands on Levi? And here I thought that didn’t even bother you.”

I was still such an easy target, wasn’t I?

I launched forward and gripped his tie before I was even aware I had moved. Somewhere in the space of a heartbeat I had found my way around the desk and onto his body. The fabric dug into my hand as I wrapped it around my fist, tugging hard until he was off the chair. I was certain he was in pain and I was more than happy to do more, but he didn’t flinch.

I wanted him to flinch.

“Of course it bothered me.” The words were rough in my throat and barely made it out through my teeth. “You touched what’s mine.”

“You’re so territorial now.” His voice was strained and cut off by the tie, but my little victory didn’t last long. He grabbed my hand and shoved back with just enough force to send me stumbling away. It was effortless for him, I could tell, but as he rubbed his neck I knew I had at least left a mark. And I was fucking proud of that.

But even still he was able to laugh; the sound soft and amused. As if I had told him a funny joke. “Where was this back then?”

Did it really matter now?

I had bottled it up back then, but even if I hadn’t it wasn’t as if I was about to go up on stage. Somehow I’d known a territorial show wouldn’t have helped anyone in the end. And I’d done that for Levi, not him. I couldn’t give a shit about what Erwin needed or wanted, save for the fact that it
matched Levi’s desires at the time. That was the only thing that had kept me in my seat during their little dance.

“I let him do what he had to do, but that doesn’t mean you had any right to touch him.”

“And I can assure you I won’t again.” Erwin rubbed his neck as he stared at me, all humor gone from his face now. “I’ve already let him go.”

“I’ve heard that before.”

“Believe it or not, I mean it this time.” He nodded once to the tape resting on the desk. “And I would hope that proves it.”

I stared down at the tape for a long moment and felt a thousand emotions bubble up inside me. It had been months since this started and the end was so close now. Was it really going to be this easy?

“Are you really going to do this? Are you really going to give it all up?” My voice was still trembling, but the anger was starting to fade now. The fact that this might all be done soon was bringing me a kind of relief I couldn’t ignore, but at the same time it seemed too good to be true. “Or are you just lying to Armin?”

“Unlike you, I don’t lie to the ones I care about.”

The unexpected words shot straight through my chest and suddenly I didn’t know whether to be angry or terrified. The fact that he was bringing up the lie now, after everything that had happened between us, felt like a threat.

“I’m not lying to him.” The words themselves were a lie and they stuck in my throat like needles. “Not anymore.”

Erwin raised a brow. “Did you tell him?”

“No.”

“Then you’re still lying, Eren.” He paused for a moment and then shrugged, standing from his seat. “And I can’t blame you for it. At this point you would lose him if you told him, so I suppose lying is the only way.”

“Lying was the only way from the start,” I shot back. “You saw to that.”

“No, actually. I didn’t.” Erwin glanced once in my direction as he walked towards the bar, snagging a new glass up from the counter. “I thought you were going to tell him, Eren. I honestly expected all of that to blow up in my face.”

As if I could have known any of that at the time. Not that any of it helped me now.

A new anger started boiling in the pit of my stomach as I followed him across the room. “You told me not to.”

“And you listened.” He looked down to the glass, dropping three ice cubes into the cup. “You chose to lie to him.”

All at once, guilt and rage fought for position and the words tore from my mouth louder than expected. “No, I didn’t!”

There was so much fear it was inescapable.
But there was no denying that this was my fault.

“Yes, you did.” He smacked the glass down in its place and set both his hands against the wood, leaning forward to glare at me. “Stop trying to act like some innocent doe-eyed little brat and own up to your mistakes. You’re just as guilty as I am in this.”

“I didn’t know how he felt about lies then.” I snapped, knowing all the while that I was wrong. “If I had known then, I would have—”

“Done the exact same thing you did.” He cut me off quickly with a truth I couldn’t deny. “Face it, Eren. You did what you did because you knew it would give you a shot with him. You were worried he was going to throw you away like yesterday’s leftovers if he didn’t have a good use for you.”

“He might have.” The words trembled on their way out. The biggest fear I’d had in the beginning. The reason the lie had seemed like a good idea in the first place. I had half a chance when he had a use for me, even if it wasn’t real.

“Believe it or not, he wouldn’t have just given you up like that.” Erwin paused, pouring the liquid into his glass. “Not with how interested he was. And trust me, if he wasn’t interested you would have been gone by now. Regardless of what you could have done for him.”

I watched him swirl the glass once and take a sip, feeling my stomach bottom out. “It doesn’t matter now, does it?”

“It really won’t matter soon enough.” Erwin shrugged. “Not after you use that tape, anyway. He’ll get everything he thinks he wants and he’ll never have to know that none of it was real. Not unless you decide to tell him.”

And lose him forever.

“I’m never going to tell him.” That much I knew was true. The risk was too much and I could live with the lie. I couldn’t live without him. I shook my head slowly and let a sigh rush out of my lungs, looking over at the door. “I’m not going to ruin what we have that way. I’ll die with the lie before I let him know.”

A soft, sad laugh drew my attention back to him and I watched as he lowered his glass back down to the bar. “Levi wouldn’t want a relationship shaped around a lie.”

And all at once panic gripped my chest and my jaw tightened. “Does that mean you’re going to tell him?”

“No,” Erwin angled his head to the side, regarding me. “I’m just sad that he’s trapped in something he would hate.”

That stung more than I could have ever imagined it would.

“He’s happy with me.”

“Because he doesn’t know who you are.” Erwin shrugged, pushing his drink aside. “And now he never has to.”

Because I wouldn’t let him. Because I was selfish and because I knew it wouldn’t matter in the end. What we had was so much more than the lie it was built upon. The lie gave me a chance to be in his life and as much as I regretted it now, I wouldn’t change it. Everything else had been worth that
sacrifice.

Even if Erwin couldn’t see it that way.

“You make it sound like the lie is all I am,” I muttered, not even attempting to keep the disgust from my voice. “Just because I fucked up once doesn’t mean I don’t deserve him.”

“Oh, but you really don’t deserve him.” Erwin countered, crossing the bar to walk towards me. “And you know what? You’re going to have to spend every day of forever trying to make it up to him.”

I took a step back as he came closer, my eyes narrowing. If he was trying to put me on the defensive, it was working. I came to talk about the tape and nothing else. I didn’t need a lecture about my relationship, especially from someone who had failed in his own. “How would you know what I’m supposed to do? You’re the one who lost him.”

“Which is exactly why I know what to do.” Erwin grabbed my shoulders and held me under his stare, and for a moment I couldn’t move. For a moment I actually understood why they called him Commander. “You don’t know what it’s like to lose him yet, and I don’t want you to find out. Even if you think I hate you, I don’t want you to go through that pain.”

And suddenly I could move again.

I shoved at his arms and pulled back, trying to ignore the fear burning in the pit of my stomach. “I’m not going to.”

“That’s what I told myself before everything went to shit.” He shot back. “And losing him was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do. I know you think I’m a fucking asshole, Eren, but you don’t know what I’m feeling inside. You don’t know what it’s like to see your life move on without you.”

I opened my mouth but the words weren’t there. The pain in his eyes stopped them in my throat and suddenly all I felt for him was pity. The anger was gone, and what replaced it was fear. Fear that one day my eyes would look like that. That one day I would know what it was like to lose everything that mattered.

“I couldn’t get back in, Eren. And trust me, I tried.” Erwin shook his head and lowered his hands to his sides. “Once he shuts you out, that’s it. He closes you off, and no amount of groveling will ever get you back into his heart. Nothing I can say, nothing I can do will ever give him back to me.”

“Is that why you’re doing this?”

“Yes,” Erwin’s voice broke and his jaw tightened instantly, as if he were angry at the emotion. “I know I can never have him, so I’m going to let him go. Because this is the only thing I can do to make him happy. The only thing he wants is for me to go. And even if it kills me, I’ll give that to him. Because I would do anything for him, Eren. Anything.”

He caught my wrist before I could say another word, his eyes intent on mine. “And I need you to be willing to do that, too.”

I didn’t pull back. I didn’t even try. It was the most honest moment I’d ever had with him, and for that brief time I felt as if we truly understood one another. Our worlds revolved around the same thing and we were both willing to do anything to keep him happy. Even if it meant letting go.

I held Erwin’s eyes and nodded slowly, once, and he released my hand.

“Then this belongs to you.” Erwin crossed the distance to the desk and held out the disc. “Give it to
Levi and let him end it. I’m tired of watching him hate me.”

I followed him to the desk and grabbed the case, gripping it between two fingers. “What are you going to do when he comes to you with it?”

“Well, I’m sure I’ll have to put up an act,” he mused. “He won’t buy it if I just give in. But it won’t take long before I do.”

“And when you leave the company?” I almost believed I cared. And maybe a small part of me did. “What will you do then?”

“Well, we both know he’s not actually going to use what’s on that tape,” Erwin pointed to it and then paused. “I’ll step down with a hefty pension and find another place to work for. With my credentials, it won’t take me long.”

“You’ll probably be the head of another company in no time.” I muttered, rolling my eyes.

“But he won’t be there.” Erwin smiled sadly. “And that’s one thing I loved about this place. The rest of it will just be a job.”

“So you’re losing him, not the company.”

“That’s the only way I can see it,” he agreed. “I’ve lost everything else.”

And it was true. He had. But I wasn’t sure how he was going to let Levi know about the rest of it. “What about your wife and kids?”

“You already know I lost her months ago.” Erwin waved his hand dismissively, walking around the desk and to his chair. “Gave her up for him, actually. Right before he met you.”

“And are you going to tell him that?”

Erwin settled into his seat and raised a brow, almost amused. “I’m going to assume you’re kidding. And no, I’m not. You’re the only one that knows about my family matters, but after this the rest of the world will know. He’ll just think it happened because of this.”

I gripped the case tighter and stared down at it, feeling my heart race in my chest. By the end of the day, Erwin might be gone. Out of our lives and taking this whole mess with him. There would be no need for the lie anymore. I would never have to say it again, and Levi would never bring it up. We would finally be able to move on from the stain of his past.

“Your lunch is over,” Erwin gestured once to the door but his eyes stayed on me. “Go bring it to him.”

I nodded once and started walking towards the door, determined to leave without another word. And yet I found myself turning to face him once more.

“I’m not sorry.”

I don’t know why I felt the need to say that, but I was willing to bet it was because I felt the exact opposite. I didn’t want to be sorry, but I was. I was sorry it had come to this. I was sorry he had to ruin his life and everything he had with Levi. Even if I would never say it to him.

“I know you’re not.” Erwin stared up at me, his finger drawing a circle around the rim of his glass. “But one day you’re not going to feel that way. Some day you’re going to look back on all of this
and realize I’m not the monster you wanted me to be.”

And even without him saying the words, I knew they were true. I wanted to paint him in shadows and horns. I wanted him to deserve every hateful thought I’d ever had of him. I wanted him to be the villain because it made everything so easy. It was too much to destroy someone you sympathized with. My hands couldn’t rip him up the way I wanted to if I knew too well what it was like to be on the other end. What it was like to be a victim in all this.

But even that couldn’t stop me from closing the door on what I was determined to keep in the past.

I walked down the hall on legs that must have been made of rubber, and I wasn’t sure if it was because I was giddy or terrified. Although I was willing to bet it was both. It was true that I was happy this twisted mess was over, but at the same time I had finally realized the cost of it all. I now knew what it would look like to be in his position. To lose everything you ever wanted with no way of getting it back.

I was sure the pain in his eyes would haunt me forever, and I could only hope that was how it would stay. I didn’t want to know what it was like firsthand and I was determined to never find out.

The lie would end after today and I would make sure it was buried with me.

“I’m never going to tell him.”

My voice rang clear in my ears as if I had spoken it to myself, and for a moment I had to wonder if I’d actually said anything at all. The words hadn’t been in my mind or on my tongue, and yet they were hanging in the air now. Echoing down the hall like I was standing in the other room, still saying them to Erwin. But I wasn’t. I was here. So why could I hear my voice now?

“I’m not going to ruin what we have that way.”

I started walking in the direction of my voice, the sound growing louder the closer I got. I could feel my heart racing in my chest as if it knew what had happened even before I did. As if it was ready to break itself apart right now.

And it was.

Something was wrong.

Something was horribly wrong.

And I could feel it like a weight in my chest. Pulling me down yet propelling me forward.

Moving me towards that sound.

Those words.

Those awful words.

Dear god, why did I have to say those words?

“I’ll die with the lie before I let him know.”

I pushed my way into the room and was met with a dozen screens and a small frame I knew all too well. His shoulders were trembling, but I couldn’t see his face. Because he wasn’t looking at me. He was staring at the video.
At my life.

Or the end of it, anyway.

“Levi…”

He didn’t even jump. It was like he knew I was there, but my presence didn’t matter anymore. And I had a feeling it never would again.

“Levi.” His name broke in my throat and my hand trembled as I reached out towards him. Everything was spinning. It was all falling apart and I could feel it ripping at the seams. How was I still standing? “Levi, please.”

He turned before I could touch him, as if he could feel me before I was even there. His eyes met mine and my heart went still. The whole world went still. And I realized in that moment that I had never seen tears in his eyes, but they were there now. And yet I almost didn’t see them at all. I couldn’t. Because they were nothing compared to the pain. There was more agony in those perfect blue eyes than there was in the whole damn world.

And I was the one who put it there.

For a moment, in the still silence that was hanging between us, I actually thought that I had a chance. I thought, foolishly, that there was a way to fix this. That I could just turn off the screens and pull him away and convince him that none of it was real.

I really, truly thought I had a chance.

And then he said the words.

The words I had craved most, spoken in the only way I would never want to hear them. Broken. Agonized. Ruined.

“I can’t believe I actually loved you.”

And just like that, my world was over.
It's Thursday update time! Although I'm guessing that everyone might be dreading that more than anything. But still, it's here! ^__^ 

So first, I just want to say WOW! o__o The amount of responses I got in the last chapter really surprised me. I expected to get a few because of the angst, but daaamn. And seriously, thank you all so much for writing to me and letting me know what you thought of the most recent chapter! I really do like to hear everyone's theories about what might happen next.

A HUGE thank you to karapatel, thenewinshayneity, aaapple-jax, danchou-bitches, and serrie-smiles for the beautiful (and heartbreaking) fan art they shared this week! If you haven't seen it already, you can find it under the art tab on my blog.

I would also like to thank the newest addition to the Intern cosplayers - twerk4captain! ^__^ They have an amazing Corporal blog, so please check it out!

OH! And in case anyone missed it... THERE'S A MUSIC VIDEO! Gaaaah! I am still so incredibly excited over it! ^__^ You can find it on my blog or on youtube! Thank you SO SO SO MUCH to corporalnoticesyou, noticemecorporal, and noticemecorporal for putting that together!

In addition to that, those same amazing cosplayers will be uploading a live action version of Chapter 48. So after you read, you can watch it too! ^__^ 

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you want to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

I couldn't lose him.

That was the only thing running through my mind, the single thought driving my entire body into any kind of motion. Consuming me in every way with a level of fear I would have never thought possible until this moment. Until I knew I was only seconds away from losing everything that mattered to me. And I was. I was losing him. I didn't even need to see his eyes to know that. He was done with me now and I was sure there wasn't a damn thing I could do to change that.

But like hell if I wasn't going to try.

I moved so quickly that I wasn't even sure of what I was doing until my hands were on the door. I slammed it shut and fumbled with the lock as if it would actually have any chance of keeping him inside. As if he couldn't just open it himself, even though I knew he would. But right now I was just hoping to buy myself a few seconds of time, a few moments where I might actually manage to say the right words before losing him entirely. If he would even give me that much.
It wasn’t like I could say I deserved it.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

His words trembled unsteadily over the tightness in his throat, and I knew it was because he was fighting against the pain. Fighting against the tears that were still in his eyes; unable to hold them back but unwilling to let them fall. It almost made it impossible to face him. I would have rather seen anger and hatred in his eyes over what I saw there now. But it wasn’t like those emotions weren’t there, too.

“I know you.” I whispered the broken words into the silence, my hand still gripping the doorknob. I had so much more to say after that, but his laugh stopped it all in my throat.

Soft, sad. Barely a laugh at all.

“Do you?” Levi tilted his head to the side and stared at me as if truly I’d lost my mind. “Do you really?”

“I know that you’re going to leave,” I pushed the words out of my throat, urging them past the fear that wanted to hold them in place. I had a feeling anything I might say now would only make this worse, but the other option was letting him go. And I couldn’t bring myself to do that.

“You think I’m just going to run from this?” His voice was stronger now. Growing stable. And the words caught me by surprise.

Maybe this wasn’t over after all.

“You’re not going to run from us?”

The laugh that left his lips this time would have sounded just as sad as the one before it if it weren’t filled with disgust.

“There is no us to run from, Eren. Not anymore.” He struck his finger against a key on the console and paused the video in its place. “You saw to that with this.”

I stared at my face on the screen, paused midsentence and caught forever between words I wished I would have never said. Words I couldn’t take back now. Words that had stolen away everything I’d ever wanted.

It was over now.

“Don’t say that.”

I wasn’t sure if I was talking to him or myself, but somehow I knew it was both. And they were the words I needed to hear, even if they had come from me. Because I couldn’t just give up on what we had when I was the only one willing to fight for us. He was ready to end it all and walk away, and I couldn’t just let that happen. Even if I had no ground to stand on, even if he had no reason to forgive me, I wouldn’t let him go. I wouldn’t lose everything we had because of some stupid lie.

I was going to fight, tooth and nail, kicking and screaming, until there was nothing left of us.

Until there was nothing more to fight for.

Because that was the only way I would ever stop.

“Don’t say what? That there is no us?” Levi turned away from the screen and faced me with a
newfound anger in his eyes. “What the hell do you expect me to say, Eren? That this is okay? That I forgive you?”

“I don’t expect you to forgive me.” No matter how much I wished he would, I knew that wasn’t possible now. Not anytime soon, anyway. “And I know it’s not okay. I know I messed up, but I—”

“You messed up?” Levi pointed at the screen, staring at me with incredulous eyes. “You think that’s what this is, you messing up? Like it was some kind of accident?”

There was an anger in his voice growing to a volume I wasn’t used to. And suddenly the pain didn’t seem so bad. Suddenly the pain was something I could deal with. I didn’t know what to do when he was this angry with me.

“Levi, I—”

“Are you just going to pretend that you didn’t purposely lie to me for months on end?” He cut me off sharply and the rest of the words stuck in my throat like I’d swallowed knives. His hands curled into fists at his sides, clenching so hard that his arms started to shake almost as much as his words. “Are you really going to stand there and act like you didn’t build our entire fucking relationship off of some goddamn lie?”

“It wasn’t built off of a lie!” I snapped out the words before he could stop me again. “That might have been how it started but that’s not what we are, Levi. That’s not all we have.”

“That’s the only thing we had!” His fist came down on the console and the keyboard jerked from its position. “You built us off of that and don’t you dare try to tell me that you didn’t. You used what I needed to get close to me even though you knew it was a lie.”

“I did.” The words rushed out and for the smallest moment the truth actually felt good. “I’m not saying I didn’t lie to you. I’m not trying to cover that up. And yes, I did use it to get close to you. I know I did. But I was scared, Levi. I—”

“You were scared?” He raised one perfect eyebrow and leaned into the console, folding his arms. “That doesn’t give you any excuse for what you’ve done. We’ve all been scared, Eren. Even I have. But I’ve never lied to someone I cared about because of it.”

“What about Erwin?” I shot back, hating the words the instant they were out of my mouth but knowing it was too late to turn back from them now. “What about the tape with Armin? You kept both of those from me for days.”

“Days.” He spoke the word through a short, hard laugh and looked away, shaking his head. “Days, Eren. Days that I spent thinking about nothing other than how to tell you. Do you really think that’s the same thing?”

I knew it wasn’t even close, but I had already told myself I would fight until there was nothing left. “I didn’t know how to tell you either.”

“You didn’t…” The words caught in his throat as if he couldn’t bring himself to say the rest. He searched my eyes with pain in his own and then covered his face with his hands, shaking his head and gripping his hair as his palms pressed tight against his eyes. “Goddamn it, Eren, just stop. Please just fucking stop. I don’t care what else you say. I don’t even care if the truth is worse, just stop lying to me.”

His voice cracked at the end and he gripped his hair tighter, his arms shaking and his face hidden. But I knew the pain was there, even if I couldn’t see it. I had somehow managed to ruin things
further and I wasn’t even sure of what I’d done. I didn’t know what lie I’d told. I honestly had no idea I’d said any at all, and the fact that I had terrified me more than what it meant.

That this was just getting worse.

“I didn’t… I wasn’t…” The words broke off and each time my throat grew tighter. The room was blurring around me now, almost to the point that I couldn’t see the man standing in front of me. My eyes were burning. “I didn’t mean to…”

“You didn’t mean to lie?” The sound was hopeless, like it wasn’t even meant to be a question at all. He believed my words even if they weren’t what he wanted to hear. He shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose, taking a deep breath before muttering. “So it just comes that naturally to you, then?”

I wasn’t sure it did, but I wasn’t even sure what I’d done. “Why do you think I’m lying to you?”

“Do you really have to ask that?” He paused and looked at the screen, at my frozen face, and his eyes lingered there. “You were lying when you say you didn’t know how to tell me.”

“No, I wasn’t.” And it was true. In the beginning I didn’t know how to say the words to him, and as time went on it became easier to just lie.

“That’s fucking bullshit, Eren,” Levi snapped, his eyes narrowing as he turned to face me once more. “You were never planning to tell me. That was never even a thought in your head. You weren’t struggling with how to bring it up, you were trying to find ways that you didn’t have to.”

“What else was I supposed to do?” I threw my hands up and then clenched them into fists, holding them there as I turned my face away. I didn’t want him to see the frustration in my eyes. I didn’t want him to see me breaking even though we both knew I was. “I shouldn’t have lied to you in the beginning. I know that. I fucked up. But I didn’t know what to do back then. I was scared and I thought you would leave if I…”

“You thought I would leave if I didn’t have a use for you.”

It wasn’t a question at all. And as I stared into his eyes I could only nod. Anything else would be a lie.

And we’d had enough of those to last us a lifetime.

“Do you really think that little of me?” Levi searched my eyes as if he were truly looking for the answer there. “Do you really think I’m the type of person that would be with you just because of what you could do for me? That I would use you that way?”

“No.” The word broke on a sob and I felt my shoulders quaking as I tried to pull myself back under control. I shut my eyes and shook my head, swallowing a few gulps of air before continuing in a voice that wavered at best. “No, I know you wouldn’t do that. I know that now. That’s not the type of person you are, Levi.”

“But you thought I was back then.”

It was a cold statement and nothing more.

“I didn’t know who you were back then.” The words were soft because it was the only way I could say them. I was worried they would break otherwise. “I didn’t know how you would react to it, and I was scared to find out. I wanted to be with you so badly and I—”
“Didn’t care if it was through a lie,” Levi cut me off, finishing the sentence with the only truth there was.

And I couldn’t deny it.

“I didn’t want it to be through a lie.” My voice cracked and I hated myself for it. I shook my head and shut my eyes. “But I didn’t know what else to do.”

Even without seeing him, I could hear the sorrow in his voice. “You could have just told me, Eren.”

“Would you have stayed?”

“You wouldn’t have been able to keep me away, kid.”

I lifted my eyes to his, hoping for a smile and seeing none. I was terrified I would never see a smile on his lips again. And even if I did I knew it wouldn’t be because of me. I couldn’t make him happy anymore.

I hung my head and clenched my fists so tight my arms started to shake. I was desperately searching my mind for anything that would make this better. Any words, any excuse. Anything that could keep this from ending here and now. Anything that would buy me more time than this. But what was there to say? I hadn’t told him all those months ago and there was no changing that now. By the time I’d had the courage to say anything at all it was too late.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Levi spoke into the silence, his eyes on the ground. He was gripping the table behind him as if it were the only thing holding him up; his muscles strained tight and his shoulders trembling. “Goddamn it, Eren, why didn’t you just tell me? I begged you to tell me.”

“When?” My brow furrowed and his eyes lifted to meet mine. “Today?”

“Yes.” He held my stare and shook his head, his expression guarded now. He was already pulling away from me. “I knew something was wrong, I could feel it. That’s why I came to this room. But I didn’t think it would be this. I thought it would be something to do with Armin, and I guess I wasn’t entirely wrong. But this…”

“If I had told you in your office, would it have made any difference?” I watched as he stared at the screens with a look of disgust and felt my stomach turn. “Would it have really mattered then?”

“It would have made every difference.”

I felt my heart snap in two.

“How?”

“Because you would have been the one to tell me.” He turned his attention back to me, his eyes cold. “And yea, we would have fought. It would have been a fucking mess, but at least it wouldn’t have come to this.”

“Why would it be different?” I could feel my heart racing faster now, my body shaking. I had been so close to ending it all and I had made the wrong choice. “Why would a few minutes make a difference?”

“It was never going to be a few minutes with you.” Levi snapped. “You were never going to tell me, remember? You were going to die with it first.”
I stared at the screen; my mouth paused on those exact words.

“If you had told me, I would have been angry,” Levi paused for a moment, staring down at the floor. “But I would have been able to forgive you.”

“That isn’t fair.” The words barely made it out through my teeth and when they did they didn’t sound like words at all. I was shaking to the point that I couldn’t keep still, and I knew there was no stopping the tears from spilling down my cheeks now. “You can’t just say that. Not like this. You can’t make it sound like it would have been okay.”

“It would have been,” he whispered softly. “If you had just told me the truth.”

“I couldn’t just tell you the truth.” The words were strained and the tears continued to fall. “I was so scared I would lose you.”

“And now you have.”

“No…” It wasn’t even a word at all. Nothing but a broken sound leaving my lips through a sob and continuing again and again. “No, no, no… please… Levi, oh god… please…”

“I can’t, Eren.” Through all the agony I was feeling inside, I could hear the tears in his voice. I knew they were there, even if I couldn’t see them.

“Yes, you can.” My voice cracked and I wiped at my eyes, shaking my head roughly as I tried to get my emotions under control. “I can hear it. I can see it. I know you love me, too.”

Levi was silent for a long moment. Just long enough to fill my heart with hope.

“It’s not enough, Eren.”

A pitiful sound cracked in my throat and I held my hand over my eyes, trying to ignore the wave of tears that wanted to follow the last. I couldn’t fight if I broke like this and I knew that. I could fall apart later, but not now. Not when we were still talking. Not when I still had a chance.

“Shit...” His voice broke and he pressed his arm against his eyes, his other hand gripping the table tight. His body shook and he clenched his teeth, speaking through them. “Why did you have to ruin it? Why did you have to do this? I could have handled this from anyone but you. Not you. Damn it, Eren, I trusted you!”

“I messed up!” I shouted over him, feeling a sudden terror rise inside me. Something in his words told me we were almost at the end, and I couldn’t let that happen. “But Levi, it was just a fucking lie! It was a stupid lie and I never meant to hurt you with it.”

“But you did!” Levi snapped, jerking his arm away from his face.

“I know I did, I’m not saying I didn’t.” I shook my head roughly, my mouth tripping over the question I didn’t want an answer to. “Are you just going to let us end because of a lie?”

“I didn’t end us,” Levi’s voice was rough and his eyes were cold as he held my stare. “You did. You were the one who decided to lie to me. You were the one who decided to keep it. Whether you meant to hurt me or not doesn’t matter. You lied, Eren. Despite all the chances I gave you to tell me, you lied.”

“I was scared!” My voice shook and I clenched my fists. “I’m young! What do you expect? You said it yourself days ago! And suddenly it’s different? Why are you letting Paris happen again? Why are
“This isn’t Paris.” Levi shook his head slowly, a quiet rage on his face as he looked off to the side. “You can’t use your age to make this go away, Eren. You weren’t in control of your emotions then, but you knew you were telling a lie now. The fact that I’m older than you doesn’t make a difference. It wouldn’t be right for you to lie to Armin either, and he’s your age. You knew this was wrong. You knew you were lying to me.”

I searched his expression and choked on the words that were only a half-truth. “I didn’t know it meant that much to you.”

“Bullshit.” Levi turned his eyes back to mine, his expression dark. “You knew exactly what it meant to me. You knew what lies did to my past and what they would do to us now. You didn’t tell me because you were scared; that much is true. I actually believe that. But that doesn’t make this any better.”

“But that’s not the only reason I didn’t tell you.”

And that was actually the truth. I had been terrified to tell Levi from the start; terrified that he would leave me if he knew, but that wasn’t the only reason I’d kept it a secret. I’d known how much Levi needed his revenge. We all did. He was never going to get that if he knew everything about Erwin. He would know there was no way to destroy the man he claimed to hate, and he would never get what he needed in the end.

And as selfish as I’d been, the lie wasn’t just for me.

“I lied for you, too.” I searched his expression, praying he would actually understand and knowing he wouldn’t. “It wasn’t just because I was scared.”

“That’s not true.” Levi shook his head and let a sigh rush out of his lungs, turning back to the screens. If for no other reason than to avoid my eyes. “But I know you think it is, kid. I know that somewhere in that head of yours you’re able to twist it around to make yourself sound noble. Like you actually did it to help me, when it was really just for you. It was selfish, Eren. There’s no other way to put it.”

“But there is,” I pushed, knowing all the while it was stupid. Knowing that I should stop. “You needed it, Levi. You can’t tell me you didn’t. You already heard everything, so you know there was no other way to get this. We were just trying to help you.”

“You were just trying to help me?” He spun around, staring at me as if I’d lost my mind. “What the fuck do you think I am? Five? Do you actually think I want to live in some goddamn lie? Do you think I’d be happy with that?”

“You would have been if you didn’t know.”

It was the worst possible thing that could have come out of my mouth, but the words were hanging between us before I could stop them. His eyes widened as if he couldn’t believe what I’d said and then all at once his teeth snapped together and his face filled with more rage than I’d ever seen in it before. There was only one other man I’d seen that angry, and for a moment I was back in that dark little room.

Terrified and alone.

Dying.
Levi’s hands were on my wrists and pulling them down to my sides, his touch so gentle it brought my mind back. I realized then that I was shaking, my breath coming in uneven and strained as if I had just run a mile. My hands had been in front of my face as if I were protecting myself; as if I knew I was going to be hurt and it was the only way to soften the blow.

“Shit, kid,” Levi’s voice shook as his hands moved against mine, spreading my fingers apart to lace our fingers together. “I’m so sorry.”

His hand squeezed mine and for a moment everything felt right in the world. Even if I knew it wouldn’t stay that way. But that didn’t matter right now. He was touching me again, and as long as I had this much I knew it would be okay. There was love there. And even if Erwin hadn’t found his way back inside, I would.

“I would never hurt you,” Levi’s voice drew my attention back to him and I found his eyes on mine. “Do you understand that? No matter how angry I get. No matter what happens to us, I will never, ever hurt you, Eren.”

The guilt in his eyes was enough to tear my heart apart. “I know that. I just…”

“I know.” Levi paused and stared down at our hands, silent for a long moment. “But I shouldn’t have gotten that angry. Not when I know your past. I didn’t mean to scare you, Eren. That’s not the way I want to end things.”

My breath caught in my throat and my hands fell away from his. The small moment of peace was gone and suddenly I couldn’t breathe again. He hadn’t said the words before now. And even if I knew they were coming, it was so much more to hear them from his lips.

“We can work on this.”

“No, we can’t, Eren.” Levi shook his head and he searched my eyes, more pain in his stare than in my own. “I wish we could, but we can’t.”

“Why?” The word was pitiful and broken, and I barely managed it before my entire expression crumbled under the weight of my agony. I hung my head to hide my face, my shoulders shaking. “Why can’t we fix this? Why am I not enough?”

“Eren…” His hands cupped my face and tilted it until I was staring in his eyes once more. “You are more than enough. You were always enough.”

“Then why?”

“Because I can’t trust you anymore.” The words were a whisper, strained and sad. He held my eyes, and in the depths of his stare I could see his heart breaking.

And it ripped me apart more than anything ever could.

Because he wasn’t screaming. He wasn’t fighting. His touch was gentle and his eyes were kind. He was in as much pain as I was, and yet he was still bringing us to an end. The fact that he could do that, even when we were both in tears, meant that we were truly over. As much as I wanted to save us, there was nothing left to save. I had ruined everything.

And there was no getting it back.

“I thought… you…” My voice hitched on each sob, my body shaking as it gave up the battle of holding me still any longer. The fight was leaving me, and pain was all that waited. It was all I felt as
I whispered the words in a broken gasp. “I thought you loved me.”

Levi’s expression started to break as he brushed the tears away from my eyes, still holding my face in his hands. “With every beat of my heart. Until the day that I die.”

And suddenly I couldn’t see him anymore. The tears swam in my vision until they were all I knew, consuming me entirely and leaving me breathless. The agony ripped through me faster than the realization of what I’d done, and the pain carried me to the ground. He followed me there, his hands on my shoulders and for a moment I thought he might break, too.

But there were no tears in his eyes. None that he would show anyway. Not until I was gone. He was too strong to let himself fall apart here in this room, in front of me. He wasn’t going to show me that kind of vulnerability or open himself up to the chance that he might actually give in. That he might actually forgive me for all of this. He wasn’t going to do that.

And I couldn’t even blame him.

I wouldn’t have forgiven me either.

“Oh don’t cry, Eren.” He held me tight and his forehead pressed to mine. Even through my tears, I could see his jaw tightening. “Not when I have no way to fix this.”

“But you have every way.” I knew I was begging now and I didn’t even care. I was at the end of it all, grasping for straws. “You don’t have to end this.”

“It’s already over.” Levi snapped. But the anger in his voice wasn’t for me. It was for him. He was angry at himself, and that terrified me more than anything. “I don’t want to do this, Eren. You’re insane if you think I do. I’m not ending us because I’m angry or because it’s my first fucking choice. I know myself, better than anyone. I can’t trust you after this, and without that we have nothing.”

“I can earn it back.” And I was sure I could, regardless of what I had to do. It didn’t matter at this point if it meant I could keep him. I would do anything.

“You can’t,” Levi muttered. “Not now. Not after I caught you with this. Maybe if you had told me yourself, it would be different. But you were never going to tell me, were you?”

I opened my mouth, but the words wouldn’t come. They would be a lie if they did. I knew I was never going to tell him. “I’m so sorry.”

“No, you’re not.” A sad smile touched his lips and he shook his head. “You’re only sorry that I found out. I’m not stupid, Eren. This didn’t go the way you wanted it to and you’re upset about it now. But you’re not really sorry that you lied to me. You wouldn’t be if it had worked out in the end.”

I stared at him in silence, my mind scrambling for the words that would counter what he said. But there was nothing. He knew it as well as I did, and that was the reason we were ending now. Because he knew he couldn’t trust me. He would question every word that came out of my mouth now, because he would always know that I had kept this from him. That I hid this secret until the bitter end. That I let this tear apart everything we had because I couldn’t be honest with him.

And there was nothing I could say to fix that.

Nothing I could do to change it.

I had lost him. And it was entirely my fault.
“I want you to stay with Mikasa.”

Mikasa.

I had almost forgotten about her in the pain of it all. Where would she stay now that we were over? He was paying for her apartment and after this she would have nowhere to go. We had lost our home.

“What’s that look for?” Levi searched my expression and then frowned, a hint of disgust in his eyes. “Am I really that bad a person, Eren? Do you really think I would just throw her on the streets because of us?”

“You’re not going to?”

“Damn it, you really don’t think anything of me, do you?” Levi shook his head and pushed a hand through his hair, leaning back. “Just go stay with her, kid. I’ll have your things sent over.”

“What about you?”

“What about me?” Levi raised a brow, regarding me for a moment before looking away, giving a small shrug. “I’m not staying at the apartment either. I’m going back to Trost.”

And for a moment that was the only place I wanted to be, no matter how dangerous I knew it was. As stupid as it sounded, as ridiculous as I knew it was, it was almost worth the risk if it meant I could see him again. Even now, I was already trying to figure out a way I could safely live in the building. Even if it meant taking the stairs at odd hours, I could…

“Don’t.” Levi snapped, pulling my mind back to him. “Don’t you dare, Eren. Don’t even let it be a thought in your head, do you understand?”

“What are you talking about?” As if we both didn’t know exactly what was going through my head right now. It wasn’t as if I even tried to hide the lie behind a hint of innocence. There was none, no point to it.

“I know you, Eren. Even if I don’t know everything, I know you. And I know how stupid you can be.” His voice was bordering on harsh but it was softened by the concern there. He was worried I would chase him down regardless of my own safety, and I couldn’t even say he was wrong.

“I’m not going to be stupid about it, Levi. I wouldn’t let myself get—”

His hands went into my hair and I met his gaze as he angled my head up. And suddenly I was lost in that concerned sea of blue hiding in his perfect eyes. “You’re not allowed to get yourself hurt over me. I don’t care what we are, Eren. I don’t even care if we’re over. It doesn’t matter if every single thing has fallen apart and I never want to see you again. It doesn’t matter what it comes to. I still can’t lose you that way.”

Each word put another crack in my heart and my voice was strained as I muttered. “What way?”

Levi opened his mouth for a moment and then shut it, staring down between us. “I can lose what we have, Eren. But I can’t lose you. I…”

There was silence again for the longest moment and then he closed his eyes, the words leaving him in a rush. “I honestly don’t know what I’d do if you were no longer in this world.”

And the pain on his face was just enough to make me reconsider, even if I knew it wasn’t necessary.
I was sure I could handle myself. I wasn’t about to be caught in that mess again. “I wouldn’t let it get to that.”

“You’re not allowed to put yourself at risk for me, kid,” Levi snapped with an edge of finality to his voice. It was clear he was done discussing this now, and I knew he wouldn’t let it get any further. “If I have to move, I will.”

“So what am I supposed to do?” I shot back. It was the only thing I could do, and I was hurt by the fact that he was willing to take it that far to get away from me. “Do you expect me to never see you again?”

“It’ll get to that point eventually.”

My heart snapped further and I looked away, trembling as I shut my eyes. I didn’t even need him to tell me we wouldn’t be seeing each other again. The internship would be over soon, and I knew I wouldn’t be welcome at The Wall. He was stepping out of my life and pretty soon he would be gone entirely. And right now I had no idea how I could possibly hold onto us.

“Levi…” My voice cracked and I felt my chest tighten as I stared down, my body shaking to the point where I was certain I would never be able to get it under control again. I couldn’t even see anymore. The room was nothing but a blur, and I couldn’t bring myself to care. Not about anything but this.

I pulled in a trembling breath and balled my hands into fists, shutting my eyes as I whispered in a voice too broken to be anything. “I was your something to come home to…”

Levi’s breath caught in his throat, and for a fleeting instant I thought it had made a difference. But I was never going to be that fucking lucky again, was I?

“You’re not my home anymore.”

And then the room was gone. Like it had never been there at all. Like I had never been there at all, and right now I wished like hell that I hadn’t. That it hadn’t come to this. That I hadn’t lost him.

But I did.

It was over.

“I need the key back.”

The air rushed out of my lungs as if he had hit me himself, and I stared at him with a hopeless desperation in my eyes. “Don’t.”

“I have to.” Levi held my stare, too strong to look away. And in that moment I knew this was something he wanted to do. Even more than that, it was something he had to do. Because no matter what was said between us, I had hurt him. Even if he was hiding it now, he was angry. Angrier than he had ever been. And right now my tears were all at once the first and last things he wanted to see. Which is why he was going to do this.

He was going to ruin me, and he was going to do it while looking into my eyes.

And maybe it was his moment of revenge.

 Maybe this is what he needed to do to Erwin all along.
Maybe this was the release he needed.

But I never thought he would get it through me.

“You don’t belong to me anymore, Eren.” His words were a whisper, and the pain was all too clear. He couldn’t hide it. Not from me. Not even if he wanted to.

But no matter what he was feeling right now, it could never compare to what I felt when he removed that collar from my neck.

And then I heard the key.

A soft slip of metal pulling away from the chain in the same moment that his heart pulled away from mine.

“And I don’t belong to you.”
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

Ah, Thursday... another update. And possibly with a little less pain than the last chapter, because I know that hurt. Not that the pain is entirely over, but... well, you'll see.

And damn. o_o That was a lot of responses! Chapter 48 essentially turned into a forum on here. XD But hey, that's awesome! ^_^ It was interesting to see everyone discussing ideas, theories, and opinions. Especially one in particular, which will be more or less addressed in this chapter.

A huge thank you to thenewinshayneity, rou-tan, keakasenka, and karapatel for the beautiful fan art they shared this week! ^_^ Oh! And we also have a new cosplayer ask blog, chibihanji! If you'd like to see the art or amazing cosplayers, you can find them under the 'Intern Art' and 'Intern Cosplay' tabs on my blog.

AND A HUGE THANK YOU TO MINDXRASH! ^___^ Hopefully most of you have already seen Ven's amazing photoshoot of The Corporal, but if you happened to miss it then you can find it on my blog. Or just follow mindxrash so you can see that photoshoot and all the other amazing ones that Ven has done. ^_^

Oh, and for anyone that missed it, the Chibi Interns (as they shall henceforth be named) submitted the live action scene for Chapter 48. That can also be found on my blog or in the tag. ^_^

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you'd like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

"You can’t just lay there like that forever."

Mikasa’s voice was muffled through the series of pillows I had stacked over my head hours ago, but somehow it was just as annoying as if she were screaming it next to my ear. Of course, that was mostly due to the fact that I had heard the same words repeated every fifteen minutes for the past three days. And to be honest, they were getting old at this point. It wasn’t going to make a difference whether she screamed it with a megaphone or whispered it across the room; the result was going to be the same.

I wasn’t fucking moving for anything.

"Eren." There was a snap to her voice now, and I felt movement above my head as she ripped away one of the pillows. And the subsequent groan as she found another one waiting beneath it.

I’d learned my lesson days ago when she stole the only pillow I had for an hour-long talk that I had since blocked out, and had no desire to revisit any time soon.

“So help me, Eren.” Another pillow left my head and this time she whipped it down against my
backside. It could have been a ton of bricks and I still wouldn’t have noticed. “If you don’t get your ass out of bed right now, I will get Hanji up here and have her drag you out.”

I flinched against the pillow at the name I knew all too well, knowing I could never see her face again. She was his best friend, and probably wanted nothing to do with me. Which is why I knew Mikasa’s threat was an empty one.

“How do I have to get him up here?”

She was aiming at my heart and she was a perfect shot. But she couldn’t see the pain with the pillow covering it.

“Good luck with that.” I muttered into the fabric, too muffled to sound emotional at all. Even if I was dying inside.

“I didn’t say it would be willing.” She snatched another pillow and I grabbed onto the last, my fingers digging into the fabric. She was relentless today. “I’ll drag that fucking pint sized asshole up here by his hair if I have to.”

“Pretty sure he can take you.” The words strained tight in my throat and my stomach twisted uneasily as his perfect face invaded my mind as if it had never left.

And I was pretty sure it hadn’t.

She grabbed the center of the pillow and tugged hard. “Not with the mood I’m in, he can’t. I’m tired of watching you lay here and waste your life over some fucking boy.”

“He wasn’t just some boy.” I growled into the pillow, emotion pushing my teeth together as I held fast to the fabric. “He was my whole life.”

“Well, it’s time to get a new one.” Mikasa wrenched the pillow away and tossed it across the room, leaving my face and every emotion on it bared to her.

But right now all I felt was anger. All I could do was glare. “I don’t want a life that doesn’t have him in it.”

“Well maybe you should have thought about that before lying to the king of fucking morals.” She rolled her eyes as she tossed the other pillows off the mattress. “Seriously, I’ve never seen someone get so sensitive over a lie. You’d think for someone who owns a BDSM club, he’d have a little wiggle room.”

“The Wall doesn’t have anything to do with this.” I sat up and pressed a hand against my forehead, running it down over my eyes with a groan. “I fucked up. I knew before he even found out, but I just couldn’t…”

“You were scared.” Mikasa dropped down onto the bed beside me, pulling her legs in and sitting with them crossed on the bed. “And who could blame you? He’s your first real relationship, and it’s not like you can say that any of this was normal.”

“That doesn’t give me any excuse for what I did.”

“Did I say it does?” Mikasa angled her head to the side, watching my eyes as if she hadn’t seen them in days. “I’m not saying you didn’t fuck up, Eren. You did. I know you did. You absolutely did, and trust me I hate to say it. It’s not like I want to side with him, and it’s not like I really am. But I can see where he’s coming from.”
I rubbed my forehead as I stared at her, frowning. “That doesn’t even make sense, Mikasa. Are you on my side or his?”

“I don’t really think there is a side, is there?” Mikasa shrugged and reached across to push her fingers through my hair. “You’re my brother, Eren. I’m always going to be on your side, even if I don’t agree with you.”

I closed my eyes and leaned into her hand, actually relieved by the comforting touch for once. “I am wrong though, right?”

“I think you’re both wrong.” Mikasa rubbed my scalp gently, and I felt my mind begin to relax. “You shouldn’t have lied to him, and there’s really no excuse for that. But I think he’s taking it too far. It’s your first relationship, and this is the first time you’ve really messed up.”

“What about Paris?”

She rolled her eyes, “Fine, twice.”

I frowned, recalling every mistake I’d ever made with him. I couldn’t really count the time Mikasa called, but the day I’d left him on that curb had been my fault. There was no denying that. “I messed up once before that, too.”

“Fine,” Mikasa ruffled my hair. “Then this makes the third time. And the third time’s the charm, right? So just don’t fuck it up after this.”

I pulled away from the touch and shook my head, pushing my own hands through my hair. “Don’t you get it? There’s not going to be anything after this. I lost him, Mikasa. It’s over.”

A pillow whipped into my face and suddenly all I saw was white. “Wake up, Eren.”

I shoved the pillow away and threw it back at her, fixing her with an annoyed stare. “I am awake. What the fuck was that for?”

“That is because you’re not awake.” She tossed it aside and turned back to me. “You haven’t been for four days.”

“That is because you’re not awake.” She tossed it aside and turned back to me. “You haven’t been for four days.”

“Three days.”

“No.” She leaned over me and snatched the phone off the dresser, pushing the glowing screen into my face. “See that? It’s called a calendar. Four days, Eren. And I’m not even surprised that you don’t remember the first.”

And I didn’t. I didn’t at all. It was as if that day had never happened, and I was sure that was for the best. To be honest, the only day I was really aware of happened to be today. Everything else just kind of blurred into a mess of anguish, tears, and hate. The most I kept track of was the sun going up and down, and aside from that I’d done nothing but try to block out Mikasa’s voice and Armin’s phone calls.

“It’s normal to grieve after you lose something.” I muttered, snatching my phone from her and tossing it haphazardly onto the dresser. I could really care less if it was broken now; there was no one I wanted to call me anyway. “And I’ve lost everything, so I’d say what I’m doing is pretty damn normal.”

“He didn’t die, Eren.” Mikasa snapped. “So stop acting like he did.”
I rolled my eyes and flopped back into the heap of pillows that weren’t waiting for me, my head dropping lamely onto the mattress. “I’m not acting like he’s dead.”

“Yes, you are.” She pushed; grabbing my arm and tugging to try to pull me back up. I let it flop against the bed like an overcooked noodle. “You’ve been moping your ass off for the better part of a week, and whenever you actually do talk it’s always about the fact that you’ve lost him.”

“I have lost him!” I yelled, jerking my hand from her and pushing both into my hair. “Goddamn it, Mikasa, what part of that is so hard to understand?”

“The part where it’s coming out of your mouth.”

I turned my eyes to her, glaring as I held my hair in two twisted clumps. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means this isn’t like you.” Mikasa paused, staring around the room. “None of this is. You’re a fighter, Eren. And this isn’t fighting.”

“What do I have left to fight for?” I shook my head and dropped my hands back onto the mattress. “He’s not going to forgive me, Mikasa. I know he’s not. So what’s the point?”

“Since when did you ever need a reason to fight?” Mikasa leaned over me and folded her arms, her expression stern with just a hint of remorse. “My brother wouldn’t give up like this. You wouldn’t give up like this. I know you, Eren. You would fight tooth and nail until there was literally nothing left. Until he wasn’t there to fight for.”

“I did fight.”

“He’d be yours if that was true.” Mikasa shook her head and moved off of the bed. “If you would have actually tried. You should have been at his side every night. You should have chased him down and proved that you weren’t just going to throw him away like this.”

“Throw him away?” I sat up and rubbed my forehead, a pain resting deep in my skull. “I didn’t throw him away, I gave him what he wanted. He wanted me to let him go.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“I…” I paused, my eyes lingering on her outfit. Something was different. “What the hell are you wearing?”

Mikasa opened her mouth and shut it just as quickly, staring down at the black corset that had her laced into a figure that would be alluring to anyone but her brother. She wore a deep red shrug and tight red pants with black boots to pair it all off in a style I knew too damn well at this point. Why didn’t I notice it before? She was dressed like she was going to a club.

“His club.”

“Does it look bad or something?”

“Don’t avoid the question, Mikasa.”

She pursed her lips together and then frowned, folding her arms across her chest and shifting her weight from one boot to the other. “I told you I’d get Hanji up here to drag you down.”

“What?” I glanced warily at the bedroom door. “Is she here, too?”
“No.” Mikasa paused for a moment and then spoke in a rush. “But she’s waiting downstairs in the lobby.”

My stomach twisted and suddenly I felt like doubling over. Was he here, too?

“Why?”

“Because you’re not the only one who made friends.” Mikasa shrugged, glancing over her shoulder at the window. I had a feeling she was trying to avoid my eyes. “I’ve been hanging out with Petra and Hanji every day. I didn’t see a reason in stopping now.”

“You shouldn’t stop now.” I tried to keep the bitterness out of my voice and failed miserably. “It’s not like they’re mad at you.”

“They’re not mad at you either.”

“That’s a lie.” I paused and then glanced at her, hoping her expression would prove me wrong. In truth, I didn’t want them to hate me at all. And that wasn’t just because of Levi. “Or they’re just hiding it really well.”

“Hanji doesn’t strike me as the type of person to hide things like that.” Mikasa turned and met my eyes. “They’re worried about you, Eren. They’ve been asking to see you.”

“It’s not like I can go see them.” I muttered, looking down at the blankets and picking at a loose strand. I stayed silent for a moment and then braved the one question I was sure I didn’t want to ask. “Did you see him?”

“Yes.”

I opened my mouth, shut it, and tried again. “And?”

“I think you might actually be doing better.” Mikasa smiled sadly when I met her eyes. “And it really sucks, Eren. I want to hate him for hurting you like that, but I can’t. Not after seeing him in so much pain. If it weren’t for Hanji dragging him to the club, I don’t know if he would have moved either.”

I wasn’t sure whether I should be thrilled or upset. The idea that he was hurting just as badly as I was seemed so unfair. I was the one who had hurt him in the end, and it made sense that I should be suffering now. There was no reason for him to linger on this pain, and that had been one of the reasons I’d stayed away. Because Mikasa was right.

It wasn’t like me not to fight.

And I wanted to. I wanted to so badly that at one point I actually thought I would teleport right out of my bed. But I knew I couldn’t do that to him. Looking back on the things we had said, the pain in his eyes, I knew I’d hurt him too much. And as badly as I wanted to have him back, I had to wonder if it would be kinder to just let him go. He could move on and be happy, even if it wasn’t with me.

But he wasn’t doing that. He wasn’t even trying.

And that made me want to.

“Have you talked to him?”

“I tried.” Mikasa frowned. “I actually went in there planning to yell at him, but that didn’t work. Not after I saw his face. I mean, I know I can be a hard ass but even I couldn’t dig into him after that.
He’s… he’s really hurting, Eren.”

I felt like my heart was filled with daggers shoved in at all the wrong angles. “Do you think I should stay away from him?”

“I think that’s what he’s going to ask for.” Mikasa paused, searching my expression. “And it’s the only thing he doesn’t actually want.”

“So what should I do?”

“Do what you’re best at.” Mikasa shrugged, a small smile pulling at her lips. “Chase him down like you know you want to. Be at The Wall every night from opening to close. See him every chance you get. Be his constant reminder. Let him know that you won’t give up on him, even if it takes forever.”

“You make me sound like a real pain in the ass.” I muttered, rolling my eyes.

“Like I said, it’s what you’re best at.” Mikasa ruffled my hair, smiling softly. “And it’s what he needs right now. He needs someone like that, someone like you. Because honestly, he’s like me. And maybe that’s why I can sympathize with him. We’re both so ready to push everyone away, even the ones we know we need. And we need people like you, Eren. Because you’re someone who will tear his way back into our lives. Even when we try to stop you.”

I sat in silence, searching her expression and realizing for the first time that she actually approved of Levi. And it took seeing me in immense pain to get her to that point, when I thought it would be the exact opposite. I was sure she would hate him after this, and the fact that she didn’t told me just how much pain he was in. How badly he needed me, and how much of a chance I actually had.

“And he’s going to try to stop you,” Mikasa continued, her expression sadder now. “I know he is. He’s not the only one who tried to push you away. But he needs you, Eren. Maybe even more than I did.”

She drew her hand back and I caught it in mine, lacing our fingers together and squeezing gently, reassuringly. “I don’t know why you left, but you’re here now. And I don’t blame you for going. I know you had your reasons.”

“I’m still never going to forget the face you had when I left.”

The smallest grin tugged at my lips, and it felt strange there. Like it couldn’t possibly belong. “Then I’ll have to make new faces to replace it.”

Mikasa wrinkled her nose slightly and shook her head. “I really don’t think I want to know what those are.”

I shrugged and leaned back against the headboard. “I don’t even know what they are. But I guess I’ll have to figure them out eventually, right?”

“Are you going to go to him?”

“I was always going to go to him.” I whispered softly, staring down at the floor. Even if I had been determined to give him what he wanted, I always knew it would be a matter of time until I went after him again.

“Then why don’t you come to The Wall tonight?” Mikasa offered, grabbing her keys from the desk.

“I don’t think he’ll let me.”
Mikasa paused for a moment, fiddling with the chain on her keys before glancing over at me. “I actually asked him about that.”

I felt my stomach drop to the floor. “What did he say?”

“He said he doesn’t own you anymore. You don’t belong to him. He can’t tell you where to go or what to do.” She dropped the keys into her purse. “And he said that includes The Wall. You’re free to be there if you want to.”

I could tell by Mikasa’s triumphant smile that she had absolutely no idea just how much that truly hurt. I felt like doubling over and pulling the pillows back onto my head. I wanted to smother myself with them until I was sure I could sleep again. I wanted to hide under the covers and never come out, as if it could actually keep the pain away.

I wasn’t his.

I didn’t belong to him anymore.

He wouldn’t tell me what to do, and somehow that was the worst possible thing.

“Don’t look like that.” Mikasa interrupted my thoughts, and I could only guess what my expression must have been. “I don’t know what kind of master-slave situation thing you’ve got going on, but you don’t need that right now, got it? That’s not going to help you. You’re never going to get him back if you just drop to your knees when he tells you to stop.”

“I wouldn’t just drop to my knees.” I ran a hand down my face and sighed. I didn’t want to talk about this anymore; especially when I knew she would never be able to understand. “When are you going, Mikasa?”

“Right now, actually.” She answered, glancing once at her phone. “Hanji’s been waiting for me, but you can follow us when you’re done here.”

“Yea, okay.” I muttered, rubbing a hand over the mess that was once called hair. I knew I at least needed to get a shower before I went out the door. I had no hope of getting Levi back if I looked like a drowned sewer rat.

“There’s something in there for you.” Mikasa nodded to the closet. “Hanji thought you might say yes.”

I looked once at the closet and then back at her, catching the smile before she walked out the door. It was clear that she had woken me up with the plan to ask me to join them at The Wall, but I had to wonder if there was more to it than that. More than just an outfit and a chance to see him again. And suddenly I realized that I wasn’t really alone in this. They wanted me to try just as badly as I wanted to. And maybe that was a good thing. Maybe that meant I actually had a chance.

And even if it was small, I was willing to take it.

I snagged a towel from the linen closet and made my way down the hall, briefly catching the sound of the front door opening and closing. She didn’t bother to lock it, but I didn’t expect her to. No one really knew we were here, and anyone that did was more than welcome to come in. For the most part, anyway. Not that I was expecting any visitors that would actually show up. I knew there was no real chance of seeing Levi walking through that door.

And the only other person wouldn’t bother to come.
Because we hadn’t spoken in days.

My shower was quick at best, but I at least managed to cover every area. Not that I planned to be thorough. Not when the room smelled like this. The alluring scent of his body wash hung heavy in the air, and it was almost enough to bring me to my knees. I shouldn’t have used it, but at the same time I knew it was his favorite. It would actually make a difference if he saw me. If I was close enough to touch him.

And if nothing else, it beat smelling like I’d drenched myself in prepubescent kid cologne.

I walked out of the bathroom to the sound of the door opening once more, rubbing a towel over my head as I turned the corner. I already had a pair of brown lounge pants on, a habit I had picked up since the day I had accidentally exposed myself to a room full of people. It had been at least ten minutes since she’d left and I couldn’t imagine why she was back now, but I was at least grateful for the chance to have a ride to The Wall.

“Did you forget something?”

I dropped the towel from my head and froze, staring across the room at a familiar face I wasn’t ready to see.

One I had been avoiding on purpose.

Because I was worried of what I would say if I didn’t.

“Armin.”

A small, sad smile touched his lips and he fidgeted nervously in the doorway. “Hey, Eren.”

The few words were all at once too little and too much to hear, and I felt myself turning out of the room before I even realized I wasn’t willing to give him a chance. And I wasn’t. I couldn’t. I knew I couldn’t. Not now. Not when I was still so angry over what had happened. Not when I knew I was only seconds away from openly blaming him for a whole mess that he had nothing to do with.

Because in the end he was only trying to help, and I knew that.

Even if he had helped our relationship straight off a cliff.

“So, what do you want, Eren?” The door shut and I heard his footsteps behind me, knowing he couldn’t get to me before I reached the bedroom. But what would I do then? It was Armin, and I was willing to bet he wouldn’t just leave.

In fact, I knew he wouldn’t.

“Eren!”

I turned to face him, halting in the doorway and fixing him with an expression that was meant to be friendly. But it wasn’t. It wasn’t even close, no matter how much I wanted it to be.

So I stopped trying.

“What do you want, Armin?”

“What do I want?” His brow furrowed and he whispered the words as if he couldn’t quite believe them himself. “You haven’t talked to me in four days, and you want to know what I want? Isn’t it obvious?”
I opened my mouth and shut it just as quickly. There was no pretending with him. Even if I could manage it, he would see right through it. And even if he couldn’t, I wasn’t willing to lie anymore. Not to him, not to anyone. I’d had enough of that to last me a lifetime.

“I’m not ready to talk to you yet, Armin.”

There was pain in his eyes but no surprise to follow it. “Why?”

I shook my head and started to turn back towards the bedroom. I still had to get dressed, and this was one conversation I knew I didn’t need right now. “I already told you I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Not even to tell me why?”

“Not even that.”

And for a moment I was sure he would leave it there and let me go. But I should have known better than to expect that from him. Armin was just as much a fighter as I was, even if he didn’t do it as loudly as I did. He could be relentless and I could tell this was going to be one of those moments. Just the same, I turned away to the bedroom.

I could be stubborn, too.

“Do you hate me?”

The sound of his voice cracking under the weight of his agony was enough to stop me dead in my tracks. I found myself at his side before I even knew I was moving, before I was even aware I had turned at all. But I couldn’t think about that right now. In that one moment all I saw was his lips trembling and his body shaking as he tried to hold himself together.

Why did I keep hurting people like this?

“I don’t hate you.” I held his eyes as he stared into mine, trying to see past the pain and worry only to find no end to it all.

“Then why?” His voice cracked and he looked down and away, taking a deep breath before trying again. “You haven’t talked to me in days, Eren. And unless your phone is broken, I know you got my messages. I haven’t stopped trying. I keep sending them and you just… you…”

His hands balled into fists at his sides and his arms started to shake, his words cracking into nothing before stopping entirely. He hung his head and stood there in quaking silence as my heart tore itself apart. I had never seen him in this much pain, not even over Jean, and I realized I hated myself for it. For something I couldn’t change and something I couldn’t stop.

Because as much as I wanted to help him, I knew I couldn’t.

The anger was still there, and I knew I would only hurt him with it. It would only make this worse in the end, and I couldn’t do that to him. Not to Armin. Not when he meant this much to me.

“I’m angry.” I whispered into the silence and he lifted his head, staring at me with an expression that was all at once scared and concerned.

“At me?”

I didn’t want to answer that question, because I knew I couldn’t give the one he wanted to hear. But I knew he needed it anyway. “Yes.”
His expression started to break and he looked down again, biting into his lower lip and giving me nothing but a nod. As if he had resigned himself to it all. As if he actually understood even when I didn’t.

Because I knew I had no good fucking reason to be as angry as I was. Not at him. Never at him. He didn’t deserve this.

“I don’t have any reason to be angry at you, Armin.” My words were shaking and I had to force myself to look away. I hadn’t felt this much in four days and somehow it was worse. I was angry and devastated all in the same moment, and for a fleeting instant I had to wonder if this was exactly how Levi had felt with me. Only his anger had been justified.

“You can be angry at me.” He whispered, shrugging as if it was actually okay. But the crack in his voice told me it was anything but. “If it helps you, you can be mad at me. It’s alright, okay? I understand.”

“I’m not angry at you because I need someone to be mad at, Armin.” I shot back and then stopped. Because in all actuality, that had to be the reason. “I mean, I guess I am. I just… I…”

My voice started to break as my throat shut entirely, and suddenly I couldn’t see the room anymore. It was nothing but a blur, kept from me by a shield of tears that were threatening to fall once again.

“Eren…”

“I just…” I tried again and the words squeaked out, cracking into practically nothing as the agony broke me down. “I hate myself so much right now.”

“No…” Armin’s hands were on my face, his skin warm and soft against my cheeks. “Eren, please don’t cry… please…”

“I can’t…” I shook my head and swallowed the words that wouldn’t come. But he knew what I wanted to say just the same.

I couldn’t help it.

“Eren, I’m so sorry.” Armin’s voice shook and if he weren’t so close I might have actually missed it all. “I shouldn’t have let you keep that lie. I shouldn’t have gotten involved. I…”

“You ruined it.”

Those horrible words were falling off my tongue before I even knew they were in my head. His hands jerked off of my face like I had physically burned him and he stumbled back, staring at me with wide eyes that were consumed with guilt. He stood in place and trembled as if the ground was falling apart beneath him, and suddenly that was all I wanted to happen to me. I wanted the Earth to open up and swallow me whole.

I couldn’t say the world wouldn’t be better for it.

“You…” The word was so soft on his tongue that it might as well not have been there at all. “You think I… ruined it? You think I did this?”

“Not all of it.” I shook my head against the words, wanting nothing more than to take it all back and knowing that I couldn’t. This was why I had avoided him. I knew these horrible things would come out if I didn’t, and now it was too late. “I know it was my fault, Armin. I’m the one who lied to him, but…”
I trailed off because I didn’t want to say anymore. I wanted to keep the thoughts to myself, buried deep where they belonged. I was angry enough to have them in my head, but at the same time I knew I shouldn’t say them.

“But?”

I shut my eyes and hung my head, as if doing so would actually fix this. “I don’t want to talk about it, Armin.”

“I know you don’t.” He paused, his voice a little stronger now. “But I need you to. I need to hear it. Because if this is the reason you’re staying away, I’d rather hear it all. Even if it’s not good, even if it hurts me, it has to be better than this.”

“Better than what?”

“Not seeing you.” I met his eyes and he held my stare. “I’m dying without you, Eren.”

And I couldn’t say that I felt different. Armin had been my best friend since I was a kid, and we hadn’t gone a day without talking to each other until now. It broke me apart inside to know I hadn’t heard his voice, and when I saw him walk through that door I knew he was the one I wanted to see. Because I couldn’t get through this without him.

Levi was my life, but Armin was everything else. Filling in all the space in between like the glue holding me together.

Without him, I would just fall apart.

Which is why I knew we had to talk about this. Even if I didn’t want to, even if I said horrible things, we had to. Because I couldn’t keep going without him.

And I knew now that he wouldn’t let me.

“Eren,” Armin’s voice drew my attention back to him, and even without the words I could see him begging through his eyes. “Please.”

I nodded once and looked down, wanting desperately to keep the words to myself and knowing all the while that I couldn’t. So I didn’t.

“Why did you have to give him that tape?”

The words were nothing more than a whisper but I wasn’t ready to try anything else. I was scared I would scream if I did.

“Because I wanted to help you.”

The words were so simple and I knew they were coming, but they angered me just the same. “You should have stayed out of it, Armin.”

“Why?” His voice was confused, but I couldn’t bring myself to look up.

“Because I could have handled it.”

“No, you couldn’t.” Armin took a step forward and I fought the urge to move back. “You said so yourself, Eren. You couldn’t do it for him anymore. You couldn’t do what he needed. And he did need it, right?”
“He did.” I shook my head and pushed my teeth together. “But not from you.”

“There was no one else who could do it, Eren.” Armin’s voice was soft, knowledgeable. I knew he was right, and it didn’t help at all. “I was the only way.”

“I know, but I didn’t want you to do it!” I snapped, the words rushing out on their own. “I didn’t want you involved, Armin! And now that you are it’s all ruined!”

“Why?” Armin wanted his voice to be strong, I could tell. But it wasn’t. “Why me? How did I make the difference? Tell me, Eren, how did I ruin it?”

“Because I couldn’t trust you!”

My eyes snapped up to his and I watched them widen with more pain than I had ever seen in them before.

Why did I keep doing this?

“You couldn’t…” Armin paused and swallowed, his lips trembling around the words when he tried again. “You didn’t trust me?”

“It’s not a bad thing,” I muttered, looking away from the pain like a coward. But I couldn’t form words with his face like that. “I just know that you would hurt yourself for me. You would even put yourself in danger if it meant that you could help me.”

“I would,” he admitted softly, “But how does that make a difference?”

“Because I wouldn’t let you get hurt for me.” And it was true. The whole reason I had gone into Erwin’s office in the first place had been for him. I needed to know that he was in on it and that Armin wasn’t actually putting himself at risk.

“I wasn’t going to.”

“I didn’t know that.” I shrugged. “And I knew you wouldn’t tell me if you were. You would tell me to use it anyway, so I had to go to him instead. I had to talk to Erwin and that’s when Levi…”

The name broke in my throat and tore through my heart so quickly that I barely had time to recover. It was the first time I had said it in days, and the sound of it now was almost enough to carry me to the ground. I gripped the doorframe and stared down, taking a slow and deep breath until I was sure I could speak again.

“He found out because I went into Erwin’s office.”

“I know,” Armin whispered softly. “Erwin told me after… after you left that day.”

“Well, I’m sure he already knew.” I muttered, the words bitter on my tongue. “He probably set the whole thing up himself. He just needed you to get me there.”

Armin’s breath caught in his throat and he stared at me as if I had completely lost my mind. “Do you think I let him do that?”

“What?” I actually sounded surprised, but I knew exactly what he was asking. Because it had been a thought in my mind, for the smallest of moments days ago. But I had ignored it just as quickly. I knew Armin wouldn’t do that to me.

“I wouldn’t… I never…” Armin stared down and gripped his hands into fists, his shoulders shaking.
“Damn it, Eren. I wouldn’t let that happen to you.”

“I’m not saying you were in on it, I just—”

“I’m not saying that either!” He cut me off sharply, his eyes snapping up to meet mine. “You know I wouldn’t do that. But how could you think I would put so much trust into someone that would?”

I opened my mouth and stopped, searching his eyes and finding nothing but pain. He looked like he was seconds away from breaking down entirely, and all I wanted to do was to take him into my arms. But I was too shocked to move.

“He didn’t plan it?”

“No!” Armin shouted, his expression bordering on disgust. “No, he didn’t. None of us did, Eren. Why would you think that we would?”

“I didn’t think you would.” I shook my head. “But I thought that he did.”

“He didn’t.” Armin’s voice softened, and I knew then that he could see the pain in my eyes. “He was upset. He didn’t want it to happen like that. I know you hate him, Eren, but he actually wanted to see Levi happy. And you make him happy.”

“Please don’t say his name.” The words were nothing but a gasp as I rubbed at my chest. It was even worse hearing it from someone else.

“Eren…” I could hear the pain when he spoke again, and even without looking I knew he was shaking. He was breaking just as quickly as I was, and it was all because of me. “Eren, I know you’re mad at me…”

“I’m—”

“You are,” Armin cut me off through a sob and I fought every urge I had to look up. I knew it would end me if I did. “I know you are, and it’s okay. I understand. I shouldn’t have gotten involved and I’m so sorry this happened. But I—”

“I’m not mad that you got involved.” I whispered the words before he could stop me, and I knew all at once that they were true. Even if that disc was the catalyst that started it all, my lie was what finished it in the end.

“I don’t want you to hate yourself, Eren.” His words were barely words at all. Shaking and breaking apart with every syllable. Just like he was. Just like we were. “So if you have to hate someone, hate me. If it makes you feel better, please. Blame me. Yell at me. Hate me. Do what you have to do, but stop this.”

He looked up and I forced myself to meet his eyes. The brightest blue, swimming with tears and agony. I wasn’t even sure how he managed to choke out the rest, but when he did he broke us both.

“Because I need to hold you, Eren. I can’t watch you in pain like that and not have you in my arms.”

The last words were nothing but sobs, and they didn’t even matter. Because he was already in my arms, speaking them against my chest in a voice that was so broken there was nothing left. I gripped him close and hid my face in his hair, his scent engulfing me in a comfort that I had needed for days. And I fell apart in it.

We both did.
Our knees hit the floor like we had no strength to stand. His arms circled around me and his nails clutched at my back as if he would actually find a shirt there. I couldn’t even feel the pain. I held him tighter; sure I would never be able to get him close enough and determined to try anyway. I could feel him shaking in my arms as the tears came, and I knew I had no hope of holding back my own.

So I didn’t even try.

“Eren…” The word was strained but I knew his voice too well to miss it. “Eren, I love you.”

He didn’t even need to say what he meant for me to know. I’d realized it long ago.

“Armin,” I pulled back and he lifted his eyes to mine, and all I could see was tears. I brushed them away, collecting them on my fingertips only to have more follow in their path. I hated knowing that I put the pain there. “Please don’t cry…”

He gave me a sad smile, or what was meant to be a smile, and I knew he was trying. But that didn’t stop the tears. Tears that I had put there. Tears that I had caused. I had somehow managed to convince him that I hated him when it wasn’t even close to how I felt. Because I could never hate him, no matter how much I tried. Armin was my best friend, and nothing could change that.

Why did I do this to him?

“What’s wrong with me?” I whispered, unaware the words were even there at all. “Why do I keep doing this? Why do I keep hurting everyone I love? Why do I—”

The rest of it was lost to the taste of Armin’s tongue, and my mind went with it. His hands fist into my hair and I could feel his heart racing as if it were in my own chest, beating next to mine. He moved against me until he was in my lap, straddling me and pushing until my back met the floor, leaving me trapped between the heat of his body and the frigid tile. And still I couldn’t move. Still I couldn’t think.

All I knew was him.

Him and his taste, invading my mouth like it always wanted to be there even if it never could. His tongue was soft but insistent, moving against mine in a way I knew I would never forget. And part of me wasn’t even sure I wanted to. His hands slipped from my hair and moved to my neck, brushing slowly down the raging pulse before making their way to my chest.

And then he stopped.

His lips left mine, slow and lingering as he held my stare.

Which couldn’t have been hard, considering my eyes were as wide as they were ever going to get.

“Armin…” My voice cracked and I cleared my throat. “I… uhm…”

He searched my eyes and I waited for the embarrassment that never came. All he did was smile softly and touch my cheek. “I know.”

And we both knew what he meant.

I didn’t feel that way, and it was okay.

He was my best friend.

But Levi was my life.
Even still, I needed to say the words. “I’m sorry.”

And I was. Because given another time and a separate world, it would have been different. I would have wanted him, and I knew beyond a doubt that it would have been more than this. We were perfect together, and there was no denying it. But that didn’t matter in the end.

He would never be Levi.

“You don’t have to apologize.” Armin moved off of me and offered me his hand as if it were the proper thing to do.

I grabbed it and jerked him into my lap as if I didn’t give a fuck.

I held him close and rested my head against his shoulder, closing my eyes. “I know I don’t have to, but I want to.”

He angled his head and rested it against mine. “You can if you want to, but it’s not necessary, Eren. I know you love him, and that’s not what this is about. I’m not trying to steal you away from him. I just need you to know that I love you, too.”

I squeezed him once, holding him closer. “I know. And you know that I love you.”

“Yea, I do… but I love you more.” Armin spoke through a soft laugh, nudging his head against mine. We sat in a moment of quiet silence before he continued in a whisper. “And you’re going to get him back, Eren.”

I felt my stomach twist and I closed my eyes. “I don’t know if that’s true.”

“It is.” And his voice was so certain that I almost believed it. “You’re relentless, Eren. And he loves that. I know he does. Even if he won’t admit it, I’m sure he’s just waiting for you to chase him down.”

“Even if I do, it’s not like I’ll know what to say when I get there.”

“You will.” Armin angled his head to the side and smiled softly. “When you’re standing in front of him, I know you will.”

“I don’t even know how to get to him, Armin.” I shook my head and stared down. “I don’t even think I can get near him. It’s not like he’ll let me up in his office. And he can avoid me everywhere else.”

“Not at The Wall.” Armin countered and then paused, glancing once over my shoulder at the closet. “And you were going there anyway, right?”

Of course.

I should have known Mikasa was the one to send Armin up here. Even if it had been his plan in the first place, I was willing to bet that she definitely had a hand in it. And I couldn’t even blame her. It was obvious that I needed this.

“Yea.” I muttered, “I just have to get dressed into whatever contraption Hanji brought me.”

“It’s nothing over the top.” Armin shrugged and gave me a sheepish smile. “I picked it out.”

I raised a brow and felt a small smile tug on my lips. “I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing.”
Armin rolled his eyes. “It’s a good thing, Eren. Now go get dressed. We don’t want him to get away.”

And I had no plan to let him.

I knew I couldn’t just let him go. Whether it was like me or not, I couldn’t just let it happen this way. I wouldn’t lie down anymore. I wouldn’t let him ruin us like this. Without even trying. Without even fighting. Even if he wanted to give up, I wouldn’t.

I couldn’t.

He could tell me he didn’t want us anymore. He could ruin me with his words. He could break every bone in my goddamn body. He could rip my heart into a million fucking pieces.

And I wouldn’t stop.

I would never stop.

I was going to fight.

And not a damn thing in this world could stop me.
Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

YAY THURSDAY! ^__^ And an early update, too. I figured I might as well get this out early if I could, so hopefully this makes a few people happy today. ^__^

Thank you so much to everyone who commented on the last chapter! o_o There was more than I expected, but it was exciting just the same! Hopefully everyone enjoys this chapter as well. I'm personally excited for the one coming up next week... it's a bit long. XD

A HUGE thank you to noticemecorporal for the fan art they shared for The Intern this week! ^_^ And thank you to city-of-feels who also shared their Intern-inspired henna tattoo! Both can be found under the art tab on my blog, if you'd like to check them out!

AND AN EXTRA HUGE THANK YOU TO MINDXCRASH! ^__^ Ven shared an incredible photoshoot of The Corporal and just... GAH! Honestly, it's amazing! ^_^ If you haven't already seen it, you can find it under the cosplay tab on my blog. Or you can simply follow mindxcrash, which I would highly suggest. ^_^

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you'd like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

“What the fuck is he doing here?”

The words were out of my mouth before I’d even made it outside of the glass doors, but that cocky blonde headed dishrag heard me anyway. Erwin glanced up from the book he was holding, his one arm draped across his chest as he leaned against the car in the most relaxed position. As if he couldn’t care less that he had been waiting over an hour for us. Which I was sure he had. Because Armin didn’t look at all surprised to see him, and that told me everything I needed to know.

“Nice to see you, too, Eren.” He snapped the book shut and smiled so invitingly it made me want to greet him with my fist. “All ready to go?”

“To go? With you? In that?” I pointed at the car, not even trying to keep the disgust off my face. “I think I’d rather walk.”

“Are you sure about that?” Erwin shot back, angling his head to the side and eyeing my outfit with a critical stare. “It’s not exactly warm out, and I wouldn’t say that you’re dressed for—”

“Erwin,” Armin cut him off with a warning tone and then turned to face me, frowning. “I’m sorry. I should have mentioned that he drove me here.”

“And instead you just decided to skip over the part where you brought this asshole to my apartment?”
“You make it sound like I wasn’t already aware of where you lived.” Erwin paused and tossed the book onto the passenger seat of the car. “Not that it matters. If you really don’t want me to drive you, then you’re free to walk in that.”

He gestured briefly at my outfit and I glanced down at the fishnet top and belted black pants, trying to decide if it was really worth it. Even though I knew my way around, I was sure I was bound to attract some unwanted attention. That, and I wasn’t exactly thrilled with the idea of adding an extra hour onto my travel time when I was already bound to be late. I had been banking on the fact that Armin would be driving us there, and now that plan was all shot to hell.

“Eren…”

I turned to Armin at the sound of his voice, knowing my expression was far more accusatory than I wanted it to be. But I couldn’t help myself right now. I felt betrayed and there was no way past that. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I knew you wouldn’t come outside if I did.” Armin paused and shrugged, continuing in a soft voice. “I wasn’t trying to catch you off guard or anything. I just…”

“I don’t want to see him right now.”

“Well, I’m not about to give you a choice in that.” Erwin opened the door and nodded to the interior. “Keep your eyes closed for the whole ride if you have to.”

I eyed the roomy backseat, which was enough to hold a handful of people and might as well have been covered in needles and flames. It was the last place I wanted to be right now, especially when I knew he would be riding in the front seat. And that was only if I was lucky. Knowing him, he probably wasn’t even up for touching a steering wheel. I was almost willing to bet that there was a driver waiting inside for us.

“You said you didn’t care if I walked.”

“I never said I didn’t care.” Erwin corrected, still holding the door. “I just said that you were free to do so if you wanted to.”

“Good,” I snapped, turning toward the sidewalk, “Then I am.”

The speed at which he appeared in front of me was almost enough to throw me back a few feet, and he didn’t even have to touch me to do it. The shock of nearly bumping into a wall of chest that wasn’t there a moment ago was enough to leave me immobile. I stared up at him and tried desperately to keep the surprise off my face, wanting him to see nothing but hate.

“What the hell are you doing?” My voice wavered and I cursed it for doing so.

“Mr. Jaeger…” His voice was cool and collected and his expression was even more so as he bent to stare me in the eyes. “You will get in that car, or I will put you in there myself.”

“You told me I could walk.”

“I lied.” He replied simply, pointing to the car. “Yet another thing we share in common. Now get in.”

The tone of his voice had me certain beyond a doubt that this was the way he spoke in the bedroom. And I could see, once again, why they called him Commander. But that didn’t mean I would have to obey. There was only one man I answered to, and he wasn’t here right now.
And there was a chance he never would be again.

“Go fuck yourself,” I shot back, looking away. I had a feeling that if I saw the anger in his eyes now I would lose my nerve. “I’ll take a cab if I have to, but I’m not getting in that car with you.”

“Maybe I didn’t make myself clear.” He leaned closer now, and I was sure it was because he didn’t want Armin to hear. “I know that he’s going to follow you if you go without me. And I’m not about to risk him on the streets because you want to be stubborn, Eren. Now get in that car.”

I glanced over his shoulder to find Armin watching us with a wary expression, as if he were trying to decide if he should cut in. And suddenly I knew he was right. As much as I wanted to avoid a car ride with him, I knew it would be ridiculous to drag Armin around on the streets with me. And I was positive he would follow me even if I begged him not to.

As much as I hated to admit it, Erwin was the best option right now.

“Fine.” I bit out the word and hated its taste, walking past him and towards the car. “But don’t expect me to talk to you.”

I shoved my way into the backseat and caught a glimpse of the driver in the front of the car before muttering a curse under my breath. I shouldn’t have been surprised that the hunk of meat would be joining us in the back, but I had been hoping like hell that he wouldn’t. It was really all I could do to keep my mouth shut as he followed Armin into the car and shut the door.

At the very least, he sat the furthest away from me.

But I had a feeling there was a reason for that.

“Like it or not, Eren, we have to talk.”

And there it was.

The reason he wanted me in an enclosed space that would be moving with a speed of forty-five miles at best, given a severe lack of traffic. But even if we stopped now, I was willing to bet the door wasn’t going to pop open for me if I tried it. He was as calculating as Armin and he was bound to be at least several steps ahead of me. Which meant that the doors were already child locked.

And that was fine. If that was the way he was going to treat me, then I would act like the child he thought I was. I folded my arms across my chest and turned my eyes to the tinted window, watching the lights fly by.

“You’re wrong if you think I need you to talk in order to speak with you.” Erwin paused for a moment and I could feel his eyes on me. “I didn’t know he was listening, Eren.”

“Bullshit.” I muttered the word before I even realized I was speaking at all. And now that I had, there was no point in staying silent. I angled my head and fixed him with the coldest stare I could manage. Which was difficult considering Armin was sitting right next to him. “You knew there were cameras in your office.”

“I did,” he agreed, pulling Armin closer to his side. “But I didn’t know he was suspecting you, Eren. If I did, I wouldn’t have had that conversation with you.”

“Sure you would,” I shot back, the annoyance growing in me now. Even if Armin had tried to convince me otherwise, the doubts were still there. “It all works out for you better in the end, doesn’t it? You said yourself that you left your family for him. He’s probably going to want you now that he
“He hasn’t talked to me, Eren. Not even to tell me that he wasn’t going to come into work.” Erwin let the air rush out of his lungs and shook his head, looking out the window. “And he hasn’t. I haven’t seen him in days, and I’m not expecting to anytime soon.”

“Hanji just barely managed to drag him out of his apartment the other day,” Armin added, watching me with a careful expression. As if he were waiting for me to break. “Mikasa said he’s been coming to The Wall, but he hasn’t been doing much else.”

“I’ve never seen him this broken.” Erwin paused for a moment and shook his head. “At least not since his mother. He didn’t speak to anyone for nearly a year after that.”

“It’s just the first week,” I muttered, trying to ignore the feelings twisting in my gut. “And I’m not doing okay either. I’d say what we’re doing is pretty normal.”

“Not with him,” Erwin shot back. “He didn’t act like this with me. Not even close, Eren. And he lost his father then.”

“Yea, but we know how he felt about him.”

“And I know how he felt about me,” Erwin countered.

I was sure my stare could melt his face. “Fuck you.”

“I’m not saying that to hurt you, but you’re an idiot if you think we didn’t have anything between us.” Erwin paused, his eyes lingering on his own wrist like there was something meant to be there. “I know he didn’t want to lose me. No more than I wanted to lose him. But as angry as he was, he wasn’t able to stay away. Not like this.”

My heart ached and I forced myself to look away. “So, what? You’re saying he loved me less than you?”

“No, I’m saying that he loves you more.” Erwin was silent for a moment, remaining that way until I looked at him again. “And I mean loves, Eren. He still loves you, and no amount of anger is going to change that now.”

“Then why is it so easy for him to stay away?”

“Easy? You really need to adjust your opinion of him, Eren, because this is the hardest thing he’s ever had to do.” Erwin paused and gripped Armin’s hand tight. “Trust me, I know.”

I stared at their hands and the look on Armin’s face, and realized there was more to it than this. “So you’re staying away from him, too?”

“It’s easier that way.” Erwin responded softly, staring down at their hands. “Levi is my past, and I have my future now. I’m not going to ruin that again.”

“So is that why you brought me here?” I rolled my eyes and looked away from them. It was too much to see a happy relationship when there was nothing left of mine. “For my blessing or something?”

“No, I don’t need that.” There was a small chuckle in his voice that got under my skin. “I’ll do what makes me happy, regardless of what you want.”
“Then why the hell did you need to talk to me?” I snapped. I was desperate for The Wall to appear in front of us, but I knew we weren’t there yet.

“For two reasons.” He shrugged, following my gaze out the window. “One of those being that I wanted you to know that I didn’t have a hand in what happened.”

“I know.” The words tasted awful on my tongue but at the same time I knew they belonged there. As badly as I wanted to hate him, as much as I wanted to blame him, I knew he didn’t plan this. He didn’t know that Levi suspected me, and he had no idea that he would be watching.

The whole mess had worked itself out perfectly.

And I was the only one who could have prevented it.

“Why else did you want to talk to me?” I muttered the words into the silence of the car. I wanted this conversation to be over. I wanted to go back to hating him.

But I wasn’t sure I could.

“I want you to use me.”

I looked at him as if he had lost his mind. “Use you?”

Armin flushed at the tone of my voice and hid his face in his hands, groaning. “Not like that, Eren.”

Erwin smirked and moved his fingers through Armin’s hair, the touch slow and delicate. “As attractive as you are, I’m not interested.”

“Ditto to that.” I rolled my eyes and leaned back in the seat. “So what do you mean?”

“I want you to tell him that I made you do it.” Erwin replied, eyeing my expression carefully. “I want you to tell him that I manipulated you into lying to him. Tell him I threatened you. Tell him I threatened Armin if you want to add that in. Do what you have to do to convince him.”

“Why?”

“Because this way he can’t hate us both.”

I opened my mouth and shut it just as quickly, not even sure of what I wanted to say. These weren’t the words I expected from him. “You don’t know what he’ll do if I say that. He might never talk to you again.”

“But he’ll talk to you.” Erwin paused and angled his head to the side, still watching me. “I’ve already lost him, Eren. There’s no way to get around that now. But I can fix this for you, and I know he needs that. So I’ll do it even if it means losing him entirely. Because I can’t watch him fall apart like this anymore.”

And I didn’t want to watch him fall apart either. I truly didn’t. I was so desperate to fix this all, so desperate to have him back in my arms. And to be honest, I was almost willing to do anything to get that.

But I wasn’t going to lie.

“I can’t.”

Erwin stared at me, but his expression didn’t falter in the slightest. As if he was already expecting my
answer. “What do you mean you can’t?”

“I mean I can’t lie to him anymore. I won’t do it.” I shook my head against the words, wanting to deny them but knowing they were for the best. “I won’t hurt him like that again. I won’t do that even if I know he won’t find out. He means too much to me for that, and I won’t betray him that way. Not again. If I’m going to have him back then it’s going to be honest.”

“Even if it means you’ll never have him back?”

“He’s not mine if it’s through a lie.”

And I meant it. I truly did. Even if I could fix it all now, even if everything would be better with this, it wouldn’t be real. And I didn’t want that anymore. I didn’t want a lie hanging over our relationship like an axe just waiting to fall. I wouldn’t do that to him again, and I wouldn’t do it to myself. Even if it killed me, I would lose him before I lied to him again.

Because he was worth so much more than that.

“You know, I never really thought I would say this.” Erwin murmured into the silence, holding my eyes as if he wouldn’t let go. “Not to you, anyway. But you really do deserve him.”

“I’m not sure I do.” I shrugged, turning my eyes out the window. We were almost there now. “But that doesn’t mean I won’t fight for him anyway.”

“You’re doing the right thing, Eren.” He drew my attention back to him, still watching me carefully. “This is what he needs. You can’t let him go. You can’t let him forget you. Not even for a moment.”

“I don’t plan to.”

“Good.” He muttered, leaning back in his seat and fixing his stare on the window. “Because honestly if anyone has a chance of getting him back, it’s you.”

The look in his eyes was distant, and I had a feeling that he wasn’t seeing the tinted glass or the city beyond it. He was seeing Levi and a life he could never have. And I realized now that it wasn’t because of me. Even if I had never found my way into Levi’s life, Erwin would have never found his way back in. He was a man trapped in a hell he created, destined to watch his life move on without him.

And I knew how that felt now.

The pain of losing him.

We rolled up to the curb and the driver hopped out to open the door. I watched as Armin squeezed Erwin’s hand, and caught the reassuring look in his eyes before he slipped out of the car entirely. They’d planned this. And I couldn’t blame them. Armin knew that Erwin needed to tell me all of this; it hadn’t just been for me. And after that last conversation we had, I could understand why. Because for the first time since meeting him, I actually understood.

“You’re right.” I paused, staring into his eyes as I whispered the words into the silence. Words I never thought I would say to him. Words I needed to say now. “You’re not the monster I thought you were.”

And there it was. The words he had promised I would one day understand. I just wish it hadn’t come so soon. Even now I wasn’t sure I wanted to feel them on my tongue, but I knew I needed to say them. Not for me, but for him. I had made him out to be the villain in all of this, and there was no
reason for it in the end. He was hurting just like I was. He had lost everything just like I had. And as much as I wanted to hate him, I knew that no one could understand me better than he did right now.

Because we had both lost him.

We had both been through this pain.

And we were both still feeling it now.

I shut the door behind myself and wasn’t surprised when he didn’t follow. Armin was standing a few steps away from the curb, watching me with wary eyes as if he were waiting for me to yell. And normally I would want to, but I honestly couldn’t bring myself to do that now. Even if I could, I knew he didn’t deserve it. He had done everything to help me.

And I couldn’t hate him for that.

“Let’s go before I lose my nerve entirely.”

I shot out the words before he could say anything else. Somehow I knew he was only moments away from groveling, and I was desperate to keep that from happening. There was no need for it, and it was only going to delay us at this point. As it was, I wasn’t even sure if Levi was still inside at all.

I could only hope that he was.

I stepped up to the front doors and ignored the crowd as I always had before. Even on that first night, I had pushed my way inside without so much as a glance at the other people. And after that night, it hadn’t mattered. I was the Corporal’s property, and that gave me easy access through the door. Everyone knew who I was. Everyone knew I belonged to Levi.

And everyone knew we were over.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

The wall of muscle was talking to me, but all I could see was the logo stretched across his wide chest. And for a moment I wasn’t even sure why it was there, blocking my way to the door and into the only place I wanted to be. But then I realized. They had been waiting for me. They knew my face, and they knew damn well that I wasn’t welcome here anymore. And I had a sudden sinking feeling I never would be again.

“Hi, Hanji?” Armin’s voice was calm and casual. It was almost as if he weren’t even aware of the two angry gorillas blocking our path. “We’re here, but we’re having some trouble getting inside.”

“That’s because you’re not welcome here.” Gorilla One muttered, crossing his thick arms over his chest.

Armin held up a finger and glanced to the side, leaning slightly to eye the door. “Yea, he’s with me. Mikasa’s already inside? All right, great. We’ll wait here.”

Armin slipped his phone into his pocket and took a small step to the side, tugging me along with him. I could see the door now, but I knew it didn’t matter. It wasn’t like they were about to let us inside.

“Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum.” Mikasa stepped through the doors, her eyes heated with annoyance. She folded her arms across her chest, somehow managing to look far more intimidating
than the two of them put together. “I thought Hanji told you they were coming.”

“She might have mentioned it.” Gorilla Two shrugged as if it didn’t really make a difference. “But it doesn’t matter. Corporal doesn’t want to see him right now.”

“How about you let the Corporal decide what he wants and back the fuck off of my brother?” Mikasa shot back, pointing to the door. “Unless you want me to get Hanji out here to tell you that herself.”

“Hanji’s not the one who signs our paychecks.”

“Oh, I could be.” Hanji poked her head out the door before leaning through it. “He’s pretty much my business husband at this point, and I don’t think he’ll put up much of a fight if I decide to make a few adjustments.”

I felt my heart ache at the sight of Hanji, and for a moment I actually wondered if everything could be okay again. The last time I’d seen her we’d been around a table, laughing and eating as if nothing were wrong. As if the whole world weren’t just days from falling apart. As if we were actually happy and had every reason to be.

And when she looked at me with that same smile, I actually felt like it could be okay again. Like I actually had a chance.

Like I wasn’t alone in all of this.

“Come on.” Hanji grabbed my hand and pulled me through the door without another word. I didn’t even have to look back to know that Mikasa and Armin were following.

The heavy thrum of The Wall pushed through me like it was the beat of my own heart, and I had to wonder how I had survived days without it. This place that had once been so foreign and terrifying was now the most welcoming home. Because it was him. Every single inch of it. He surrounded me here, even without his presence. He was in every color, every texture, every beat.

He was my home.

Even if I was no longer his.

“You look like someone shot your puppy.” Hanji commented with a frown, poking once at my face. “I’m getting that enough with him already.”

“He’s not doing well?” I tried desperately not to sound hopeful, but I was sure I did. As much as I didn’t want to see him in pain, I knew it was better in the end.

“That’s the understatement of the year.” Hanji glanced at me as we weaved our way through the crowd. “I’ve barely heard two words from him in days. He’s been upset and distant, even with me. And honestly, that’s not something I’m used to.”

The look on her face was enough to fill me with guilt. “I’m sorry.”

“Hey, we all make mistakes.” Hanji pulled me to the side, away from the noise of the crowd. “Just don’t make the same one twice.”

“I don’t even know if he’ll give me the chance.”

“I want to agree with you there.” Hanji paused, eyeing the door to the dungeon. “But I’ve never seen
him like this. It’s not how he was with Erwin. I really don’t know how he’s going to get through this without you.”

“Is that why you…” I hesitated on the words, not sure I wanted the answer. I was hoping she’d done this for me. “Is that why you let me come here tonight?”

“It’s part of the reason,” she admitted with a shrug. “I know he needs you, but he’s too stubborn to admit it. Which means we have to shove you in his face until he does.”

“And what if he never does?”

“He will.”

There was so much certainty in her voice that I was almost positive she didn’t know just how bad it was. “I don’t know, Hanji. You didn’t hear the things he said that day.”

“And you haven’t seen him since,” she countered. “He’s had time to think about it, Eren. And honestly, what did you expect then? He found out about the lie and a moment later you wanted him to discuss it calmly. That’s not the way things work.”

The bite in her tone was enough to worry me, but I knew she was right. I had the same thought after finally pulling myself together. I’d been so scared at the time, so desperate to fix things, that I didn’t even bother to consider what he needed. Instead I locked him in the room and dragged us through that painful mess when everything was still so raw. I never even gave him the time to think.

Looking back on it now, I really don’t know what I expected.

“He didn’t want to hurt you that way.” Hanji continued, pulling my attention back to her. “But I don’t think there was anything else he could say. He was angry. You understand that, right?”

“I do. Even if I didn’t, I deserved everything he said,” I muttered softly, my eyes drifting to the stage.

“Hrm?”

“Do you hate me now?”

“I’ve never hated you, Eren.” Hanji put her hand on my shoulder and squeezed once, offering me a small smile. “I was mad, though. He’s my family and I don’t like to see him hurt. But I know you didn’t do it on purpose. I know you didn’t mean to hurt him. And honestly, you wouldn’t have been able to if he didn’t love you so much.”

My heart shattered and I let out a slow breath as I closed my eyes, trying to ignore the pain that was slowly creeping its way back to the surface. I couldn’t react like this if I was going to have any chance of succeeding in that room. I needed to show him that I was prepared to fight, and I couldn’t do that if I crumbled at the mere sight of him.

“Oh, it’s the girls!” Hanji’s voice was suddenly nothing but excitement, and she was spinning me around before I even had the chance to open my eyes.

Five girls stepped out onto stage, but none of them were familiar. Of course, I had only seen Maria, Rose, and Sina before then.

“Are they new?”
Hanji hummed in agreement and nodded once. “Fresh spring chickens! They started two days ago. Still so innocent, but they’ve been having so much fun.”

“I’m not here for a few days and you get an entire crew?”

“Not a crew. Just five.” She smiled wider and counted them off. “Sabrina, Hope, Sarah, Drew, and Evony. Sabrina is Levi’s favorite. Or she would be, if he wasn’t in such a sour mood all the time.”

I had to imagine that being Levi’s favorite meant she pissed him off the least.

“Although my personal favorite is Drew.” Hanji continued, glancing to me with a small smile.

And suddenly I realized what she was doing. She was trying to calm me down. She knew I was about to go into that room, and that I couldn’t do that if I was scared. But really, what reason did I have to be scared? The worse had happened at this point. I had already lost him, and now the only way I could go was up. It wasn’t like he could leave me further, and there was nothing else he could take away.

So maybe I could actually do this.

“Which is your favorite?”

She was still trying, but there was no point to it anymore. I was as calm as I was going to get and even if it was nothing much, it was something.

“Hope.” I answered simply, not even sure if my eyes were on the right girl. But it was the name that mattered. “I need a lot of it right now.”

“You’ll do fine.” Hanji assured me, patting my shoulder once before nodding to the door. “He’s alone in there right now. He asked everyone else to leave.”

I tried not to think of what kind of mood he had to be in to do that. “And you really think it’s a good idea for me to go in there?”

“No’s as good a time as any,” she shrugged. “Besides, do you really want an audience?”

I was sure it didn’t matter at this point.

“I guess not,” I muttered, taking a step towards the door. Had it always been so big?

“Trust me, it’s better to talk to him without a room full of prying eyes.” Hanji continued, following me across the room to the door. For some reason I felt like everyone was staring at us now, even though I knew their attention was focused on the stage.

“I don’t think it’ll make a difference.” I whispered. My throat felt dry and it was a wonder she heard me at all.

“It will.” Hanji rubbed my back reassuringly as she stopped at the door. “He doesn’t need them there. All he needs is you right now. He needs to talk to you. Especially now that he’s had time to think.”

I wasn’t sure that was a good thing. Time to think could have given him time to move on, and I wasn’t sure what I would do then.

But I at least had to try.
“And Eren,” Hanji stopped me, catching me by the wrist. I met her eyes and tried to pretend there was no worry there. “Even if this doesn’t work out right now, just look at it as a first step.”

The most I could do was nod.

“Deep breaths.” Hanji smiled and grabbed the handle, pulling the door open. The staircase looked a lot longer than I remembered.

But before I knew it, I was at the bottom. The door was closed.

And I was alone with him.
YAY! Another Thursday update day! ^_^ I've been looking forward to posting this chapter, so I'm really excited to hear what everyone thinks. Especially after the chapter that will be coming next week. It will be in Levi's POV. ^_^

And wow, thank you all so much for the comments you left on the last chapter! And those of you who have been leaving comments on the older chapters, too. XD There's been a lot of new readers this week - I hope you're all enjoying it so far! You know, aside from the angst... although I know there's some readers who enjoy that, too.

A HUGE thank you to thug-seme-since1995 and silverying for the wonderful artwork they shared this week! If you haven't already seen it, you can find it on the art tab of my blog. OH! AND THANK YOU SO MUCH TO THE CHIBI INTERNS! They created another music video this week for The Intern, and this one was Eremin feels themed! If you haven't already seen that, you can find it under the cosplay tab on my blog or in the The Intern tag! ^___^

Oh, and I'll be posting this for the next three weeks... I'M GOING TO OTAKON! ^__^ If any of you are also going to Otakon and would like to meet up, please send me a message on tumblr!

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you would like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

Why did I think I could do this?

Why did I think I could talk to him when I could barely manage to hold myself in place? It was already taking everything I had to keep my mind stable, and I wasn't even sure it was working at this point. I was torn between the sudden desire to meet the floor or bolt out the door, and I couldn't decide which would be better. Although right now I knew that neither was an option.

Not when I could see him sitting across the room.

He was in his throne, just as he had been on that first night when I saw him at The Wall. Only now there was no one chained at his feet. No moaning patrons filling the room, surrounding him as if he were their king. He was alone, and in the silence he looked just as broken as I was. His fist pressed against his forehead, his head bowed and his expression pained, sitting there as if he were frozen that way. Trapped in the same hell I knew. The same one I was still trying to escape.

Even when I could see no way out.

I moved forward, not even meaning to make a sound and knowing all the while that he would hear me anyway. And he did, almost instantly. As if he had been waiting for it all this time. His brow
pushed together with annoyance and he pressed his forehead tight against his fist, but other than that he didn’t move. He didn’t even look up, not once. And for a moment, I was terrified. For a moment, I wanted to run.

For a moment, I wanted to stop entirely.

“I already told you that I want to be alone tonight. So why are you…” The words caught in his throat in the same instant that his eyes met mine, and all at once I knew. He had no idea it was me. He didn’t know that I was the one who had come down the stairs. The one who had been standing in this room. He had been expecting Hanji or Petra, and now he looked just as nervous, just as terrified as I felt.

I had caught him off guard.

And for some strange reason, that put me at ease.

“Kid…” Levi breathed the word as if it was the only one he knew. The only one worth saying. And my heart ached at the sound.

“Levi…”

He looked away and shook his head, taking the time to breathe in and out before he shut his eyes and muttered the words. “What are you doing here?”

“I couldn’t stay away.”

It was a simple answer, but it was the truth. Even if it had taken me four days to realize it. I needed Levi in my life, and I refused to spend the rest of my days curled up in bed and mourning what I had. Because at this point I would take what I could get, no matter what that meant. Even if it was just friendship, it would still be something. He would still be in my life, and I was slowly beginning to realize that was all that mattered.

I needed him. In any way and every way that I could have him.

“How did you even…” Levi paused on the words and a short, humorless laugh finished the rest as he shook his head again. “Nevermind. I shouldn’t even have to ask when I already know who let you in here.”

And of course he knew. There was really no question about it, and it wasn’t just because Hanji was probably the only one who could work me past the guards. She was also the only one willing to go against Levi if she actually thought it would help him in the end. And part of that actually worried me. Because as desperate as I was to get him back, I didn’t want to ruin the friendship they had just because I refused to leave.

“Are you mad at her?”

“Mad at her?” Levi rolled his eyes and angled his head to the side, gazing at me for the briefest of moments before looking away once more. As if he couldn’t stand the sight of me. “Why the hell would I be mad at her?”

“Because she helped me.”

“Of course she did. I knew she would.” Levi shrugged and leaned back in his throne, his gaze fixed on the corner of the room. Far away from me. “Honestly, I wouldn’t expect any less of her. She already told me what she would do if you showed up again, so I can’t say I’m surprised. At least not
by her.”

But he was by me. I could tell, even without him saying it. “You weren’t expecting me to show up.”

He paused for a moment and regarded me with a quick glance that didn’t last.

“No, I really wasn’t.” He tapped his finger against the arm of his throne and mused quietly, as if to himself. “Although now it makes sense why she was so fucking adamant to get me here.”

Mikasa had been a pain in my ass for the past two days, and I was sure her efforts couldn’t even come close to half the shit Hanji must have tried. Which explained why he was sitting in his throne now. I could only imagine what she had to do to get him there, or what kind of state his apartment was left in.

Or how betrayed he felt right now.

“I don’t think she meant to set you up.”

Although part of me was sure she did.

“Did I say that?” Levi rested his chin against his knuckles and stared over at the door, the smallest of smirks tugging at the corners of his mouth. “I don’t think it would be too far from the truth.”

The sight of amusement in his eyes confused me more than anything else. He was actually admitting that Hanji had planned it all, without his knowledge, and yet somehow it was fine. Somehow it was different from everything I had done. And that just didn’t seem fair to me.

“So you think she set it up, and yet you’re not mad at her?” I tried to keep the annoyance from my voice. I wanted to hide the fact that this was bothering me at all.

And I knew I failed.

The humor slipped off his face as quickly as if someone had shut off the light.

“I could never be mad at her,” he muttered, turning his eyes to me. “I know her too well, Eren. I was fully aware of what she was doing, and she didn’t even try to hide it. And she wouldn’t. Not from me.”

“Why not?”

“Because Hanji is the one person who would never lie to me.”

I couldn’t have missed the accusation in his voice if I tried. His tone, his eyes, every single part of him was blaming me. And for once I didn’t care. Because if what he said was true, then it meant I had a chance. It meant he had forgiven others in the past, and it meant he could forgive me, too. Because Hanji wasn’t the only one in his life. Others had fought their way back in. And even if it took forever for me to get to that point, I was willing to try.

“Well, I guess she has me beat there.”

The words were so soft that I wasn’t sure he’d hear them, but it was all I could do not to have them shaking on the way out. They were a risk, and I knew that, but somehow I was sure they were the right thing to say. What he needed to hear and what I needed to admit. Both to him and myself. Because it was the only way we were ever going to get past this.

Levi went so still in his throne that I knew he’d heard me even before he answered. And when he did, he held my eyes as if he couldn’t let go. As if there was nowhere else to look. “Are you finally
done making excuses? Or did you just happen to run out of them?”

“There’s no excuse for what I did to you. None that would matter, anyway.” My voice was stronger now despite the apprehension rattling through me. And as terrified as I felt, I knew what I needed to say. “I shouldn’t have done that to you, and I know that now. And I hate myself for not knowing it then, but—”

“Don’t hate yourself.” He cut me off all too quickly, shaking his head and looking away once more. There was a pain in his voice that I didn’t understand. “Not over me. You’re too good for that, Eren.”

“Too good for…” The words caught in my throat, stuck on the confusion rattling in my brain as I tried to wrap my mind around the words. “But I hurt you.”

“And I hurt you.”

There was a self-loathing there, a hatred I couldn’t bare to see. Not in his eyes. Not on his face. Not when I was the one who had torn us apart because I was too scared to trust what we had. As hurt as I was, as much as I hated this, I couldn’t blame him for any of it. And I wouldn’t let him do that either. I’d watched him spiral one too many times, and I wouldn’t let him do it over me now.

Because somehow I knew that once he did, I would never be able to get him back.

“I deserve what you did to me.”

“Not all of it,” he whispered, rubbing his neck and staring off to the side. I could practically feel the collar there and even without the words I knew exactly what he meant.

The moment I would never forget.

The words that still haunted my dreams.

“I know why you did it. I know why you had to. I…” The words cracked in my throat and my hand found my neck as if it could be the temporary collar that I needed. When really it couldn’t even come close. “I’m so sorry for what I did to you, Levi. I’m sorry I hurt you and betrayed your trust. I’m sorry I ever doubted you and what we had. You never gave me a reason to, and yet…”

“Do you really expect me to forgive you just because you’re sorry?” Levi’s eyes met mine and I felt my heart break. Any temporary warmth he had was now lost to the ice in his voice. “Is that what you want me to do, Eren?”

“I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want that,” I admitted, knowing it was the only truth I could give. “But I know I don’t deserve it.”

The sheer surprise in his eyes was enough to give me a sudden surge of courage. He wasn’t expecting me to say that, and I couldn’t say that I was either. The words had somehow found their way onto my tongue as if they belonged there, perfect and honest and everything I needed to say. Because I didn’t just deserve his forgiveness. I knew that now.

I needed to work for him.

And I wanted to work for him.

Because he was worth so much more than a simple battle and an easy victory.
And I would give him more than that.

“All this time, and you still manage to surprise me more than anyone.” Levi muttered, shaking his head. “And here I thought you would have stopped that by now.”

“I don’t have any plans to.” I shot back, feeling a moment of playfulness in the air. One I had missed. One I was probably imagining now. “And I’ve had four days to think of new material. I bet I could surprise you even more if I wanted to.”

And I was hoping like hell that he would let me.

“Four days…” He sounded as shocked as I had been when Mikasa told me the date. “It’s only been four days…”

“Time passes kind of slow when you spend the whole day in bed.” I paused for a moment, my mind temporarily flooded by the memories of when we had spent whole weekends in bed. None of it had been slow then, but all of it made me ache now. I cleared my throat and looked away, hoping to hide the sudden blush that was rising into my cheeks. “When you spend it alone, anyway.”

“Fuck…”

The word brought my attention back to him and the pain on his face was almost enough to make my heart snap in two. He looked as if he were giving up on everything. As if his plan had just been torn apart and he knew now that he never had a chance at all. That there had never been a point to any of it. That he could never do what he needed to do.

And I knew exactly what it was.

Because the past four days had been hell for me, too.

The only difference was I wasn’t the one who was trying to stay away.

“I feel like I haven’t see you in forever,” Levi’s voice filled the silence once more, and he groaned softly as he ran a hand down his face. “Damn it, kid, why didn’t you just stay away?”

“Because it’s taking everything I have to stay this far.” And it wasn’t very far at all, but it felt like miles. It may as well have been when it meant I couldn’t have my hands on him, especially when he looked this way. This frustrated. This hurt.

“I don’t even know why you’re trying.” Levi dropped his hand to the side and fixed me with his steel blue stare. “To be honest, brat, I kind of expected you to be as friendly with personal barriers as you always are.”

“You weren’t even expecting me to show up.”

Levi paused and raised an eyebrow. And then shrugged, as if he were actually agreeing. “Well, now that you have…”

“Can I?”

I really couldn’t have sounded more desperate if I tried, and I wanted to kick myself for it. I may as well have donned a pair of puppy ears and wagged a tail while pawing at his feet. And to think I’d actually come here with the hope that I would at least seem cool and at ease. Acting like I wanted to be close, but as if it didn’t matter if I couldn’t be. I wanted to be strong.
And instead I was just myself.

Levi stared at me for a long moment, his hand covering the lower half of his face and hiding his lips from my view. Lips that would have told me what he was thinking, or at least have given me some idea. Because his eyes gave away nothing. Not a glimmer of amusement or a hint of rejection. Just the same cold blue I was so used to. I’d forgotten how hard it was to read him.

And suddenly I was losing my nerve.

“Nevermind,” I muttered quickly, cutting off any response he wanted to give. Although I was sure there was going to be none. “I shouldn’t have asked.”

“No, you shouldn’t have.” He agreed, lowering his hand to rest on his thigh. His expression, whatever it had been, was composed now. “There’s really no point, is there? You don’t belong to me anymore, so you can do whatever you want.”

And what I wanted, in that moment, was to make him pay for those words.

Words I had heard from both him and Mikasa.

Words I had heard in my head again and again.

Words that weren’t even true.

Because I did belong to him, and he didn’t get a choice in that. And if he was going to continue to throw that in my face, I was going to prove to him just how fucking wrong he was.

He could say he wasn’t mine. But I would always be his.

I slammed my hands down against the top of the throne, trapping him between my arms as I gripped the black metal tight. I bent down as I stared into his eyes, watching them widen in a way that thrilled me and urged me to go further. I was surprising him now, and I knew I needed that. Knew it was the only way I was ever going to do this. If he could predict me, he could stop me.

And I wasn’t going to let that happen.

“So…” The word fell off my lips, deep and tempting, and I could have sworn I saw him shiver. “I can do anything?”

His jaw tightened and I had a feeling that was the only way his lips were staying together. The only way he was keeping himself in control. “Within reason, brat.”

I leaned closer and he leaned back, his expression growing guarded. “And is this within reason?”

His lips parted as if he wanted to speak, but no words came out. Nothing but a trembling breath that told me his heart was beating just as fast as mine. He searched my eyes, his own narrowed in a glare, but he gave me nothing more.

And that nothing was all the permission I needed.

I dropped into his lap as if I couldn’t bear to stand anymore, straddling him as I had a dozen times before. I heard him hiss softly beneath me and I could practically feel what little resolve he had left cracking into pieces. And in the back of my mind, I blessed the throne that made it too fucking easy to accommodate us both. There were no secrets when we were this close. Nothing he could hide from me here. We were barely a breath apart, and he was as bared to me as I was to him.
And for a moment I actually had to wonder how we had survived apart at all.

“Get away from me."

His words were breathless, trapped between his panting lips and lacking the command they would need to convince me. I pressed my hands against his chest and felt his heart racing beneath it in a beat that was somehow more familiar than my own. In fact, it might as well have been my own. My heart, my lungs, both racing to match his. Struggling to capture what little air was left between us. If there was any left at all. I had a feeling there was nothing left in the world.

Nothing but us.

And I was fine with that.

“Move, Eren.” It still wasn’t a command, but it was stronger than the last. And I might have actually believed it if he weren’t trembling beneath me.

“I don’t want to.”

And it was true, I didn’t. Even if he actually wanted me to, it would take everything I had.

But I knew he didn’t want that.

Levi’s lips parted as he stared up at me, searching my eyes with a thousand emotions in his own. And when he finally spoke it was a whisper, strained and shaking. “You need to get off of me, Eren. You’ll only make this harder.”

I had a feeling he wasn’t just talking about the situation, and when my hips moved down against his I was sure he wasn’t. He was trying to refuse his body. He wanted to deny everything between us so he could continue in his stubborn silence. And for some reason he actually thought I would let him.

But like he said, I never stopped surprising him.

I angled my head to the side and my lips brushed against his ear as I stared down between us, whispering. “It can’t get any harder.”

A growl worked its way out of his throat and he grabbed my shoulders, pushing me back. “Damn it, Eren! Stop!”

I didn’t even try to stop him from pushing me away. But I didn’t move off of him either. “Is that an order, Corporal?”

His hands pulled back from me as if he had touched fire, and he stared up into my eyes as if I had completely lost my mind. As if I couldn’t possibly be aware of what happened four days ago and still ask that question. But I was. He knew I was. And even if he didn’t want to admit it, he still wanted to hear those words on my lips as badly as I wanted to say them.

“Don’t say that.” The words were so tight, so strained they barely made it out of his mouth at all. “You don’t have any right to call me that anymore. I’m not your Corporal.”

“Yes, you are!” I snapped as quickly as my anger, grabbing the throne and closing the space between us once more. I had been waiting for those words. I had known they were coming, but they hurt me just the same. Because he didn’t know. He really believed that.

And none of it was true.
“What do you mean, I am? I already told you I—”

“You are my Corporal.” I spoke each word as if it were its own separated from the rest. And with each syllable that rolled off my tongue, I pressed closer against him until I was sure there would never be space between us again. I could feel our hearts racing together, moving with the same beat as if it were the only way to survive. And maybe it was.

Because I couldn’t bring myself to imagine anything else.

“I’m…”

“No,” I cut him off just as sharply, just as fast as before. “Don’t you dare say you’re not when I know you are.”

The sympathy in his eyes made my stomach turn. “Eren…”

“No!” It wasn’t even a word, it was a growl. “You don’t have any right, Levi. You can say that you’re not mine, but you can’t say I’m not yours. That’s my choice, it’s my heart, and you can’t say who it belongs to!”

Levi opened his mouth and stared down between us, down at my chest. Down at the heart that was beating for him. “That doesn’t mean I’ll order you.”

“But it means I’ll listen if you do.” I shot back. “That makes you my Corporal, whether you fucking like it or not. So just admit it.”

He looked up and his eyes searched mine, and suddenly I could feel his hands on my shoulders. But even when I was sure he would push me away, he didn’t. “Why should I?”

“Because I want you to know that I’m yours.” I whispered, watching the pain in his eyes and knowing he couldn’t say it back to me. But I was willing to accept that for now. I was willing to take what I could get. Even if it was nothing more than this. “I want you to know that no matter where you go, no matter what you do, I will always belong to you.”

And for a moment, I thought I’d lost him entirely. He lowered his eyes from mine and then shut them completely, his nails digging into my shoulders as if he were fully prepared to push me down to the ground.

And then his hands were in my hair. Fingers twisting around the strands and pulling until my forehead was pressed tight against his. Until I was staring into his eyes because there was nowhere else to go and nowhere else I wanted to be.

“Why do you think I left the collar on the table if I didn’t think you were mine?”

I was sure I never knew how to breathe at all. And if I ever did, I had forgotten now. I had wondered why he left it on the table back then; wondered if it had been to torture me. And it had at the time. I’d held it against my chest as I broke apart on the floor, but even after I gathered myself together I still couldn’t bring myself to throw it out. It had become a painful reminder that I couldn’t release.

And now I knew he meant to leave it there.

For every reason I wanted it to be.

He jerked on my hair and snapped my mind back to him. And I sucked in a sharp breath as if I hadn’t breathed in minutes. “Don’t take that for more than it’s meant to be, kid.”
I couldn’t have taken it as less if I tried. “If it means that I’m yours, then it’s everything.”

His fingers started to slip from my hair and he looked down between us. As if somehow that would hide the pain in his eyes. “You’re really out to break me, aren’t you?”

“I can’t break what doesn’t belong to me.” It was a slap, and I knew it was. But right now I wasn’t even close to playing fair. Not when he had already admitted so much. Not when I knew he was breaking.

“You little shit…” The words were a growl against the pain and I felt his fingers tighten in my hair once more.

And I moved with them. Pushing my forehead against his own and forcing his eyes to meet mine. “Yes, I am. So punish me, Corporal.”

“You’re out of your fucking mind, brat.” He snapped and pushed once at my shoulder with just enough strength to put the space back between us. “Now get off of me.”

I wasn’t willing to do that at all, but I wasn’t about to refuse him if he really meant it. “Is that an order, Corporal?”

He stared at me like I was the biggest shit on the planet, a world of annoyance in his eyes. “Yes. It is. Now move.”

And it took nothing more than that.

I moved off of him like it was easy, even when my body was screaming against it. But I knew I could use this as so much more. He had given me an edge he hadn’t planned to, one he wasn’t willing to admit. And I was ready to use it as long as he would let me, even if it didn’t last. I lowered myself to my knees in front of him, seated at the foot of his throne as I stared up.

Like the perfect, obedient dog.

“No.” Levi pointed at me and fixed me with a stare that was well beyond frustration. “No, we’re not playing that game, Eren. Not now. Not anymore.”

“What game?” It actually sounded innocent.

“Oh, fuck you.” He pushed up from the throne and ran a hand through his hair, walking away from me without a second glance. “You need to get the hell out of here before we say and do more shit that we’re going to regret.”

I stared at him from my spot on the ground, following him with my eyes. “I don’t think it can get any worse than this.”

“I don’t want to find out.”

“I do.” I shot back. “And I’m not leaving. I couldn’t if I wanted to.”

He rolled his eyes and fixed me with a glare that told me he didn’t understand. “Try.”

“My ride left.”

“Then get it back.” He snapped. “Or better yet, I’ll get my car and…”

He paused, his expression growing curious as he searched my face. I could practically see the wheels
turning in his head. He knew Mikasa had gotten here before me, and my ride couldn’t have left if I’d taken a cab.

“Who drove you here?”

For a moment I wanted to say Armin. But that would have been a lie.

And I was done with lies.

“Erwin did.”

Anger and betrayal filled his face until I was certain he was feeling nothing more.

“You came here with him?” He couldn’t have sounded more disgusted if he tried.

“Not just with him. With Armin, too.” I paused, watching his eyes carefully. I wanted to be honest with him, but at the same time I didn’t want to ruin the one conversation we’d had in days. “It’s not like he really gave me much of a choice. I didn’t even know he was there until I walked outside.”

“And why was he there?”

“Because he wanted to talk.”

Levi rolled his eyes and turned away, pushing a hand through a hair. “He always wants to fucking talk. Him and Hanji both. This is why I hate having a phone.”

“He’s been trying to call you?”

“Hell if I know. I turned my phone off days ago.” Levi kept his back turned to me, and in the brief moment of silence I watched his shoulders rise and fall with a deep sigh. And then he whispered. “What did he talk to you about?”

“You.” I paused and then shrugged. “Me. Everything that happened.”

“And the fact that his little plan failed?”

Levi turned around before I could answer, and I lost my words at the sight of his face. That cold, distant anger that made it almost impossible to get back in. The eyes that Erwin knew too well.

“I don’t even know how you could get in the car with him.” Levi muttered, a hint of disgust still on his face. “I thought you hated him.”

“I thought I did, too,” I admitted softly, staring down for a long moment before finally deciding to push up. There was no point in staying on the ground now. “To be honest, I really want to hate him. I really do.”

“Then why don’t you?”

“Because I understand him.” I whispered the words, almost hoping he wouldn’t hear them at all. I barely wanted to admit them to myself.

“You understand him?” The words were practically an accusation, and even without looking I knew there was anger in his eyes. “So, what? Am I the bad guy in all of this now? Are you on his side?”

“I wouldn’t be on his side even if it were the only side to be on.” I shot back quickly, rolling my eyes. The thought of it alone was ridiculous. “I can’t stand him, Levi. That hasn’t changed. But that
doesn’t mean I can’t see where he’s coming from.”

“So you think what he did was right?”

“No, nothing he did was right.” I shook my head and shrugged. “And you know what? Nothing I did was right, either. We both fucked up and we both lost the best thing in our lives because of it. And that’s why I can understand him.”

“You think you understand him because you both lost me?” Levi raised a brow, regarding me with an expression that was bordering on amused. “Trust me, Eren, he doesn’t care nearly as much as you think he does.”

“I know he does.” The words were out of my mouth before I knew whether or not they would be the right things to say. “He has a picture of you, Levi. I’ve seen it. He put it where he had his family. He gave them up for you.”

“That’s just some bullshit he was trying to feed you.”

“You really think I can believe that after I saw you two up there on stage?” I pushed, knowing all the while that I shouldn’t. Levi was supposed to be mine and I had a feeling I was currently treading into dangerous territory with this.

And the look in his eyes told me I was.

But as quickly as it was there, it was gone again. And suddenly his expression was a composed mask. “It really doesn’t matter if he meant it or not, Eren. It’s too late for it to make any difference now.”

I had to wonder what he meant. Because I knew there was a reason, much more than what he was saying. And I could only pray that I was a part of it. If Erwin couldn’t make a difference, if he couldn’t change Levi’s mind, then it meant that he had moved on. And it was either out of anger or out of love, and that love could mean me. It could make all the difference.

If I hadn’t lost him, too.

“And is it too late for me?” I tried desperately to keep my voice from shaking, but I failed miserably. I was so scared of the answer, so scared of the truth that I wasn’t even sure I wanted to know. “Are you going to block me out and throw me away, too?”

Immediately I knew they were the wrong words.

But I couldn’t take them back now.

He hid his face from me as if he didn’t want me to see the anger there. And suddenly all I wanted was for him to turn around. No matter what I saw. No matter what it meant. Even if it were hatred waiting for me there, at least I wouldn’t spiral in on myself wondering about the secrets of his face. I wanted to know now if I had a chance. Or if I had just lost him again.

“I never threw him away, Eren.” Levi’s voice was soft, controlled, and gave away nothing. “I should have. That would have been best for us both in the end, but I didn’t. And that’s why I’m doing it with you.”

I couldn’t see his face, couldn’t know the truth, but the words broke me apart anyway. It was as if he were twisting the knife that had settled in my heart days ago. Ripping up the old wounds and creating new ones. Bleeding me to death from the inside out.
“Is it…” My breath hitched on the words caught in my throat, and for a moment I was sure the pain wouldn’t let me finish. But then the rest spilled out. “Is it because you love me less than him?”

“No, Eren.” Levi shook his head slowly, but he didn’t turn. “It’s because I love you more.”

“Then why are you able to stay away from me?”

He was silent for a long moment, long enough that I was almost sure he wouldn’t answer me at all. He folded one arm across his chest and rested his forehead against his hand, so still he could have been a statue.

And then he let out a breath, and his body started to tremble.

As if he couldn’t hold on anymore.

“You make it sound like it’s easy.” He whispered, each word shaking on the way out. “Like I’m not dying inside right now.”

The crack in his voice put a crack in my heart twice as large, and I had to fight every urge I had to cross the room to him. Even still, I couldn’t stop myself from taking a few steps forward. And when I did, he turned. And suddenly I didn’t want to see his eyes anymore. The pain of four days ago was nothing compared to now.

How could I think that any of this was easy?

“Do you have any idea how hard it is not to touch you?” His words were soft, each one more broken than the last. “How hard it is to keep my hands off of you when you’re this close?”

The words were off my lips before I even knew they were there at all. “Then don’t.”

“I have to.” He shook his head and pressed his hand flat over his eyes, remaining still for a moment before continuing in a shuddering breath. “But damn it, Eren, I don’t want to.”

I moved forward and he moved back, as if he knew I would. As if there were a bar tied between us, forcing the distance that neither of us wanted but both of us had to bear.

“I want to feel your skin more than I want to feel my own.” He continued in a voice that was so strained I barely heard it. I could feel him breaking apart and suddenly all I wanted to do was stop it. No matter what that meant.

“Levi, I…”

“Damn it, Eren.” Levi’s hand dropped from his face and fell against his chest. He angled his head to the side and his eyes met mine, not a tear to be seen but holding all the pain in the world. “I don’t think my heart even remembers what it’s like to beat without yours.”

I wasn’t sure mine had beat since I last felt his, but it was the only thing I wanted to feel now. And I was determined to feel it again. No matter what kind of pain he dragged me through, no matter how many years it took, I would have him again. I would feel him again.

And once I did, I would never let him go.

“Then work on it with me, Levi.” I breathed, moving forward and praying he wouldn’t move back. He did. “It’s the only lie I’ve ever told you, and I swear I won’t tell another.”

“I want to believe that.” And everything in his voice told me it was true.
“Then why don’t you?”

“Because I’m broken, Eren. Don’t you understand that?” He said the words as if they were the most obvious thing in the world. As if he truly believed them. “I’m a broken person. I’m damaged. I have been for long before I met you. I proved that with him when I dragged our relationship through seven years of shit, and I’m not going to prove it with you, too.”

There was so much finality in his voice that it terrified me.

But this time it only made me want to fight harder.

“You don’t have to prove it, Levi.” My words were shaking as hard as I was, but that didn’t stop me from moving forward. And this time he didn’t step back. “You can prove the opposite. You can show yourself that you’re wrong. You can show me that we’re worth fighting for.”

He searched my eyes, looking at me as if he were expecting every word. As if he knew they would be on my lips even before I did. As if they couldn’t possibly make any difference now.

“I know we’re worth fighting for, Eren.” His voice was soft and held no lies. No hatred. No anger. No will to fight. “But I’m not willing to break you apart by trying.”

I was certain there was nothing left of me to break. He had already taken me down to my lowest point, and the only way to go was up. Even if he brought me back down again and again, I was willing to rebuild it all if it meant I could stay with him.

“I’m strong.” And my voice actually sounded like it was. Because even if he lacked the will to fight, I didn’t. And I was willing to fight for the both of us. “You know that, Levi. You’ve said it yourself before. So break me. Break me if you have to, but fight.”

And even without him saying the words, I knew his answer.

“I can’t.” He shook his head as if he didn’t even want to agree with it himself, but he said it anyway. “And I won’t.”

“Why?”

“Because I’d rather lose you while loving you than watch you die with me.”

I was sure I already had.

I’d already lost him and yet I felt like it was ending all over again. Like he was slipping through my fingers when I never really had him there to begin with. Like I never had a chance at all. And maybe that should have bothered me. Maybe that should have drained the fight out of my body. Maybe that should have sent me running out the door.

But I never did what I was supposed to.

And I wasn’t about to start now.

“No.” I blurted out the word in the same moment that I grabbed his shoulders and pushed him against the wall. I was sick of this space between us, and I wasn’t going to have it any longer. “No, I’m not going to let you just throw us away, Levi. I’m not going to let you give me up like that.”

He gripped my wrists and met my eyes with a guarded expression, and for a moment I was sure he would push me away.
But he wanted this just as badly as I did.

“You don’t have a choice, Eren.”

Even if he was too stubborn to admit it.

“The hell I don’t!” I snapped back, the anger blazing through me now. “Maybe you’re not going to fight for us, but I am. I will fight for you with every breath in my lungs. I will be here every second of every goddamn day. I will be your living memory if I have to, Levi, but I won’t let you go.”

Each sharp word brought me closer to him until he was trapped between me and the wall. My hands found their way into his hair and I gripped fistfuls as if I couldn’t bear to let go. I could feel his breath falling hot on my lips, uneven and shaking like mine. Our hearts were pumping together, racing to find the same beat. I was unraveling in him, and I could see in his eyes that he was doing the same in me.

And yet somehow his words were calm.

“You’ll stop fighting eventually.”

“I will never stop fighting for you.”

“Never is a long time, Eren.” Levi murmured softly, his eyes drifting down once to my lips. “And it’s only been four days. I know you feel this way now, but that’s going to change. You’ll move on eventually.”

Everything in his eyes told me he wanted that as little as I did.

“I’ll move on?” I spoke the words through a laugh, wondering if the idea sounded as stupid as it was. “Do you actually think I’m going to be able to move past you?”

I was sure there wasn’t another person in this world that could’ve been meant for me. And if there was, I didn’t want to meet them. They wouldn’t be Levi, and that was really all that mattered.

“Trust me, it’s going to be a lot better for you in the end if you do.” Levi assured me, reaching out to grab my shoulders as if he were finally ready to push me away. “I’ve broken enough people, Eren”

“I don’t care if you break me.” I shot back, trying to ignore how scared I sounded. I wasn’t ready for this to end. “I’d rather be broken with you than living a lie with someone else.”

“You were already living a lie with me.”

“And I’m not going to do that again.” I gripped his hair tighter, desperate to keep his eyes on mine. Praying that he could see the truth there. “I swear I’ll prove it to you. I don’t care how long it takes.”

“It could take forever.” Levi replied softly, brushing his fingers through my hair. The touch was so gentle I knew it was a goodbye. “So don’t waste your time on me, kid.”

I wasn’t even sure he meant it as an insult, but that was the only way I could take it. And I didn’t know those words could hurt me that way until the moment he said them. The moment I realized what I was fighting for. Because as important as our relationship was, as much as I wanted that back, I knew I wanted him more. I wanted to be a part of his life, no matter what that meant.

And even if I had to fight forever, it was all worth it if it was by his side.

“Just because we’re not together doesn’t mean I’m wasting my time.” The words fell off my tongue
and I knew instantly that I had once again surprised him. “Do you actually think that’s all we are? That it’s what I’m fighting for? I don’t need to fuck you to love you, Levi. I just want to have you in my life.”

He searched my eyes as if there would be a lie. But I knew he would never find one there again.

“You just want me in your life?”

He said it as if it were actually hard to believe. As if no one would ever want just him as he was.

“Yes. No matter what that means. Even if you can never forgive me. Even if we can never be what we were, I just want to be with you. I want to be a part of your life.” I found myself whispering the words into the small space between our lips and had to wonder when I had pulled him so close. I could actually feel our hearts beating together again. “You are more than just a relationship to me, Levi. You are my best friend. My home. My heart.”

It was almost impossible to stay away, and it took all I had not to touch his lips as I breathed the words against him. “And I can’t live without my heart.”

And suddenly something broke. A crack in his resolve. Something he had been holding onto since I walked into that room four days ago. I could see it in his eyes, even as he tried to hide it from me. He didn’t want to let go of me, either. He didn’t want to see this end.

And I could see that in his eyes now.

“Eren…” My name was like a curse on his tongue, shaking in his throat like it was meant to be a growl. Every ounce of frustration, all the anger of four days were building up inside him as he gripped my hair tight and jerked my head down to his. And suddenly all I could see were his eyes. Deep steel blue with every emotion in the world, on the verge of breaking entirely. As if he couldn’t hold on anymore.

And then he didn’t even try. “Fuck.”

Any meaning, any purpose, any cause for the word was lost the second his lips were on mine. And immediately I went with it. Lost to the taste of him as if I hadn’t savored it a hundred times before. And right now I was sure I hadn’t, and I was desperate to drink him in again. As if he were the only thing I wanted, the only thing I needed, the only thing worth keeping me alive.

His nails dug into my back like he was trying to rip me apart, and I couldn’t have been happier for it. Because I wanted that right now. Craved it, even. I wanted the punishment, wanted the pain so long as it came with every single inch of him. And I was sure it would. Because at this point, we couldn’t stop. Not when we were already pulling at each other’s clothes, jerking and tearing away as we stumbled back towards the throne.

And we didn’t even manage to make it that far.

I had no idea when I hit the floor or what happened to our clothes, but I was blessing their absence as I dragged my nails across his skin. And I wanted to do so much more. I wanted to mark up every inch of him until there was nothing left. I wanted him to remember he was mine. I wanted to carve my name in his skin and chase the marks with my tongue. And with one bite, I knew he wanted it, too. I could feel his teeth in my shoulder, in my neck, traveling all over me as he found his way inside.

And he did.
His slick fingers were pushing and probing like they were trying to make a point. Rushed and hurried and desperate. As desperate as I was. Only I didn’t know what for. My mind was spinning around me, lost in him, to the point that I couldn’t even say what I was aching for anymore. And it wasn’t until his nails were on me again, dragging and ripping down to my hips, that I knew what I needed.

And then I was filled by it all.

My cry was sharp and mingled with his until it became the only thing I knew. The only thing I wanted to hear. And it only grew loud as our bodies moved in a desperate pace, our nails raking over each other as if we couldn’t decide if we were fighting or fucking. And I didn’t even care. I wanted to fight. I wanted to fuck. I wanted it all. His nails, his teeth, his cock. I was never going to get enough. No matter how many times he filled me. No matter how many times I fell apart in his arms.

I would never want it to end.

Even when I knew it had to.

I couldn’t say when sleep finally took me away, but I was sure it happened when I was still in his arms. I could remember the soft touch of his skin against my face, and his warm, familiar scent filling my nose. I could remember his fingers in my hair, moving through the strands as they had a hundred times before, as if it came second nature. And in the hazy twilight that hung just above sleep, I could have sworn I heard his voice.

Singing soft words to me.

Words I was sure I would never forget.

Words I could still hear after waking up hours later.

Even though he wasn’t there to sing them to me.

He was gone by the time I woke up.
**Chapter 52**

Chapter Notes

YAY! ^__^ A THURSDAY UPDATE! Although it is definitely late. o_o I'm sorry for that! It was a pretty busy day, so I know this is a little delayed.

Thank you all so much for all of your comments on the last chapter! It was really interesting to see what you all thought about the latest turn of events. Although... well, not everything is quite as it seems. You'll see. XD

A huge thank you to thenewinshayneity for the beautiful artwork they shared this week! ^__^ If you haven't already seen it, you should definitely check it out! Oh! And a huge thank you to the Chibi Interns for the new CMV of Levi and Eren that they shared this week! And thank you to renamonprotectionsquad for sharing their Corporal cosplay! Both the photos and the CMV can be found under the Intern Cosplay tab on my blog.

^_^

Also, for anyone who might be going to Otakon this year, please let me know if you'd like to meet up!

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you'd like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

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Levi

I fucked up.

I really, truly fucked up.

And I knew that was the understatement of the year.

I let my head fall back against the cold white tiles and groaned, the sound reverberating off the shower walls, loud and unwelcome in the otherwise quiet room. It had been silent since I dulled the soft hiss of the water, shutting it off completely when it did nothing to drown out my thoughts. Not that it would be able to. I was sure nothing could do that right now. My mind hadn’t stopped since I came to, and I knew without a doubt that it wouldn’t quit anytime soon.

Not when I had that kid on my mind.

Which seemed to be a fucking constant as of late.

A frustrated growl stirred in my throat and I dragged a hand down my face as if doing so could somehow pull the brat’s image away with it. But I knew I had no hope of that. He was practically painted on the inside of my eyes at this point, and I wasn’t even sure of what I would do if he left me now. Because even though he pissed me off, and as much as I’d hated the things he’d done, there was still nothing in this world I would rather see than him.
I’d known that even before he walked down those stairs.

And at that point I didn’t have a chance.

“What the fuck have I done?”

The words left me on a whisper but I knew there was no response for them. None that I could give, anyway. None that would make any sense. None that would justify fucking my ex until neither of us could even move. At least not until hours later. Although I was willing to bet that he still hadn’t moved from that spot on the floor. His body had been limp and relaxed, fucked into a peaceful oblivion by the time I left The Wall. And I was sure he would still be that way by the time I got back.

Which would have to be soon now. Typically I never slept much, but I’d spent enough time in this shower today to make up for the gap that was usually between us. Not that he would be getting off the floor any time soon, but I wasn’t going to risk him waking up without me. I could be a real shithead when I wanted to be, but I wasn’t going to do something like that to him.

No matter how angry I was.

No matter what he’d done to me.

I wouldn’t do something like that to him.

I stepped out of my shower and grabbed a towel from the rack, but I had to admit it was useless. I’d stood there in the shower with my head pressed against the wall for so long that I’d dried off completely with the exception of my hair. And if it weren’t for the wet strands hanging in front of my eyes, I wouldn’t have known I’d taken a shower at all. As it was, my mind had been a screaming mess the entire time my head was held under the heavy beat of the water.

And I still hadn’t decided what I was going to do.

Part of me was terrified that I wouldn’t figure it out at all, even after I was back at his side. And by then I was supposed to know. By then I was supposed to give him some kind of answer as to what the fuck was going on between us after the whole mess last night. And good or bad, I was at least hoping to give him something. Although part of the reason for that was because I wanted to know the answer myself. Because I really didn’t know what was going to happen to us now.

And I’d actually hoped that coming up here would solve it.

It always had before.

Whenever I’d had a problem, I would go to my mother’s room and sit with nothing but the silence and my thoughts. And I’d never left without an answer, not until today. But I had to do it now. It wasn’t as if I could keep a clear thought in my head with his scent covering every inch of my body. Every time I closed my eyes, I went back to the floor. Back with him. Back where I knew I wanted to be.

But that couldn’t be my answer, could it?

I was too broken for something as simple as that.

And that was what it all came down to. I was a mess and I wasn’t willing to drag him down with me. Not when I knew exactly where it would lead in the end, and I had no doubt now that it would. Especially after last night. After I proved that I couldn’t keep my hands off him. I’d actually thought for a moment that I could control myself around him, but then he said those words. Those perfect,
horrible words that made me feel more alive, more wanted, than I’d ever been before.

It was almost too easy to snap, too easy to break apart in his arms.

And I knew all along that he wouldn’t stop me.

But that was because he didn’t understand what it would mean if he didn’t.

I’d told him time and again that I was broken, but I knew even then that the brat wasn’t hearing my words. And either he was too fucking stubborn or too fucking stupid to listen, but it didn’t matter now. Not when I’d already taken us to the point that I didn’t want to reach. I’d crossed a line I didn’t even mean to touch, and I’d done it so easily it was almost natural.

But after years of fucking up everything with Erwin, it probably was.

I’d gotten so used to solving things this way that I wasn’t even sure if I knew how to react normally anymore. Every talk and every fight had always led to one thing with Erwin, and I knew I didn’t want that with Eren. He was so much more than that, so much more than a physical relationship, and I knew now that I wasn’t the only one who felt that way. Only I had responded with the exact opposite. I’d taken every feeling I had and shoved it behind the need to be physical with him.

And I hated myself for it now.

Because I knew what came after this.

I would pull away from him emotionally, but I would continue to use him for as long as he would let me. And he would with every chance he got, always with the vain hope that I would someday give him more. When I never would. Because I never had. I was broken and I would break him, too.

“What is wrong with me?”

I spoke the words into the empty room, staring at my mother’s picture and wondering somewhere in the back of my mind how I had ended up here. The towel was gone and my clothes were on, as if I’d purposely dressed myself for a day at work. And maybe that was where I would end up in the end. I couldn’t say that a piece of normality would be a bad thing.

As it was, I was moving in a haze.

Nothing seemed right without him.

I was actually beginning to wonder if any of this was really worth the pain of losing myself. I hadn’t been like this with Erwin, not even close, and after last night I wasn’t sure how I would stay away from him now. It had been easier when I’d had four days to forget the way it felt, but now the memory of his skin on mine was fresh and inescapable.

And I didn’t want to lose it.

But I wasn’t sure I had a choice now.

“You fucking brat…” My eyes fell on the scarf that I had left draped across the chaise days ago. It was the first time I’d brought myself to look at it since. “Why did you have to do this to us?”

Somehow I was sure he didn’t even know the answer himself, but that couldn’t stop me from feeling the way I did.

I was angry, and there was no other way around that. And yet I’d been trying to find one for days.
Because I didn’t want to feel like this. I didn’t want to be mad at him. I didn’t want to care about the lie.

Even if I knew I did.

To an extent, at least. In the end, it wasn’t the lie that got to me the most. It wasn’t the lie that ripped everything apart. It was the fact that he never planned to tell me about it at all. That he had done everything within his power to cover it up. That he would rather die than be honest with me. As if somehow that were a suitable alternative to the truth.

And I wasn’t sure I could forgive him for that.

Although it wasn’t like I didn’t want to. I was desperate to forgive him and have things back to the way they were, but somehow I knew that just wasn’t possible. Not with the kind of person I was. Even if it lasted for a while, I would ultimately tear it down with my suspicions. I would question every single thing that came out of his mouth. I would doubt every word he ever said. And maybe it would take months, or even years, but it would have a slow and painful end just the same.

There was really no other way to see it, because I knew myself too well. I would drag our relationship through a world of shit and pain, until there was nothing left to save. And I didn’t want that for him. He deserved so much better and I knew that.

Which was why I had to let him go.

I couldn’t promise that I wouldn’t hurt him, and I wasn’t going to risk him in order to find out. Trust was a difficult thing for me, and once I lost it I wasn’t sure of how I would get it back. As painful as this was now, I knew it had to be better in the end. Better than years of torture. Years of an abusive relationship he didn’t need. Years of a broken man he couldn’t possibly want. And I wasn’t sure I could offer him much more. Not now. And if he took me back, he would have to take all of the shit that came with. And I was worried it would be enough to destroy us both.

Because I knew I would let it.

Just as I had let this happen.

Eren wasn’t entirely to blame, and I knew that. Even if I didn’t want to admit it out loud. He had been scared, and obviously I’d given him a reason to be even if I never intended to do so. He had held onto the lie and kept it from me because he didn’t know how I would react to it. And the fact that he couldn’t come to me, couldn’t be honest with me, couldn’t trust me, made me feel as if I had done something wrong.

Not that it made a difference in the end.

It didn’t change the lie or how I felt about it. It didn’t change the way I would act towards him.

It didn’t change anything.

“Shit.”

My eyes caught the clock in the corner of the room and I found myself locking the door before I was even aware I’d left. So much time had passed since I walked into Trost, and I was actually starting to worry that he would be awake by now. That he would wake up to find me gone. That he would take one look around the room and leave without the explanation I didn’t have to give.

Because really, what the fuck was I supposed to say when I saw him again?
Thanks for the fuck, kid. Have a nice life.

I didn’t even have to know anything about him to know he wouldn’t let me do that. Hell, I would be lucky if he let me out of there without a conversation at all. But I knew I couldn’t count on that. It was either going to end in a fight or a talk about my feelings.

Either way, I was fucked.

I rode the elevator down, the key twisted tight in the lock as it had been for the past few months. One of the perks that came with the top floor was the private elevator access; something I rarely used but it had become important as of late. After everything had happened. I wasn’t going to risk running into Grisha, but that wasn’t for my safety or even his. Because really, I couldn’t give a shit what happened to him. But I wasn’t about to get myself a one-way ticket to jail just because I couldn’t resist temptation.

And obviously I wasn’t good at that to begin with.

Although I wasn’t sure it counted when it came to Eren’s body. When that brat was willing and eager, it was almost impossible to say no. And even if I managed to, he was as persistent as shit and had a way of wearing me down faster than anyone. He probably didn’t even know just how talented he was.

Which would make it that much harder to let him go.

He would be this pure innocent thing, begging for a relationship that I couldn’t give him. Emotional ties that he desperately wanted, and I wasn’t sure I could say no. It didn’t seem fair to reject him when all he was asking for was my friendship. But even if I gave it to him, I knew it wouldn’t stay that way.

And I wasn’t prepared to argue it now.

Luckily work was an easy excuse that would buy me a few more hours of time.

It looked like I was going in after all.

“Alright, kid, get your ass up.” I spoke the words as I walked down the stairs, deciding it was the easiest way to avoid a conversation I didn’t want to have. “Believe it or not, we actually have something called a job to go to. And as I hear it, you haven’t been—”

The words stopped in my throat as I stared at the empty room, the color draining away from my face as dread swept through my body. There was no one waiting for me on the floor. No one standing anywhere in the room. Even the pillow I’d slipped under his head was gone. He wasn’t here at all. I had been talking to no one.

And that meant he had woken up without me.

“Shit!” I slammed my hand down against the railing I had been holding onto and turned back up the stairs. “Shit, shit, shit!”

I heard jostling in the corner of the room and turned to find Hanji draped over Petra on one of the plush red couches, scrambling for her phone. She hit the screen repeatedly, her face annoyed, still half asleep.

“Did I set a Levi alarm or…”
Petra made a soft noise and turned to hide her face against Hanji’s chest. “Put the phone away. It’s too bright.”

Hanji paused and glanced down at her, a small smile on her lips that made my heart ache. I could remember too clearly how it felt to be like that. I’d only had it hours before, when he laid asleep in my arms. And I longed for it now. It was during quiet moments like that, when I could temporarily escape the mistakes we’d made, that I felt at peace. And now I had one more to add to the list.

“Damn it.”

“Oh!” Hanji’s phone hit the table and she sat up, pulling her glasses onto her face. “Well, you’re here early, aren’t you?”

I rolled my eyes and snatched the phone out of my pocket, searching for Eren’s number. “Does it count as early if I never left?”

“You spent the night?” I could hear the confusion in her voice, but I didn’t lift my eyes from the screen. “You live next door. Why would you…”

She trailed off slowly and I could practically feel the realization widening her eyes. By the time I looked up there was a huge, beaming smile plastered across her face that told me she knew damn well why I had stayed the night.

“You dog.”

“I don’t want to get into it, Hanji.” I warned, holding the phone up to my ear. No answer. Not even a ring tone. His phone was off.

“Is he still here?” She glanced once around the room and her eyes lingered on the door to the dungeon. “Can he even move?”

“Barely.” I muttered, dropping the phone back into my pocket. “But enough to leave.”

“He already left?” Petra’s voice was low and groggy, and it looked as if she were trying to peel herself off the couch as she sat up.

Clearly I wasn’t the only one who had a long night.

“I went over to Trost for a fucking shower and he left before I got back.” I shook my head and pushed a hand through my hair, looking once to the door. “I have to go.”

“Wait…” Petra rubbed her forehead as if doing so could get the thoughts out. “Does he think you… that you… you know…”

“Fucked him and left?” I finished for her, keeping my eyes turned away. “Yea, probably. I can’t see why he would think anything else.”

“But you wouldn’t do something like that.” Hanji rolled her eyes and dropped her head back against the couch. “Not to Eren, anyway. I’m sure he has to know that.”

“He’s never seen me this angry before. He probably doesn’t know what I’ll do.”

“You’re angry. Not scum.” Hanji angled her head and fixed her stare on me. “And even if you were, we wouldn’t let you do something like that to him.”

“Well, there’s no way of telling him that now, is there?” I murmured, trying to ignore the sudden
worry creeping up inside me. “It’s not like I can get a hold of him.”

“You could probably reach him through Armin.” Petra suggested, leaning into Hanji and resting her head on her shoulder. “He’s at work now, right?”

“Yea, he is.” And I was willing to bet I knew exactly which room he was in.

“Don’t let yourself worry about it.” Hanji continued, watching me with eyes that were more concerned than I needed them to be. “It was just a mistake, and I’m sure he’ll understand. To be honest, he’ll probably just be happy that you’re talking to him again.”

“You are going to talk to him, right?” Petra added in a hesitant voice. I could tell she was asking about more than what happened last night.

“I don’t know.” I ran a hand down my face and sighed. “I really don’t know, Petra. I really fucked up last night.”

“You didn’t fuck up anything, Levi. We all expected you to do that.” Hanji paused and then shrugged. “At least, we were all hoping you would.”

“So you sent him down there knowing I would do this?” There was a bite in my voice, and I knew she could hear it, too. But of all people, she wouldn’t care. She was used to it by now. “You brought him here so I could drag him through the same shit I put Erwin through?”

“He’s not Erwin, Levi. And this isn’t the same thing.” Hanji snapped back as if she had known the words were coming before they did. “They’re two different relationships, and you have to realize that.”

“I know they’re different.” I muttered, rolling my eyes. “But trust me, I’m fucking it up just the same.”

“No, you’re not.” Petra cut in, the fatigue finally gone from her face. “What you did last night wasn’t wrong, Levi. And it had nothing to do with Erwin. What you had when you were with him was just a physical relationship, so of course it would only be that when you broke up. But it’s not the same with Eren. What you have with him is so much more than that.”

They sounded like the same words that had come out of Eren’s mouth. The same words he’d said before I’d given in entirely.

“Then why did I respond the same way?”

“Because you love him, you miss him,” Hanji listed the words on off her fingers before flashing me a grin. “And let’s face it, the kid’s damn hot. I think those are enough reasons to bone anyone.”

I shook my head and looked away. “It’s still no excuse.”

“Then answer me one thing.”

“What?”

“It’s obvious that you feel guilty about this.” Hanji angled her head to the side and kept a watchful eye on my face. “Did you ever feel that way with Erwin?”

It had always felt like a good slice of revenge with Erwin and nothing more. But I had known then that he wanted it, too. “No.”
“Then it’s different. You only feel guilty because you’re scared you’ll hurt Eren with this.” Hanji shrugged. “But you care too much about him to do that, don’t you?”

“That doesn’t mean I won’t.” I shot back. “Last night is proof of that.”

“Last night is only proof that you can’t keep your hands off of him. And I already knew that.” Hanji went silent for a moment, folding her arms and taking a deep breath before continuing with words that I didn’t need to hear. “You’re only acting this way because you think you’re broken and you’re worried you’re going to drag him down with you.”

“Shut up.”

She glanced up at me from over the rim of her glasses. “You’re not, you know.”

“Shut. Up.” The words were slow and a growl, and I already found myself walking towards the door.

“I’m not going to.” She shot up from the couch and even without looking I knew she was following me. “I’m not going to let you ruin the one good thing you have just because you’re scared to be happy.”

I spun around to face her, my hand stopping on the door. “I’m not the only one who ruined it.”

“But you’re the one who’s choosing to keep it that way.”

I shook my head and pulled the door, but she pushed it just as fast. “Try. That’s all I’m asking you to do, Levi. Just try.”

I could feel the frustration starting to boil inside me. “I’m going after him, aren’t I? This is me trying.”

“Not for the reasons you should be.”

“Fuck those reasons and fuck this.” I snapped back, grabbing the handle once more. This time she didn’t try to stop me. “I’m not ready to talk about it yet, and I don’t have time for this shit.”

Hanji opened her mouth but with one quick glance at Petra she thought better of whatever it was she was going to say.

“You’re going to have to talk about it Levi.”

Petra’s soft voice was unexpected, and I almost wanted to hate her for it. Because it was so perfectly planned. The two of them knew I never yelled at her. Even more than that, her voice always managed to calm me down. Although I was sure I wasn’t the only one. I didn’t think there was a person in the world that could hate Petra when she talked like that.

“I’ll talk about it.” The words were soft, as if the anger had been sucked clean out of them. “Just not right now.”

“Not right now,” she agreed. “Go to Eren first and do what you need to do. Come back here when you’re done.”

I rolled my eyes and pulled open the door. “Fine, but I doubt I’m going to want to talk about it then, either.”

“Did I say you have to?” There was just enough of a snap in her otherwise kind voice to have me
turning in the doorway. “I just want to have dinner with you. We’re your friends too, remember? Believe it or not, we miss you.”

“Yea, don’t make us hunt you down.” Hanji chimed in, playfully wagging her eyebrows. “Or do. It might be fun. I have some rope I’ve been wanting to test out.”

“You save that shit for Petra.” I paused and glanced once around the room, eyeing the mess that was left from the night before. “Speaking of shit, this place is filthy. Make sure it’s clean by the time I get back.”

“Aye, aye, Captain.” Hanji grinned, tapping her fingers against her forehead in a small salute.

“So you’re coming back?” Petra eyed me from her place on the couch and held up her crooked pinky. “You promise?”

I rolled my eyes and waved my hand as if it would chase the gesture away. “You know I don’t do that shit, but yea. I promise. I’ll be here.”

But even without the promise, I knew I would be coming back anyway. I had already planned to. Being at The Wall, even alone at The Wall, had been the most alive I felt in days. And I was actually looking forward to going back to it.

But I knew I had one hell of a mess to clean up first.

And there was only one place I could go to do that.

------------------------------------------------------------------

I pulled into the parking space that I hadn’t used in days and stared up at the shining glass that was beaming down at me like a fucking morning person. As if it knew this was the last place I wanted to be, and it was more than happy to torture me with it. But I had already promised myself that I would only have to stare at it for a few more weeks. Even if Erwin didn’t know it yet, I was done. There was no point to me working here anymore.

And my last day at this company couldn’t come soon enough.

I shoved my keys into my pocket as I walked through the front doors, purposely ignoring the stares that turned and lingered in my direction. It was no mystery that I’d been gone for days, and I had no doubt that the gossip had already spread like wildfire. Not that I cared about any of it. They were free to think what they wanted. It wasn’t like it would change a damn thing anyway.

I crossed the lobby to the front desk and stared at a face I didn’t know. Although with the way her eyes widened, I could tell she was more than aware of who I was. Which only made my job easier. If I could do what I needed without going upstairs then it meant I could avoid the one face I didn’t want to see. And right now I was willing to do anything to stay out of his office, even if it meant pestering Mike.

Which, to be honest, had been one of my favorite pastimes at one point.

“What floor does Zakarius have those little twerps running around on today?”
“Twerps? Oh, uhm…” she paused for a moment, her fingers clicking fast across the keyboard. “Mr. Zakarius actually isn’t in today. He had to call out sick. President Smith said he’d be covering for him. He hasn’t told me yet which floor they’ll be on, but I could call him and—”

“Nevermind.” I cut her off, trying to keep the annoyance off my face. It wasn’t her fault I would have to see him after all. “I was going up there anyway. I’ll just talk to Erwin myself.”

“Should I let him know that you’ll be on your way?”

“Don’t bother him. I was going to stop by my office first.” There was no point in letting him know that I was here when I was still hoping to avoid it entirely.

“Alright, sir. Have a good day.” She beamed as bright as the building.

What the fuck was it with all these happy people?

I walked over to the elevators and slipped inside, leaning into my usual corner and turning my eyes up to the ceiling. I listened to the soft beep as it ticked up the floors and tried to focus on counting the tiles. And failed all too soon. My eyes drifted to the doors and lingered there, and I tried to ignore the fact that I was hoping that they would open so I could see him waiting on the other side.

But there was no one waiting for me when they opened on the top floor.

I headed to my office without so much as a glance in Erwin’s direction, praying that I would be able to catch Armin on the phone before I had to resort to talking to him. I dropped into my desk chair and snatched out the files, paging through them until I saw the blonde mushroom and the number that went with him. Typing in the digits, I leaned back in my seat and held the phone to my ear, hoping to hear a ring tone this time.

And there was one. Not that it helped.

“Hello, you’ve reached Armin Arlert. I’m sorry I missed your call, but if you leave your name, number, and a brief message, then I will get back to you as soon as possible.”

The soft beep only added to my annoyance.

“Please tell me you had the stick up your ass the entire time you recorded that message.” I rolled my eyes and let a sigh rush out my lungs. That wasn’t how I wanted this to go. “Listen, I’m looking for your friend. I fucked up last night and I’m… I’m worried I might have hurt him. So just come up to my office when you get this. Or call me back. Or have him pick up his damn phone if he’s near you. Just…”

I gripped the phone a little tighter and tried to fight back the sudden fear that this could be so much worse than I thought.

“Answer your phone next time, Arlert.” I hit the end button and dropped the phone onto my desk.

I felt like I was never going to get a hold of him.

I pushed up from my seat and walked over to the couch, dropping onto it and contemplating how good a nap would be right now. It wasn’t as if I had slept much, but I didn’t plan to when I had him in my arms. They were the only hours we’d had in days, and I wasn’t sure there would ever be more. And I wasn’t going to waste what I had by staring at the inside of my eyelids.

But I could stare at them now.
And I had every intention to.

Up until Erwin walked into the room.

“Levi.”

Shit.
YAY! Another Thursday update! ^___^ And it’s much earlier than last week’s update. Actually, it’s earlier in general because… I’M GOING TO OTAKON TODAY! ^_^ If you happen to be going as well and would like to meet up, please let me know!

Thank you all so much for your comments on the last chapter. ^_^ And I’m really excited to hear what you all have to say about the update that I’m posting today. Although I’m not expecting everyone to read this one right away because of the angst warnings I’ve been giving. If you happened to miss those warnings…

THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS ANGST. Not a bit of angst. Not slight angst. A LOT OF ANGST. And the chapter ends with a HUGE cliffhanger. The worst cliffhanger I have done in the entire fic. So, if you do not think you can handle a huge cliffhanger and/or angst, PLEASE WAIT TO READ UNTIL CHAPTER 54!

That is my warning. If you choose to read it anyway, then please let me know what you thought of the update! But also don’t feel as if you NEED to read it this week. Everyone’s health comes first. Do not cause yourself unnecessary stress or anxiety. If you think you need to wait, then please wait.

A HUGE thank you to jaegart, sysirautias, and the newinshayneity for the beautiful art they shared this week! ^__^ And also thank you to reyna-bennet, corporalnoticesyou, and noticemecorporal for sharing their amazing cosplays this week! ^_^ If you would like to check out the art or cosplays, you can find them under the ‘Intern Art’ and ‘Intern Cosplay’ tabs on my blog.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you’re not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I’m also tracking the tag ‘fic: the intern’ if you would like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

Levi

“I wasn’t expecting to see you here.”

The deep voice pierced through me like a knife cutting straight into my heart. And I didn’t even have to look up to know who it was. The asshole had found me after all.

“So what is this? Are you spying on me now?” I opened my eyes and fixed Erwin with a stare that I was hoping would melt off his face. It didn’t.

“I heard your door.” Erwin shrugged, his eyes mildly amused. My anger must have looked fucking hilarious. “I figured it was either an intruder or you.”
I rolled my eyes and spread my arms apart. “Congratulations, you found me. Now go fuck off.”

“Well, you’re as bright and happy as I expected you to be.” He closed the door and stepped into the room. I wasn’t even surprised he wasn’t leaving.

“And getting happier by the second.” I shot back, following the same sarcasm he seemed delighted to use. He was out to annoy me today, and it was already working wonders. “Don’t you have some interns to manage today?”

“They’re already on an assignment.” Erwin shrugged and made his way to the bar. “Do you want anything?”

I couldn’t help but sneer. “Isn’t it a little early for that?”

He cocked an eyebrow and held up a bottle of water. “Yes, but good to know where your mind’s at.”

Not that it was. Numbing myself with alcohol never seemed like the right choice. I hated the idea of not being in control of myself, especially when I had a problem to sort through. “So, where’s your little pet? I thought he’d be attached to your side.”

“Usually,” Erwin smirked and cracked open the cap on his bottle. “But occasionally he does this little thing called work.”

“Really,” I eyed the drink in his hands, hoping that was all he wanted and knowing it wasn’t even close. He wasn’t leaving anytime soon.“And here I thought he just did balancing acts on your dick all day.”

“That’s what he does when he’s not working.” Erwin took a swig from the bottle and paused, an amused, playful light in his eyes. “Although I guess that’s also work, in a way.”

I rolled my eyes, but gave him nothing else. He was looking for a reaction. Some hint that we were okay. Some hint that everything was normal.

It wasn’t.

“Is he here today?”

Erwin paused and then leaned against the bar, holding the bottle between his hands and eyeing me with a knowing stare. “I guess that depends on which he it is you’re looking for.”

I tried not to give him any reaction at all. “Armin.”

“He’s with the rest of the group downstairs.” Erwin turned the drink in his hand, still watching me. “Is that really who you’re looking for?”

Annoyance screwed up my face and I shot him a glare. “Is he actually here?”

We both knew who I meant this time.

“No.”

“Then stop bringing it up.” I snapped, tilting my head back and pressing a hand over my eyes. “And get the fuck out of here while you’re at it. I’m not in the mood.”

And I wasn’t. I wasn’t even close to being prepared enough to deal with someone like Erwin. Hell, I
could barely handle Eren as it was, and I knew there were no mind games with him. His words were honest, at least to an extent. Unlike the man who was standing in front of me now. He was like a snake in the grass when you knew it was there. Hissing and rattling. Telling you its position.

But it could still bite you anyway.

“Well, that’s too bad. Because I am in the mood. I haven’t seen or heard from you in four days. We haven’t been that distant since…” He trailed off as if he actually had to think about it. As if he didn’t know the time just as well as I did. “We’ve never been like this, Levi.”

I dropped my hand to my side and shrugged. “Get used to it.”

“I don’t want to.” The crack in his voice opened my eyes, and immediately he met my stare. I hated how much love I saw there. The way he relaxed when he saw my eyes. As if they were the only things he wanted to see. The only things he’d been waiting for. “It’s good to see you again.”

The softness of his voice made me sick and I felt my stomach turn. But other than that, I ignored everything else my body did. The quick beat of my heart. A familiar yearning rising up within me. None of it mattered now.

“Well, I’d say the same, but…” I trailed off and waved my hand, filling the silence with the gesture. “Yea.”

He laughed softly, but there was no humor in it.

“Yea, I know. I’m not your favorite person right now.” Erwin paused and turned his drink in his hands once more, staring at it instead of me. “Are we going to talk about that?”

“Talk about what?” I shot back, a sudden anger stirring inside me. “How you manipulated the one man I loved into lying to me for several months? Is that what you want to talk about?”

It wasn’t really a question because I already had his answer. That was the whole reason he had come here in the first place. He wanted to talk about it. He wanted this conversation and any confrontation that came with it. Because he had never been scared of things like that. If anything, he craved them.

“One man, huh?” Another soft laugh, again without humor. “How quickly are you going to forget him, too?”

There was a sadness there I didn’t want to acknowledge. One I knew too well.

“Don’t make this about you.” I muttered. “This isn’t about you.”

“You’re right, it’s not. It’s about him.” He spun the lid on the top of the drink and sealed it tight. “That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

“I’m here because I’m looking for him.” I shrugged and folded my arms, staring up at the ceiling as if it had something better to say. “Don’t read into it.”

“It’s kind of hard not to.” Erwin pushed the drink aside and let it hit against the glasses. They clinked softly on the bar. “It’s not like you to chase after anyone. If you’re here, it has to mean something.”

“It means I fucked up.”

“You fucked up?” There was genuine surprise in his voice, but it wasn’t enough to pull my eyes to him. “This is news. How?”
“I did exactly what I did with you.” I muttered, my eyes still trained on the tiles above. “He came to talk to me, and I fucked him.”

“And then what?”

The bastard was too damn smart for his own good. And I shouldn’t have been surprised. He was always able to pick things apart, and this one was easy. Because if that had been it, if that was the end of the conversation, I wouldn’t be looking for Eren now. And he knew that.

“I went to Trost because I needed to think.” I closed my eyes, tired of staring at anything at all. “I got a shower, I got dressed. And by the time I got back to him, he was gone.”

“So he thinks you slept with him and left.”

I pointed at him as a means of a response and dropped my hand back to my side. He didn’t say anything else, but I heard the soft crack of his water bottle as he opened it again, taking another drink. And in the silence, I wanted to hurt him. Because it gave me too much time to think. Too much time to remember all the things I’d done, and all the things he’d done to me.

And looking back on it now, years later, I could see how much he ruined me.

He was the only real relationship I had when I was young, and I learned everything I knew from him. And he had trained me well. He tore me apart until it became familiar. Until I knew better than to expect an emotion from him. Until I knew that all we were was sex and lies. And there had been plenty of both. I couldn’t even begin to count how many times he said he’d leave her for me. And I guess in the end, he did.

But it didn’t really matter now.

“You really fucked me up, you know that?”

“I know.” He whispered softly, setting the bottle back on the bar. “And not a day goes by that I don’t regret it.”

“Regret what?” I didn’t bother to look at him. I didn’t even want to try. “Do you regret being with me? Is that it?”

“Never.”

I didn’t want to feel anything from that. “Then what? What do you regret?”

“I regret telling him for you.” His voice broke along with my heart, but I didn’t open my eyes. I couldn’t bear to. I didn’t know what I would do if I did. And I was sure he knew that, too. Which was why he continued, his voice still soft, still breaking. “I regret everything I did that made you hate me this way.”

So did I. But not for the same reasons he did.

“It’s too late for that now, Erwin.”

“I know it is,” he agreed. “I knew that the day it happened. And I don’t have any excuse. I can’t tell you that I wasn’t wrong. But, Levi, I didn’t know he would do that.”

As much as I hated it, I knew that was true. I had known that shortly after it happened, when I saw the pain in his eyes. But I didn’t want to admit it to myself then. The only thing I wanted to do was
drag him through the mud and shit that I had gone through myself. And he had let me. Because there was no other way to pay for what he’d done.

“I know that.” I whispered into the silence, hating the words. “But it doesn’t change what you’ve done or who I am now. It doesn’t make any of this shit go away.”

“And who do you think you are, Levi?” I heard the drink hit the bar and suddenly I realized he was walking over to me. “Who are you that makes you so terrible?”

I stared up into his eyes as he reached me, and fought back the sudden wave of nausea that started twisting in my gut. “I’m someone who hurts the people I care about. And that’s something I learned from you.”

“And how are you hurting him?” He didn’t even have to say the name for me to know. We were talking about one person and one person alone.

Even when there were two men on my mind.

“I’m hurting him because I know I can’t give him more than this.” My voice was as tight as my jaw, and I had to force myself to look away. It wasn’t fair when he was this close. It wasn’t fair when he was looking at me like that. “I know I can’t trust him, and I know I’ll only hurt him worse. It’ll become physical, and then eventually it won’t be anything else. I’ll end up fucking him like I fucked you. And I don’t think he can handle that.”

“And that’s my fault?” He didn’t even sound offended, because I was sure he already knew it was. “You can’t trust because of me?”

“I guess you could say that.” I shrugged, as if it didn’t really matter. And it didn’t. The damage was done, so what did it matter where it started? “You were the first lie I ever lived. And to be honest, it feels like I’ve been living in the same one forever.”

Mostly because I had. What started out as Erwin’s lie had twisted into so much more. It was a broken past that seemed determined to shatter everything else I had. And I couldn’t say I wasn’t helping it along.

“That’s your choice, Levi. Not mine. Not his.” He set his hands down on the top of the couch and leaned over me. But still I didn’t look up. “And you’re going to have to find a way to fix it. Because I’m not going to let you do this anymore. I already watched you destroy yourself with me. I’m not going to let you do it again with him.”

“You don’t have a choice.” I shot back, my eyes still turned away. I was sure there was pain in them now, and I didn’t want him to see that. “It’s already over.”

“No, it’s not.” His voice was hard, just as the Commander I used to know. “Don’t punish him for what I’ve done. Don’t punish yourself. What you have with him is not what you had with me. Do you understand that?”

“How is it any different?”

“Because you love him.” His voice cracked and suddenly I found myself looking into his eyes again. As if I didn’t have a choice. There was so much pain there. And I knew I couldn’t stop it, even if I wanted to.

“Erwin…”
“I know you love him more than you ever loved me. And that’s what makes this different.” Erwin gripped the couch like he was holding it for support, like he was going to break if he didn’t. But his eyes never left mine. “You didn’t have sex with him to hurt him, Levi. You did it because you missed him. Because you love him. Because you still want to fight for him.”

“I did it because I wanted to feel him again.” I whispered. “And I wanted to feel you, too. I don’t see how that makes a difference.”

“It’s different because you can’t live without him.”

I wasn’t sure I could live without Erwin either, but I was never going to admit that to him. “I’m going to have to try.”

“You could try to forgive him instead.”

I shook my head and finally looked away. “I don’t think I can do that.”

“You should.”

The words were simple. And maybe they were meant as nothing more than a response, but I could hear something hiding in them. Something he knew that I didn’t. Something that mattered.

“What do you know?”

Erwin searched my expression for a brief instant and then stood back from the couch. “I drove him to The Wall last night.”

“I know you did.”

There was a hint of surprise there. He wasn’t expecting the kid to tell me.

“Do you know why?”

I rolled my eyes, already tired of the guessing game. “No, but I’m sure you’re going to tell me.”

He was silent for a moment, as if he were actually trying to decide whether or not he should tell me at all. And then he did. “I offered him something.”

“You what?” He had my attention again. And this time I couldn’t take my eyes off of him. “What did you offer him?”

“Myself, in a sense.” He paused and then shrugged. “I told him to use me. To convince you that I manipulated him into lying to you. That I forced him to do it. That I threatened and scared him. I told him to say whatever he had to if it would get you to believe him.”

The small distance between us wasn’t nearly enough, and I already could feel the hatred rising in me once more. He had tried to convince Eren to lie to me again, after everything that had happened. And I wasn’t even sure why I was surprised. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t manipulated the situation in the first place, and I knew that. But the fact that he was continuing to do it now just made me sick.

“Look at me like that all you want.” Erwin continued. “I already know that what I did wasn’t right.”

“Then why did you do it?” I spat.

“Because I hate seeing you in pain.” He shook his head and looked away. “And I know you’re just going to destroy yourself with this.”
“If you know that… Damn it, Erwin, if you’re so fucking sure of that, then why did you tell me?” There was so much anger in me right now, and I wasn’t even sure why at this point. It was almost like part of me wanted him to, if it meant the pain would stop. “Why didn’t you just let him do it?”

“Because he already told me he wouldn’t.”

It was as if the floor had disappeared from under me, and I was falling. “What?”

“He told me he wouldn’t lie to you again.” Erwin actually sounded impressed. As if the kid had surprised him, too. “He said it wouldn’t be real if it were through a lie.”

The room felt like it was spinning uncontrollably and my stomach was trying to keep up. I had no idea what to do now. No idea what I felt. All of the pain, anger and hatred didn’t seem to make sense anymore. I wasn’t even sure why they were there. Why they mattered. I had been so mad at Eren, so finished moments ago that nothing in this world could fix it.

Nothing could get my trust back.

But that wasn’t true now.

“You know you can trust him, Levi.”

I wasn’t sure I could.

I was so desperate to. I wanted to. But I had been trapped in their lies before. And I didn’t know what I could believe now. “How do I know you’re not just saying that? How do I know any of that is true?”

A small smirk twitched on Erwin’s mouth and I could tell he knew the question was coming. He knew I was never that easy, that I wouldn’t believe his words just because he said so. It was one of the things he admired about me.

I didn’t let him get away with anything.

“If I was going to lie in order to manipulate you, Levi…” He stepped closer, his movements as slow as his words. And suddenly I felt like the prey. “I would do it for myself. Not him.”

And there was really no arguing with that.

Not that I could bring myself to when he was this close.

He was bent over me again, and my mind was starting to cloud with the scent of his cologne. And I knew that was a very dangerous thing. I was already confused as to what he wanted, what his plan was. I couldn’t read him today, more so than usual, and I was certain he wanted it that way. There was a game here that we were playing.

But I didn’t know any of the rules.

“You really need to get away from me.”

He bent closer as if he hadn’t heard me at all. “And you really need to fight for him.”

It was the most twisted contradiction I’d ever heard. He was so close to me, every inch of him intimidating and intoxicating in a way that muddied my mind and set my teeth on edge. And I could tell that he wanted me, too. But those weren’t the words coming out of his mouth. They weren’t even close. Instead he was urging me towards another man as he closed the distance between us.
And it was really starting to piss me off.

“You’re a confused old fuck, you know that?”

He laughed softly and smiled, his attention lingering on my lips for a moment before turning back to my eyes. “Oh, I’m not confused at all. I know exactly what I’m doing.”

“If what you’re doing is trying to make me uncomfortable,” I paused and pushed up at his chest, determined to put some space between us. “Then congratu-fucking-lations. You did it.”

“That’s not what I’m trying to do.” He reached down and grabbed my hand, holding it in his. His touch was gentle, and it made me want to scream. So I jerked away instead. “Then what are doing, you perverted bastard?”

“Perverted?” He arched one perfect brow and leaned close, his lips brushing once against my ear. “Oh, Levi… you know I can do so much more than this.”

“Yea, I remember.” I snapped, angling my head to the side and away from his lips. “A little too clearly. Now what the hell do you want?”

“I want you to tell me you’re going to fight for him.”

Again with the fucking contradictions. I’d felt his lips on me a second ago, and now he was asking this?

I felt like I was going insane.

“Why do you need to hear that from me?” I leaned back further on the couch and angled my head to stare up into his eyes. Trying to show him how little I cared. “It’s none of your business what I do with him.”

“Actually it is.” He settled between my legs, pressed up against the couch and removing what space we had left between us. And it was all I could do to keep my glare on him as he leaned closer, his lips a breath away, his eyes holding mine. “If you’re not going to fight for him, then I’m going to fight for you.”

I didn’t react at all. But I was falling apart inside. “What makes you think you have a chance?”

“I don’t think I have any,” Erwin admitted, searching my eyes. “But that doesn’t mean I won’t try.”

“Why try if it’s pointless?”

“It’s only pointless if you’re with him.” Erwin’s fingers touched my jaw and I tilted my head away. He paused and then continued. “If you’re with him, I can’t compete. Which is why I need to know if you even want him anymore.”

I rolled my eyes and looked over at the door, certain that this was some kind of game. He already had someone. He didn’t need me.

“What about your little mushroom?”

“My little…” Erwin paused and glanced down at himself, frowning. “That’s a low blow, Levi. You know it’s not little.”

It took me a moment to even realize what he meant. What he thought it was I meant.
“Not that, you arrogant fucking…” I ran a hand down my face and sighed. “Armin. I’m talking about Armin.”

Erwin raised a brow and amusement crossed his features. “You call him mushroom?”

“Stop avoiding the question.”

“I’m not.” Erwin smirked, rubbing his chin. “I just think it’s cute.”

I grabbed his hand and pulled it away, drawing his attention back to me. I was sick of this conversation now. I wanted it to be over. “Cute or not, you’re with him. You’re taken, so you don’t need me. There’s no reason to fight, so you really shouldn’t care what I do with Eren.”

He spun his hand fast and caught my wrist, jerking once to pull me back to him and destroying the small space I had created between us. And for a moment I was surprised. I’d forgotten how strong he was, how fast. He was almost enough to keep my on my toes.

If he weren’t always trying to get me on my back.

“I care about Armin. Don’t think for a second that I don’t.” He released my hand and grabbed my arms, as if he were waiting for me to get away. But I wasn’t going to try this time. So I let him finish his words. “He means more to me than I want to admit, but he’s still not you. He’s never going to be you. You will always be first in my heart, Levi. Everything will always be second.”

There wasn’t enough space between us to hide the heavy beat of my heart. And that sucked all the confidence out of my words. “You wouldn’t be saying that if he were here.”

“Yes, I would.” He paused and glanced down between us. At the heart I knew he could hear. The heart that was beating for him. “It’s not a secret between us. He knows exactly how I feel, and it’s no different for him. I’m second in his heart, too.”

“But he’s never going to make a move on Eren.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he already has.”

Jealousy spiked through me faster than I ever expected it to. At least when it came to him. I’d never been jealous over Armin before, because I knew there was never a reason. They were best friends and nothing more. But I had no guarantee that wouldn’t change if I were out of Eren’s life. And even though I was sure that Armin could make him happy, it still wouldn’t be me.

I wouldn’t be the one to make him smile.

And suddenly that was all I wanted.

I wanted to be the one in his life.

“There.” Erwin spoke softly, moving his hand through my hair. “That’s what I was looking for.”

“What?” I pushed his arm away, annoyed that he could see anything in me at all. “That I care? I could have told you that. I figured it was obvious.”

“Of course it’s obvious.” He angled his head to the side, watching me with an amused expression. I couldn’t understand it at all. “Levi, if you were over him, you’d be all over me by now. And you’ve barely let me touch you.”

I rolled my eyes and bit back a smirk. “Don’t sound so fucking stung.”
“I’m not stung.” His voice snapped enough to tell me otherwise. “If anything I’m pissed.”

And if that wasn’t amusing, I didn’t know what was. “Why?”

“Not for the reasons you think.” He moved forward and pinned me back against the couch, his forehead pressing against mine. And for a moment I expected our conversation to be over. For a moment I expected his lips to be on mine. And for the first time in my life, I wasn’t sure I wanted that.

Because as much as I craved it, as familiar as it was, it was never going to be Eren.

“I just don’t understand why you won’t fucking admit that you want him.”

“I do want him!”

The words rushed out of me as if I had no control over them at all. And it wasn’t until they were hanging between us that I realized I didn’t want to take them back. Because anything else would be a lie. I wanted the kid. I wanted him more than I wanted to breathe. And it was irrational. Ridiculous. The biggest mistake I would ever make in either of our lives.

But I didn’t want to stop myself anymore.

There was only one thing I wanted.

And it was him.

“Then fight for him.” Erwin’s words were soft, resigned. As if he already knew my answer, even though he didn’t want to hear it. “Fight for him, or I’ll fight for you. You don’t have another choice. You can either ruin yourself with me, or you can be happy with him.”

And I knew that was really my choice. Even if he cared about Armin, he would leave him for me if I could show him that I truly meant it. And even if I couldn’t, he might leave anyway. To join me in the same twisted, fucked up dance we had been in before those two ever walked into our lives. It had taken so many years, but I realized now that he had never lied. In the end, he gave it all up for me.

But I couldn’t give up anything for him.

“Why did you leave her?”

I wasn’t even sure I wanted to know, but I knew I had to hear the words. The question had plagued me for days, ever since I found out that he left.

“Because I never gave up on you.”

I tried to ignore how much that hurt. I tried to ignore the fact that I cared at all. That this meant something to me. More than something, even. It had been everything I wanted for years, and I’d actually had it for the past few months.

And it couldn’t change anything now.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I whispered the words and he drew closer as if he couldn’t hear me. But I didn’t mind this time. “I had just met him when you did it. Why didn’t you tell me in the start?”

“I didn’t know how you would react. And by the time I had the courage to do so, you were so happy with him.” Erwin paused and stared down between us, his voice cracking in a way that broke me inside. “I’d already ruined you so much. I didn’t want to ruin that for you, too.”
“You would have.” I admitted, because I knew it was true. As much as I cared for the kid, I would have left him in the beginning. “I wouldn’t have stayed with him. Everything would have been different.”

“Would you have been happy?”

I wanted to tell him there was no reason to sound so hopeful.

“I don’t know.”

“Levi…” His voice broke again and he hung his head, and for a moment I felt nothing but pity for him. “Do you hate me?”

No.

The word was in my head, but I wouldn’t let it on my tongue. It was so simple, but too complex to be left hanging between us.

I angled my head back and closed my eyes, muttering the only other words that were true. “It would be so much easier if I did.”

“Then why did you want to ruin everything?” The question came so fast that I knew he had been waiting to ask it. Dying to know the answer. “Why did you want to attack me that way if you don’t hate me?”

“Because I hate who I am with you.” My eyes stayed shut because I didn’t want to see the pain in his. And I was sure it was there. “And I know it’s not going to change. I can’t be around you anymore.”

There was an unsettling silence between us and it clung to the air as if it didn’t want to leave. And after a few moments, I actually had to bring myself to look at him again. To face the agony I had put in his eyes.

But it wasn’t there.

There was only quiet resolve, and a determination that worried me.

“Erwin…”

“Then I’ll stay away from you, if that’s what you need.” The words were soft on his tongue, as if they actually came easy. And they probably did, considering what would follow next. What he knew was coming. What we could both feel like it was vibrating between us. Rough and demanding. Impossible to ignore. “Just give me one last thing.”

“Erwin, don’t…”

His lips were so close to mine that I could feel the heat of his words, taste the spice of his mouth; hear the pant of his breath as he whispered in a voice that was so deep I would never forget. “Give me my goodbye.”

And it wasn’t as if I could say no. It wasn’t as if I wanted to. The second his lips were on mine, my entire body fell apart into his. My hands twisted into his hair and I latched onto him as if he were the only thing in a spinning world. The only thing keeping me stable. The only thing I had left. And I knew in that moment that I could have loved him, too. I could have lived with him. I could have been his, if everything had been different.
And even though I loved Eren, even though he was my entire world, for the briefest moment I wanted something else.

I wanted another life.

I wanted him.

And I knew then that I needed this, too.

I needed my goodbye. This one last taste of a life I’d had and a man I loved. A man I was giving up, consciously and willingly.

And he was doing the same. Because even if he didn’t want to admit it, he had a life without me. A life he wanted, and a life he loved. A man who made him happier than I had ever seen him. More than he had ever been with me. And as jealous as that would have made me at one point, it only made me content now. We had both found happiness in our lives and it took letting go of each other to realize it. And even if it hurt, it was better in the end. We were better with them. Happier with them.

So why did we continue to ruin it?

He heard the soft slip of metal before I did, but neither of us heard it in time to make a difference. He pulled away from my lips, his eyes wide and fixed on the door as if his entire life had just gone out of it.

“Armin.”

“I…” Armin clutched his phone against his chest, trembling as he stared at me. “I got your message.”

He opened his mouth again, as if he had more to say.

But he slammed the door shut instead.

“Shit, no!” Erwin’s legs seemed useless, betraying him as he pushed up from the ground. “Armin, please!”

I had never seen so much fear and pain in his eyes.

And in that moment, I realized.

He was never going to give him up for me. And I couldn’t even hate him for that. Because he had done it all for me. He had used his words to help me. To push me into realizing just how much I cared. Just how much I wanted to fight. That was the whole reason he came into this room. To save me from ruining myself. To keep me from losing Eren. To say goodbye.

And in doing so, he had lost everything.

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Armin

I heard his voice yelling for me as the elevator doors closed behind my back, and for a moment I
thought I wouldn’t make it at all. My hands were shaking uncontrollably as I looked for the ‘G’ with blurred eyes, filled with tears that refused to fall. And I couldn’t let them. Not while I was here. Not when he could find me. I wouldn’t let him see me this way.

And I wasn’t even sure he wanted to.

Because he wasn’t there when the doors opened on the ground floor.

My hand scrambled in my pocket, desperately searching for my keys as I walked with legs that felt like rubber. And when I finally found them, I fell against the car and grabbed the mirror tight, steadying myself as I tried to push the key into the lock. It took me more times than I wanted to count, and I knew I was scratching the paint away.

But I couldn’t see anything with my eyes.

“Don’t cry… don’t… cry…” Each command broke on a sob, and when they did the tears fell down. Disobeying everything I said. Everything I wanted.

I was weak.

And maybe that was why he didn’t want me. Maybe that was why none of them wanted me. And I couldn’t even blame them. I couldn’t blame him, and why should I? Levi was so strong and sure of himself. He knew exactly what he wanted and how to get it. He was in complete control of everything he did.

And I couldn’t even stop my tears.

No wonder Erwin kissed him. No wonder Eren didn’t want me. I should have known that before I even…

“Oh god…”

I pressed my hand against my mouth, but it didn’t stop the sob.

I had kissed Eren.

I had kissed Eren, and I never told him about it. Even more than that, I never planned to. But Eren had seen Levi last night, and I knew he wasn’t hiding anything anymore. There were no lies between them. Which meant he knew, and Erwin did, too.

And I didn’t know which was worse.

Because if he knew, then it was planned. He had kissed Levi out of revenge, and even worse, Levi let him. They’d done it together, willingly. Which could only mean that they were together now, and if it was because of that then I caused it. I had pushed them together by kissing Eren. I had ruined everything.

I’d ruined my best friend’s life.

“No…” I pushed the key into the ignition and pulled out of the lot, not even sure of where I wanted to go. But knowing I had to see him.

The only problem was that I wasn’t sure where he was. He hadn’t answered his phone earlier, and Mikasa hadn’t heard from him. But that was over an hour ago, so maybe…

“Armin?” Eren’s voice sounded groggy over the line, as if he had just woken up.
“Eren.”

The sound of my voice must have sobered him instantly, because his next words were sharp and concerned. “Armin? Why are you crying? What happened? Where are you?”

“Did you tell him?” They barely sounded like words, choked away on a sob.

My eyes were blurring again.

“Did I tell him what?” More concern, more fear. “Armin, are you driving?”

“Yes.”

“Get off the road!”

I wasn’t sure I could park if I had to. Not in the city. And as it was, there was only one place I wanted to stop. “I need to see you.”

“Then I’ll come to you.” His voice was fast, sharp, and nothing but worry. “Wherever you are, I don’t care. I’ll come find you. Just stop driving.”

I found myself shaking my head, refusing him in silence. It was all I could do to say the words. “Did you tell him?”

“Did I tell him what, Armin?” His voice was a panicked shout.

And it made my eyes blur further. “That I kissed you.”

“What?” He actually sounded confused. “No, why would I?”

And then the road went away. I couldn’t see anything anymore. Couldn’t feel anything anymore. Nothing but the pain inside.

He had kissed him. And he had done it because he wanted to. Not out of revenge, not because he wanted to hurt me. But because he wanted him more. More than he ever wanted me. And I’d known it all along, but it was still killing me now.

“Armin, what happened?” The panic in his voice was rising. “Are you still there?”

“He kissed him…” I choked out the words and I heard his breath catch. “I walked in on them. Erwin and Levi, they…”

“What?” Eren breathed the word as if he didn’t want to believe it himself. And I couldn’t blame him. “Why would they…”

There was so much pain in his voice that it broke me apart inside. Because I knew exactly how it felt. I knew it all too well. It was all I could feel when I saw them together in that room. Erwin holding Levi as he had held me just hours before. In a way that he would never hold me again. With that same warmth, that same love. None of that was meant for me.

He never wanted me.

And that was the only thought ringing in my mind. The only thing that seemed to matter. Because I could barely even hear the squealing tires or blaring horns.

Or the crunching metal that followed.
And it was only in the distance that I heard Eren screaming my name.

But by then everything had gone black.
YAY! A THURSDAY UPDATE! ^_^ And for those of you who waited for this update, I know this might be a double chapter day. Hopefully you enjoy it! I know the last chapter does leave everyone off at a difficult cliffhanger, but you WILL know what happened to that character by the end of this chapter. More or less.

Thank you all so much for all of your comments! I haven't gotten the chance to read most of them yet because I was at Otakon for most of the time, but I'll be getting to those soon! Hopefully you all enjoyed the last update - save for the cliffhanger and all. I'm going to go ahead and guess that no one enjoyed that one.

A huge thank you to super-rad-girl-7677 for sharing some wonderful and kinky art this week! ^_^ And thank you to the amazing cosplayers, the-coporal, wings-of-freed0m, ask-titanboy69, and starrybluefrost for sharing their cosplays this week. AND THANK YOU SO MUCH TO THE CHIBI INTERNS FOR SHARING THEIR NEWEST CMV! ^__^ It features the newest addition to their group... Erwin! So definitely check it out if you haven't already had the chance.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you would like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

There’s something about tragedy that makes the whole world stand still.

In the few short seconds that I heard the horns blaring and the metal crunching, I knew I was screaming. My heart was racing and my lungs were pumping. And then my legs were moving, pushing me forward and driving me through the statues that were once people. But they weren’t anymore. People could move and they weren’t moving. Nothing was. Not a car on the street or a plane in the sky. The city was dead, and I could hear none of it.

But that didn’t matter to me now.

The whole fucking world could stay a statue if he was gone from it. I wouldn’t want it anymore.

And the most terrifying thing about that was I meant it. I didn’t care about any of this if Armin was gone, and I hadn’t known that until now. My life had always been so much more, but that was because I knew he was a part of it. I had been holding onto some guarantee that he would be there through all of the shit that went on in my life. But now I didn’t have that anymore. It was being ripped away from me, abruptly and violently, and I wasn’t sure I knew how to survive without it.

Without him.

“Armin!”

The word was a pained cry that ripped out of my throat as if it had been trapped in there for years.
Broken and ragged, filled with more sorrow, more agony, than I would have ever thought possible. And it was loud enough to jerk dozens of eyes towards me. Eyes that didn’t matter. Eyes that were in my way.

The city was starting to move again.

And I was worried it wouldn’t wait for me. That it would take him away before I had the chance to get there. The chance to see him for what might be the last time.

“No.”

There was so much determination in a word that may as well have been a sob. It was nothing more than that, but right now it was the only thing I could feel. The unwavering refusal that something like this could be happening to me, to us. Because it couldn’t be. It wasn’t fair. This wasn’t supposed to be our world, our life. This wasn’t meant to be my struggle. What I had suffered through before was so much easier than this, and I wanted it all back now.

I wanted to sob over him. I wanted to be broken over him.

I wanted to live that eternity, as long as it wouldn’t be this.

Because what more did we have now? There was nothing left to fight for and even if there was, I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t fight for him anymore. Not after this. Not after Armin. There were no words in the world that could make this better. Nothing he could say to take back what he’d done. Not that it mattered. Not that he would. The fact that Armin had discovered them that way told me he was over me now. And even if he wasn’t, it didn’t make a difference. I wouldn’t forgive him for this.

He wanted me to give up. He wanted it to end.

And now I would give him everything he asked for.

The sudden shift was almost alarming. Moments ago I would have never thought it would be possible to be this angry with someone I loved so much. But I was. I was furious. I didn’t want to imagine his face or speak his name, even though it had been all that plagued my mind just before the call. The call that ended everything. The call that stole it all away. A future I thought I wanted and a friend I couldn’t live without. All gone.

And I didn’t even get to say goodbye.

“Shit!”

I turned the corner and ignored the burning in my legs, refusing to let it slow me down now. Not when I was this close. Not when I had the chance to reach him, and I was almost certain that I could. I hadn’t been that far from the company, and I could hear the ambulances already. Loud blaring sirens, racing in the same direction as me. Sirens that could potentially make a difference, either good or bad. They could save his life or steal away the last moments I would ever have with him. And those were moments I wasn’t willing to give up.

Because I wouldn’t let him die without me.

If he left me now, it would have to be in my arms.

There was no other choice for him.

“Stop!”
I spat the word like it was a curse, hoping to banish away the thoughts that were quickly stirring the panic inside me. I knew I wouldn’t be able to help him this way if I saw him now. If he were conscious enough to see me. The terrified agony I was feeling inside would be nothing compared to his. And as impossible as it might have been, I knew I would have to be strong for the both of us. Even if it broke me apart afterwards.

I was willing to do it for him.

The trip from Bryant Park had never seemed so far before, but it was states away now. And I hated myself for being there at all. I had fallen asleep by the fountain, my phone forgotten in my hands and my mind lost to a past that had been bliss compared to the present. And for a few hours, I actually wanted to return to it. I wanted to stitch up all the wounds between us and find a way back into his heart. Back to a time when we were happy. Back to a time when I could wake up without him there and know that he wasn’t far away.

But I didn’t know that anymore.

And for once, it didn’t matter.

I had lost him, and I could accept that now. Because holding on to him had cost me so much more in the end. And it was entirely my fault. I’d used so many words to try to win him back, and in the mess of it all I’d managed to convince him of Erwin’s feelings. And it’d only taken a handful of hours after that to bring the two of them together again. It was almost sickening how easily they could turn away from us, as if everything had been a temporary bandage on the wound of their relationship. One that was no longer necessary.

One that had been thrown away.

And I was almost happy for it. But I couldn’t help but wish that it hadn’t happened this way. Not at the cost of him. Not at the cost of my best friend. Armin wasn’t worth finding out that I never really had a chance with him at all. Because that was what it came down to in the end. If the few words I said were all it took to send Levi back into Erwin’s arms, then he was heading there all along. That was where he truly wanted to be, and I was just a detour. Someone to waste time with.

Someone that didn’t matter.

“Fuck you…”

The words left my tongue with no hope of finding their destination. He wasn’t close by and somehow I knew that he never would be again. But it still felt good to say. Even if it was just to his face in my mind, it was what I needed right now. In this moment where I had no peace, no hope, no joy left. Nothing but agony and terror writhing in my gut, threatening to end me before I could get to him. And I almost wanted to give in. I almost wanted to fall to my knees and succumb to all of the emotions that had been piling up until now.

But I couldn’t do that to him.

Awake or not. Alive or not. Armin needed me.

And I would be there for him. Until he took his last breath and even after.

Because there was nothing else I could do. Nothing else I wanted to do. I couldn’t imagine a life without him, and I wasn’t willing to try. If Armin died, I would go with him. Maybe not physically, but everything else inside of me would follow. I wouldn’t be the person that I was now. I wouldn’t know how to be without him. And I wouldn’t even try. Losing him would mean losing myself. I
would have to find a new life to live in.

And I didn’t want to do that.

I didn’t want to turn the corner and watch my life get ripped away as if it were really that quick, that easy, that fucking simple to take away everything I had. Even though I knew it was. It was all holding on by the thinnest of threads, and I was seconds away from snapping the string and crushing it all.

I could hear everything now. The panicked voices, the shifting of metal, the rush of the EMTs.

The smell of burnt rubber was filling my nose, and I wanted to gag on it.

And as I turned the corner, I started to.

They didn’t look like cars anymore. The twists of metal that were once familiar were now nothing but a demented sculpture. Like two angry beasts that were torn apart and forced together all at once. Covered in thousands of fragments of shattered glass, glittering in the sunlight as if they wanted to be so much more beautiful than they really were. But they couldn’t be. They could never be.

Not when they were covered in blood.

“Oh god, no…” It was a whisper even I couldn’t hear. “No, please, no!”

But the whisper started to grow. And as I watched them lift the body out of the car, the words turned into panicked screams. His hair was covered in blood; the soft blonde stained with so much red that I was almost certain there would be nothing left. That it would always be that color. That disgusting color that I had once loved so much, and now it was the one thing I didn’t want to see. Not on him. Never on him.

I had to get it off.

I moved forward without a clue as to what I was doing. But it didn’t really matter in the end. As long as I could get to his side and get the blood off of him, I was convinced it would all be okay. That as soon as it was gone, as soon as I could see his face, everything would be fine again. He would open his eyes and scold me for worrying so much, and then after that we could go home. We could move on. We could forget the mess of the past six months and the hell that was this internship. We could learn to be happy again.

I just had clean off the blood before that could happen.

“Sir.”

The hands on my shoulders confused me at first. I couldn’t understand why they were there or how they could stop me. But they were. I wasn’t going forward, and the more I struggled the tighter the grip got. I couldn’t get to him, and I was quickly beginning to realize that I wouldn’t be able to. They were going to put him in the ambulance and take him away from me before I could even see if he was okay. Before I could know if he was still alive.

Before I could say goodbye.

If it wasn’t already too late for that.

And if it wasn’t, there was a chance that the moment would slip away quickly. It could be gone before I managed to see him again.
And I wasn’t willing to let that happen to us.

I wouldn’t let this be our last moment.

“Armin!”

The word was nothing more than a desperate scream, but it was all I needed to find my strength again. They had no chance of holding me back now, and in the next breath I found myself running towards the white doors of the ambulance and the body that was being placed inside. I had to see him, if nothing more. I had to know if there was a chance that he was still alive at all. Even if it was small. Even if it couldn’t last, I had to know. Because there couldn’t be anything worse than the agony of being kept in the dark like this. The fear of not knowing if I had already lost everything that mattered.

“Sir!”

Another set of hands caught my shoulders and two other sets followed in from behind. They grabbed my arms and held me in place, but I couldn’t find the strength to care. Because it wouldn’t change a thing. It didn’t matter what kind of trouble I would get in. And it wouldn’t make a difference to me whether they tried to hold me back with ten people or the two gorillas from The Wall. I would drag them all into the fucking ambulance if I had to. They weren’t going to stop me here.

“Let me go!” It was a growl at the very best, and I barely managed it in my struggle. “Damn it, you bastards! I said let me go! I have to see him!”

“We can’t allow you to do that.” The man grunted as he tried to wrestle me away from the doors. I was so fucking close I could taste it. “We have to get him to the hospital right now. Every second is going to make a difference, and you’re only going to delay us.”

The fight went out of my body so quickly that I almost hit the ground.

“He’s alive?”

It was a whisper, but I knew he heard it anyway. I could see it on his face; a look of pity that told me he was aware of how I felt. He had seen it a thousand times before. But he couldn’t possibly know what it was like. What it was like to hope beyond hope that the person you loved was still alive, and that they would stay that way despite all the odds stacked against them.

And no one could know. No one else had a clue. Not until it happened to them.

Which was why the pity on his face worried me so much. Whatever chance Armin had was small. And it was slipping away more and more with each second that passed.

“He’s alive.” The voice drew part of my attention back, but the rest of me was trapped inside the ambulance with Armin, waiting. “And we’re going to try to keep it that way.”

The hands left me and I saw the man walking away before my mind caught up with what was happening. But I couldn’t bring myself to hold him back. Not when doing so could risk Armin. So I followed instead, running to keep up at his side as he moved to the driver’s side door.

“Where are you going?” The words cracked in my throat, choked on the fear that was still surging through me. “Which hospital?”

The man pulled open the door and regarded me with a look. “You his friend?”
“I’m his family.”

He nodded towards the interior and dropped into his seat. “Get in.”

Time is meaningless when the only thing surrounding you is despair.

Agony eats up everything else. And pain has a talent for twisting the minutes into hours and the hours into days. Yet somehow the time still manages to slip by so quickly. Eternal seconds that pass by in the blink of an eye. I had spent years in that chair waiting for him, waiting for an answer. But if you had asked me for the time I would have been convinced that only a minute had passed.

The hours I spent in that small waiting room were simultaneously the longest and shortest of my life.

And I wasn’t sure how I made it through them at all.

Looking back on it, years from now, I wouldn’t be able to recall a thing. And it wasn’t because the memory wouldn’t be there. It wasn’t because I couldn’t remember. It was because I didn’t want to. And I never would. Even though the memories would always remain, bright and vivid, locked in sharp detail and forged into my mind by overwhelming amounts of fear and pain. Stuck in me forever. Scarred into me. And my only choice was to blur them away with a stubborn forgetfulness.

Even if he survived, I knew I would never want these memories. I wouldn’t want to remember this room or the panic that came with it.

Which was why I locked myself away from everything. I ignored my surroundings and trapped myself in my own thoughts, growing so distant that I almost didn’t hear her voice at all.

But it was the one thing I had been waiting for. And I couldn’t miss it now.

“Eren.” Mikasa breathed my name a second time and the sound was muffled in my hair. Her arms went around me and all at once I felt my body weakening against her, melting into a warmth I needed more than I wanted to admit.

And for the smallest moment, I was home.

“How is he?” Mikasa brushed the hair off of my forehead in the same moment that she took the seat beside me. “Have you heard anything?”

“Nothing.” I shook my head and spared a quick glance at the clock. “I don’t even know how long it’s been since he went in there.”

“You called me as soon as you got here, didn’t you?” She paused, digging her phone out of her pocket. “So that was about an hour and a… damn it, Eren, I’m sorry.”

“You got here as soon as you could.” I shrugged, still eyeing the clock. I honestly couldn’t say when I called her, or how long I had been sitting here before I did. I barely remembered the call at all as it was.

“I still should have gotten here sooner.” She shook her head and shoved the phone into her pocket, collapsing back into the seat and pressing a hand flat over her eyes. “But first my boss, and then
traffic was…”

She trailed off because we both knew exactly why the traffic was as bad as it was.

“I can’t remember when I called you.” I muttered into the temporary silence. I could feel her eyes on me, but I didn’t bother to meet her stare. I wasn’t sure I wanted to look at anything right now.

“You were in a lot of shock,” Mikasa whispered, taking my hand into hers and squeezing softly. I almost felt it. “I wouldn’t expect you to call me right away. After seeing Armin like that, you must have…”

She trailed off and her grip tightened, a tremor moving through her arm that told me she was shaking. She muttered a quick curse under her breath and then shook her head once more. “Those fucking drivers. Some people should just stay off the road. I can’t believe this—”

“Armin caused the accident.”

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them, but I knew beyond a doubt that they were true. I had heard it all firsthand, and there was no denying that Armin was the one who had lost control. As badly as I wanted to blame the other cars, I knew I couldn’t. Even if they were the ones to hit him, it would have been avoidable if he were in a different state. If he would have just pulled over and put down the phone.

But he didn’t.

And now we were here.

“What do you mean he caused it?” She sounded just as shocked as I would have been if I hadn’t heard it all myself. “Armin’s the most careful driver I know. He won’t even pull out of a parking space unless everyone in the car is buckled up.”

I felt my stomach turn with the cold realization that I didn’t know whether or not he had worn his own safety belt. “Damn it…”

She put her hand on my back as I bent at the waist, pressing my forehead tight against my knees. “Eren… what happened?”

“He was upset.” I choked out the words and shut my eyes, fighting back the sudden wave of nausea. “He called me on the phone. He was crying and…”

“He was driving?” Mikasa cut me off sharply. “He called you while he was driving?”

I managed a nod, but I didn’t lift my head. “He wasn’t thinking.”

“Eren, it’s Armin. He’s always thinking.” Mikasa shot back, the worry clear in her voice now. “Why would he do that? What upset him that much?”

“He walked in on them kissing.”

“Them?” The tone of her voice told me she knew exactly who I was talking about, but she didn’t want to bring herself to believe it. And I couldn’t blame her. I didn’t want to believe it either. “Who’s them?”

“Erwin and Levi.” I muttered the name and tried to ignore just how much it hurt me to hear it out loud. I didn’t want it to affect me. I didn’t want to care at all. But I did. And as angry as I was, I
knew I couldn’t just turn off my feelings the way I wanted to. But I had to try.

“Erwin and…” Mikasa whispered the name and her hand stilled on my back. “But Levi hates him. Why would he—”

“He doesn’t hate him.” I cut her off with the one truth I didn’t want to admit. “He wants to, but he doesn’t. He never has. There’s too much between them for that.”

“Eren, that doesn’t make sense.”

“Sure it does.” I muttered,shrugging her off and leaning back into the seat. I angled my head back and stared up at the ceiling, determined to keep the tears locked away where they belonged. “And to be honest, it’s probably why he never did anything with the revenge in the first place. He didn’t want to. Because Erwin means too much to him. And that’s why he’s going back to him now. He just needed me to get him to a point that—”

“Do you really think that’s all you were to him?”

Mikasa’s question stopped the words in my throat and I turned to look at her, trying to decide if she was actually kidding. But there was no humor in her eyes. No hint that this was some kind of twisted joke.

“Don’t tell me you’re actually on his side.” I couldn’t keep the anger out of my voice, and I didn’t want to try. “Don’t you dare say that you understand him when Armin is in the next room because—”

Mikasa’s hand covered my mouth, muffling the rest of the words with it. “You’re yelling.”

I jerked my head back from her hand and rolled my eyes. “I have every right to yell.”

“No you don’t.” Mikasa shot back, dropping her hand to her side. “I just asked you a question, Eren. I wasn’t picking a side. And for the record, I’m on yours. But you should already know that.”

“If that’s true, then why are you defending him?”

“I’m not defending him, Eren. I’m defending your feelings for him.” Mikasa shook her head and slumped back in her seat. “Excuse me for wanting to have some faith in your relationship.”

That stung more than I expected it to. And I wasn’t even sure why. “We don’t have a relationship anymore.”

“You’re right, you don’t.” Mikasa shrugged and angled her head to the side, fixing me with a stare. “So let’s just drop it, okay? He’s a fucking cheating asshole and you’re better off without him.”

“He wasn’t cheating.” I muttered, slipping down into my own seat. “We weren’t together when—”

“Now who’s defending him?” She cut me off, raising a brow.

“I’m not defending him.” I rolled my eyes and focused my stare on the clock. “I’m just stating a fact.”

“No, you’re defending him,” she countered. “Because as far as I see it, you two are still together. Especially after last night. You can’t tell me you didn’t come home because you were having a fucking sleep over.”

I felt my cheeks burn with the sudden sting of embarrassment. “It was just sex. It didn’t mean
anything.”

“You know that’s not true.”

“No, I know it is.” I snapped, finally turning my stare back on her. “It didn’t mean anything, Mikasa. Not to him, at least. To be honest, he probably just did it to shut me up. He wasn’t even there when I woke up.”

Betrayal filled her eyes and her expression darkened as she turned to look away from me. She was still and silent, her body rigid, held in that position as if she were a statue. And after a while, I was convinced she wouldn’t move at all. But then a sigh rushed out of her mouth and she pushed a hand through her hair, in a motion that reminded me far too much of him. So much it actually hurt.

“This fucking sucks.”

Another crack in my heart. “You sound like him.”

“Don’t.” She held up a finger and fixed me with a warning glare. “Don’t compare me to him. Not after all of this.”

Clearly what I said was enough to shatter any opinion she had of him.

“So you’re mad at him now?”

“I fucking trusted him, Eren.” Mikasa muttered, her head leaning against the back of the chair as she slumped down. “I mean, I really did. I thought I understood him. Even with all the fuck ups, I could actually relate. I could get where he was coming from, even if I didn’t agree with it. But this… none of this makes sense.”

“Because he’s not the person you thought he was.” I shrugged, as if it could really be that simple. And I wanted it to be. “He wasn’t who I thought he was.”

“No,” she shook her head, frowning. “No, that’s not it. There’s got to be something more to it. I don’t just trust people, Eren. Not easily.”

“Maybe you’re wrong this time.”

“I can’t be.” Mikasa’s voice was so strong that I was sure she believed it herself. “I’m not wrong, Eren. I know I’m not. There has to be something more to it. I don’t see why he would just hurt you like this. Why he would kiss him like that. He loves you, Eren. I know he does.”

“Mikasa—”

“And trust me,” she cut me off before I could say more, holding up her hand. “I don’t want to admit to any of that. I want to hate him for everything that happened. I want to blame him for Armin. I want this to be his fault, but I just can’t see… how that can be the type of person that he is.”

“Why not?” I shot back, almost hating the fact that she could see the good in him when I couldn’t. “What makes him so perfect?”

“Nothing makes him perfect.” She shook her head and dropped her hand back to her side, shrugging once before sighing. “He’s not perfect. Not even close. But I see myself in him, Eren. That’s why I thought I knew him. That’s why I actually trusted him. And I know I would never do any of this. So why would he?”
“I don’t know.” I whispered the words because they were the only answer I had. The only one I was willing to give. Because I honestly had no idea why he had done any of it. But I knew it didn’t matter now. “I’m not going to forgive him, Mikasa. I can’t. Not after this. So does it really matter why he did it?”

“No,” she muttered, folding her arms and staring down at the floor. She crossed her legs at the ankle and closed her eyes, sighing again. “I guess it doesn’t matter at all. I just hate feeling like I was tricked by him.”

“You and me both.”

She didn’t say anything else, but I was almost wishing that she would. The temporary discussion, as painful as it was, was a breath of fresh air compared to all of the agony I had felt before she arrived. As much as I didn’t want to think about Levi and the mess that was my relationship, it was a happy alternative compared to the thought of what would come next. When the doctors would come out of that room to tell me whether I was alive or dead. And right now I wasn’t sure I wanted to know the answer.

But at the same time, I couldn’t bear to wait for it any longer.

“When do you think we’ll know?” Mikasa’s voice was small, worried, and distant.

Exactly how I felt inside.

“I don’t know.” I whispered, my eyes finding the clock once more despite how truly useless it was. “But I hope it’ll be soon.”

I closed my eyes and tried to find a way to relax, but there didn’t seem to be any chance of that. Every time my mind started to slip away from this room, something managed to drag it back. A person opening the door, people crying in the other room, a cell phone buzzing. A sound that wouldn’t stop. Some insistent caller and the asshole who refused to pick it up.

“Eren,” Mikasa groaned and pushed at my arm. “Your phone.”

I dug the vibrating object out of my pocket and stared at the screen, my blood running cold. “Oh, fuck no.”

“Who is it?” Mikasa angled her head to the side and caught sight of the screen. “What the hell is that blonde headed fuck nugget calling you for?”

“Hell if I know.” I muttered, still staring at the screen. I was determined not to answer him, now or ever. There was no reason I needed to talk to Erwin again, and I had no desire to be caught in yet another one of his lies. He’d given me enough of those, and the last had been the worst.

Because I’d actually allowed myself to believe that he was a decent person.

And not the scum-sucking snail that he was.

“Give it to me.” Mikasa had plucked the phone out of my hand before she’d even finished her sentence. And it was pressed to her ear before I could get it back again.

“Listen here, you piece of shit,” Mikasa spat and narrowed her eyes, as if he were actually standing there in front of us. “You have no fucking right to call his phone. Not after what you did. You——”

Anger crossed her features, hard and fast, and suddenly I worried for my phone’s life. “Don’t you
dare talk to me like you can order me around. You’re not going to get shit from me. I’m not giving
the phone to Eren, and there’s no way in hell that you’re going to talk to Armin.”

Mikasa was starting to tremble now, and in the beat of silence I had to wonder what he was saying.
And suddenly I realized that I wanted to know. No matter how terrible it was, no matter how much it
broke me, I wanted to understand. I wanted to know why he hurt Armin this way. And if he had
planned to do so all along.

“It’s all your fault! Do you understand that? You did this to him, you fucking bastard!” Mikasa’s
voice grew louder and it took all I had to twist the phone out of her grip before she could say more.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Erwin’s panicked voice came in on the other end as I pressed
the phone to my ear. “What did I do?”

“You know damn well what you did.”

“Eren.” He spoke my name like it was a prayer. Like he actually thought I would give him the time
of day. “Where’s Armin?”

“That’s none of your business.” And it really wasn’t. Not after the things he had done to him. Not
when he was the reason Armin was here. “Tell me why you did it.”

“Did what, Eren?” His voice was cautious, reaching, calculating. As if he were hoping I didn’t
already know.

“Oh, fuck you. You already know what. So stop acting stupid. Stop acting like I don’t know.” I
snapped, gripping my phone tighter. “Stop acting like I’m not the first fucking person he’d talk to
after what you did.”

There was silence on the end, but it didn’t last long.

“I know he’s mad.” Erwin’s voice softened, but the worry was still there. And I hated the sound.
“He has every right to be, and so do you. But what he walked in on, what he saw… Eren, it’s not
what he thinks it is.”

That made my heart beat in a way I didn’t want to understand. A way I didn’t want to admit.
Because in the end, it was pointless. No matter what he said, there was no hope for us. No reason for
my heart to beat for a man who wasn’t mine.

“And what the hell was he supposed to think when your tongue was crammed down another man’s
throat?” I shot back, refusing to say the name even to myself. We both knew who the other man was.
“Do you expect him to believe that you tripped and his lips broke your fall?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying.” Erwin’s voice was calm, collected. And I was sure he didn’t feel
that way at all. “I kissed Levi. I’m not saying that I didn’t.”

“Fuck you.” The words were sharp and I didn’t regret them at all. Not for an instant. “You fucking
lied to me. You said you would stay away from him and—”

“And I will,” he cut me off quickly. “If that’s what it takes, if that’s what you want, I will.”

“You already said that before,” I shot back. “And look what happened. You didn’t even last a day.”

“That’s because I didn’t go there for myself, Eren. I went there for you.”
There was a sharpness to his voice that had me itching to end the call, but his words stopped me from moving at all. And I wasn’t even sure why. I wanted to laugh at them and how ridiculous they must have sounded, but I couldn’t find the strength. Even worse than that, I wanted to believe them. And for a moment I actually thought I could.

But then I remembered who I was talking to.

“You went there for me.” It wasn’t even a question. Nothing but a sarcastic laugh. “Right. Did you kiss him for me, too?”

“I didn’t go there planning to kiss him.” Erwin’s voice was losing its careful edge of control, and I tried to ignore the emotions I could hear there. “I didn’t want that at first. But I... I wanted to say goodbye.”

“How many fucking goodbyes do you need?” I snapped with the sudden wave of anger that surged through me. “What the hell was The Wall? What was that dance?”

“Eren—”

“No.” I cut him off before he could say more, not wanting to hear a word of it. “That was your goodbye, Erwin. You had it then. The rest of this is just fucked up.”

“You were with him then.”

The words were careful, as if he were treading on thin ice. And if they meant what I thought, then he was.

“Excuse me?”

“You were with him when I was on stage. I couldn’t kiss him then.” Erwin paused, hesitating. “I wouldn’t have done that to you.”

“But you’d do it to Armin,” I shot back. “And that’s worse. You’re actually with him. Or you’re supposed to be, anyway.”

“He’d do it to me, too.”

There was so much certainty in his voice that I actually had to wonder if he knew. If he knew that Armin had kissed me yesterday, right before we got into the car with him. And maybe he did. But I wouldn’t betray Armin by assuming anything. If he knew, he was going to have to tell me himself. And even then, he wouldn’t get the truth out of my mouth.

“Even if he would,” I kept the words simple, dismissive, “Does that make what you did any better?”

“Not at all,” Erwin replied, “Armin doesn’t deserve any of the things I’ve done to him. He deserves so much better than me. And I don’t expect him to take me back after this.”

“Then why do you need to talk to him?”

“Because I want him to know that I didn’t do it to hurt him.” Erwin spoke softly, a deep pain in his words. “I want him to know that it didn’t mean anything. I love Levi, and I always will. But Armin means so much more to me. He is...”

Erwin paused, silent for a long moment before whispering, “He was my future.”

“And does Levi know that?” I tried my best to keep my voice indifferent. I didn’t want to admit that I
“Of course he does. He feels the same way about you, Eren.” Erwin sighed softly and continued with words I wasn’t sure I was ready to hear. “He loves you more than anything, and he doesn’t want to lose you.”

I shook my head and shut my eyes, pinching the bridge of my nose. “He already has.”

“Don’t say that.” Erwin’s voice held the same command I was used to, but it didn’t affect me now. “Don’t punish him for what I did.”

“I’m not. He doesn’t want me either.” I paused on the words, ignoring the pain that came with them. “It’s over, Erwin. I’m done fighting for him.”

“No, you’re not. You can’t be.” Erwin snapped, “Not when I’ve finally convinced him to fight for you.”

I felt the entire world slip out from under me. “You what?”

“What do you think I went there for? I already said it was for you.” Erwin continued, his voice still sharp. “I knew he wouldn’t just give in. Levi’s not that easy. He’s the type who needs to be pushed into realizing what he wants. And what he wants is you. It took getting him to give me up to admit that, but he did. He wants to fight for you, Eren. You’re everything to him.”

And in that moment, I believed him. Even if I didn’t want to, even if I knew I shouldn’t, I did. I believed every word and the fact that Levi actually wanted to fight for me. That what we had was worth fighting for. And I had believed that up until today. Up until a few hours ago, when the entire world was ripped apart. And it didn’t matter now. It didn’t matter that he wanted to fight, and it wouldn’t matter if he tried. It wouldn’t stop what happened to Armin.

It wouldn’t change the fact that I was losing my best friend because of him.

“It doesn’t matter anymore.”

“Don’t say that, Eren.” There was so much fear in his voice, and I wasn’t sure whether I liked it or not. “I did not lose everything for nothing.”

He had no idea just how much he’d actually lost.

“Yes, you did.” I whispered softly, wanting to stop the words I knew I had to say. “Because that kiss was so much more than you realize. And whether he meant it or not, I can’t forgive him for this. I can’t forgive him for what he’s done. What you’ve done.”

There was a long silence on the other end, and I could practically feel the wheels turning in his head. “What happened, Eren.”

There was no question in his words. It was a command and nothing more.

“Armin’s in the hospital.”

From the other end, it sounded as if someone had actually ripped the still beating heart out of his chest. And the gasp that followed was filled with nothing but fear and pain, to the point that I almost felt sympathy for him. But I couldn’t. Not when he was the cause of it all.

“What happened?” Erwin’s voice was sharp with panic, and I could hear the jingle of keys as he
picked them up. “Where is he? Which hospital?”

“He got in a car accident. And you can have one fucking guess whose fault that is.” My voice may as well have been venom. “And no, I’m not going to tell you where he is. Trust me, he doesn’t need you here.”

“Damn it, Eren,” Erwin hissed into the phone. “This isn’t a joke. Don’t risk your friend just because you’re pissed off at me. Suck it up and get the fuck over it. Tell me where he is.”

“Why? So you can show up and make it worse?” I could hear the rough growl of frustration on the other end, and for a moment it was almost comical.

“I won’t go to him, if that’s what you want.” Erwin’s voice was slow, just barely under control. And I didn’t believe a word of it. “Just let me know where he is so I can take care of everything.”

“He doesn’t need your fucking money.” I snapped, suddenly realizing what he meant. And for some reason it pissed me off that much more. I didn’t want him to come to Armin’s rescue like some white knight riding in on a big bag of cash. As if that could somehow make everything better.

“I don’t care if he needs it or not. I’m going to take care of him.” Erwin paused, and when he spoke again his voice was nothing more than a low command. “Tell me where he is.”

“Go fuck yourself, Commander.”

“Eren, I will search every fucking hospital in this goddamn state if I have to, but I will find him.” Erwin’s voice continued in the same low tone. And to anyone else, it might have actually been intimidating.

But I really didn’t give a shit anymore.

“Good luck with that.”

I killed the call and held down the button to switch off the phone before shoving it into my pocket, letting a sigh rush out of my lungs. That had taken so much more than I expected, so much more than I wanted to admit. And in the end, it didn’t change a damn thing. But it wasn’t like I could expect it to.

“What did he say?”

“We can’t let him near Armin,” I muttered, knowing it was really only a matter of time until he found him. But I couldn’t let that happen. I wasn’t going to let him near him again.

“Trust me, he’s not getting anywhere near Armin.” Mikasa shrugged and folded her arms, leaning back in her seat. “Not without his limbs, anyway.”

“I’m not sure that’ll actually stop him.”

Mikasa regarded me for a moment, angling her head to the side as she watched me. “What did he say about Levi?”

“What I expected,” I muttered, even though it wasn’t close to the truth. “That the kiss didn’t mean anything.”

“Right,” Mikasa rolled her eyes and tilted her head back. “Because he wasn’t expecting to kiss him. Honestly, why else would he be there?”
I paused on the words, still unwilling to let myself believe the full truth behind them. Even if I knew there was no lie hiding there. “He said he went there to convince Levi to fight for me.”

“He wouldn’t stand a chance.” Mikasa shrugged, glancing to me. “Levi hates him, so it’s not like he’ll listen to him anyway. Especially not if he hasn’t listened to us. And trust me, we’ve been trying for days.”

“Well, whatever he said made a difference,” I muttered, turning my eyes to the hall. There were people walking out of the room now. And somehow I knew they would be coming this way.

“What do you mean?”

“He actually convinced him. Levi told him that he’s going to fight for me.” The words were distant as I watched them walk down the hall. Whispers coming from an unfamiliar mouth. Words I couldn’t be sure I meant. “But it doesn’t matter.”

“Why not?”

I could feel it all slipping away.

And I wasn’t sure I would be able to stop it now.

“Because I don’t belong to him anymore.”
Chapter 55

Chapter Notes

YAY FOR THURSDAY! ^__^ Sorry this chapter is a little later than usual. o_o; It was a very busy day today. But gaaaah! I am so excited for this chapter. Although my favorite scene is coming up in the following chapter. You'll see. XD

Thank you all so much for all of your comments! I'm still a little behind on reading all of them, but I'm catching up gradually. ^_^ And honestly, thank you all for taking the time to write them! Some of you write so much, and it really is interesting to see what you thought after reading the chapter.

A huge thank you to super-rad-girl-7677 and mrs-jaeger-in-my-dreams for the wonderful art they shared this week! ^_^ And also, thank you to the amazing cosplayers askthecorporallevi, corporalnoticesyou, noticemecorporal, katscosplay97, ask-titanboy69, wings-0f-freed0m, and the-coporal for sharing their cosplay photos / gifs this week!

And finally... THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU to dauntlesranger for sharing a beautiful song they created for The Intern! If you haven't heard it already, definitely check it out! The cosplays, art, and song can all be found on my blog or the blogs listed. ^__^

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you would like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

Levi

“You’re back early.”

I rolled my eyes at the chipper greeting and shut the door behind me, twisting the lock back in place. There were a solid twelve hours sitting between now and our opening for the night, and at the moment I couldn’t have been happier for it. As it was, I had yet to decide whether I would show up tonight at all. Although I was willing to bet that Hanji wouldn’t give me a choice in the matter. She’d barely given me a day to recoup before she dragged me back out again, and now that she had me here I knew she wouldn’t let go.

And normally that might have been touching.

But right now it just pissed me off.

“I’m gonna to go ahead and guess that you coming back here is a bad thing.” Hanji dropped her rag onto the bar and leaned against the wood with her arms folded. The quirky grin was gone from her face as if she knew I didn’t need it there. But I needed the worried look in her eyes even less. “Am I right?”
“You already know you are,” I muttered, dropping down onto the barstool and pushing a hand through my hair. “And I’m not leaving again. That was a fucking mistake.”

“Why?” Petra leaned her broom against the wall and walked over, mirroring Hanji’s concern with an accuracy that made my stomach turn. Sympathy wasn’t something I needed right now. And I wasn’t even sure I would get it over this. “What happened?”

“What always happens, Petra? What happens with every fucking relationship I’ve ever had?” I shook my head and let a sigh rush out of my lungs. “And to think I actually thought this couldn’t to get any worse.”

“It got worse?” Hanji frowned, resting her chin on her palm. “How did you manage that one?”

I shot her a warning glare and then looked away, fixing my eyes on the door. The one he would never walk through again. Not once Armin got a hold of him.

And I was willing to bet he already had.

“I kissed him.”

“You what?” The surprise in Petra’s voice told me she had absolutely no idea who I was talking about. And to be honest, I wanted to keep it that way. But I knew that wouldn’t be possible. Not with them. Not with her. “Why would kissing Eren make things worse?”

“Yea, I’d have to say that’s pretty low on your list of offenses. I mean, after you fucked him and…” Hanji trailed off as she met my eyes, and when she did I knew exactly what she saw there. The truth. “You didn’t see Eren at all, did you?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“But then how would you… who did you…” Petra stumbled twice over the words before realization dawned on her face. And a mixture of horror and disgust followed on it soon after. “Oh no, Levi. Why would you do that?”

“Because I have this incredible talent for ruining everything that matters to me.” I waved my hand dismissively, as if it didn’t matter at all. Even though we both knew it meant the world. And yet I couldn’t bring myself to admit that out loud. Because if I did, then it was real. And that would mean that I’d truly lost him this time. “I fucked up again.”

“You really did.” Hanji’s voice was just as sharp as I expected it to be, and yet I didn’t hesitate to meet her eyes the second I heard it. Because I knew it was coming. I knew I was getting a lecture from her. And at the moment it was exactly what I needed. “What the hell were you thinking?”

“I wasn’t thinking at all.” I shrugged, holding her stare. “I really wasn’t. He was just so close, and…”

“And is that all it takes?” She cut me off, raising one eyebrow high over the rim of her glasses. “Levi, we’ve been close and we have yet to exchange bodily fluids. Should I be worried right now?”

I rolled my eyes and leaned back from the bar. “It wasn’t just that, Hanji.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t.” She paused and eyed my expression as if she didn’t want to know the answer to her next question. But that didn’t stop her from asking anyway. “Why did you let him do it?”

“I wasn’t going to let him do it.” I muttered, finally looking away towards the door. I was so tired of
seeing the judgment in her eyes. “I told him no at first.”

“Yea, you really stuck to your guns with that one, didn’t you?”

She had my attention fixed back on her in under a second, my eyes narrowed and angry even though there was no reason for it. And we both knew that. She was calling me on my shit and I deserved every moment of it.

Even if I hated it.

“I know I screwed up, Hanji. You don’t need to rub that one in.” I set my forearms flat against the bar and leaned into it, shrugging. “It was supposed to be a fucking goodbye or some shit. I don’t know. And you know what? It doesn’t matter. Because it’s never happening again.”

“No, it does matter. It really does. And you wanna know why? Because I’ve heard that from you before. You’ve done this before.” Hanji smacked her hands down against the bar and leaned forward, as if she weren’t already holding my stare. “And I’m sick and tired of watching you lose yourself over him. Especially when you have something good in your life.”

“Had.” I shot back, holding her eyes as if the anger there didn’t bother me at all. “I had something good in my life. I’ve lost that now.”

“You didn’t lose anything.” Her voice was just as sharp. Just as determined. Because she still didn’t have a clue. “Not unless that’s what you want, Levi. If it was only a kiss, then tell Eren. Believe it or not, the kid understands you. He’s not just going to drop you because of this.”

“Yes, he is.”

Hanji fell silent for a long moment, searching my expression for another truth. Another reason. Anything other than what I was giving her now. “Is it because you still want Erwin?”

“No, it’s nothing like that.” I muttered, angling my head to the side. “And to be perfectly honest, I don’t feel that way about him anymore. What we had… what we did… it was a goodbye. And now that it’s over, I don’t want anything more from him. I’m done.”

“Well then what’s the problem? Is it because of Eren? Are you’re worried that he won’t forgive you?” Hanji pressed and I fought back a smile I knew I didn’t deserve to have. But I almost couldn’t help it. She knew me so damn well that she didn’t even try to suggest that I lie to Eren. Even though that was the response that everyone else would give. The easy way out. One I wouldn’t take. Something I would never do. And she knew that.

“Levi, he loves you.” Hanji continued with her pointless argument. Words that wouldn’t make a difference now. Even though she wasn’t aware of it. “Of course he’s going to forgive you. If you’re honest with him, if you tell him, then I don’t see why he wouldn’t just—”

“Armin saw us.”

Petra’s audible gasp drew my eyes to her and she stared back at me, a hand covering the lower half of her face, her expression pained. And I could tell immediately that she knew what it meant. What I’d done. Eren wouldn’t be able to forgive me for this, and I couldn’t even blame him for it. I’d hurt his best friend, and I knew there was nothing worse when it came to him. He was passionate about his friends, and he wouldn’t forgive anyone who hurt them. Not even me. Which meant there would be no point in fighting.

So why did I even want to try?
“Why would he just walk in on you?” Hanji shook her head, her expression confused. As if she couldn’t bring herself to believe that things could be this bad. “Did Erwin set it up? Did he want Armin to—”

“You really want him to be the devil, don’t you?” I cut her off, raising a brow. “And no, he didn’t do it. I did.”

Hanji blinked slowly and stared at me as if I had lost my mind. “You did it on purpose?”

“What?” The snap in my voice was sharper than I wanted it to be, but the shock I was feeling was so much stronger. But it wasn’t as if I could blame her; I’d almost made it sound as if I had. And the idea of it made me roll my eyes and bite out a humorless laugh. “Give me some fucking credit, Hanji. Of course I didn’t do it on purpose. I wouldn’t hurt him like that.”

“Erwin or Armin?”

“Both.”

Hanji frowned and then shrugged, grabbing the rag to mindlessly scrub at the bar. But it wasn’t to clean. I knew it was only because she didn’t want to meet my eyes. Not with her next words. “No one would blame you if you wanted to hurt Erwin. He deserves it after what he’s done.”

“It’s easy to say that until you see the pain on his face,” I muttered, turning my eyes away from her to stare at the door. It wasn’t something I expected to admit out loud, but now it was hanging in the air between us. The truth of it all. One I’d just learned. Because I’d gotten my revenge today. Even if I didn’t plan it, even if I didn’t want it this way, I had it.

I’d watched his entire world end. Every single thing he wanted, completely destroyed. All because of me.

And it was so strange to finally have something that I had craved for years. Something I’d wanted so badly that I was willing to risk everything in order to get it. And now that I’d experienced it, now that I knew what the revenge felt like, I didn’t want it at all.

I didn’t want the pain on his face, or the cost of what it took to put it there.

I didn’t want any of it.

But it was too late to change that now.

“I don’t know. I think I’d like to see the pain on his face,” Hanji continued, still scrubbing at the same spot on the bar. “He’s hurt so many people, and now he’s hurt Armin, too. And you can’t tell me that wasn’t his fault. I don’t care if I wasn’t there. I know he manipulated you. He had to. Because I know you. You wouldn’t have kissed him if he didn’t push you into doing it.”

“I don’t care if he did or not. It still takes two people to kiss.” I paused and grabbed her hand to still the rag before she had the chance to work a hole into the counter. “I’m not blameless, Hanji.”

“You are to me.” She released the rag and I snatched it from her. “At least when he’s involved.”

“I don’t expect you to understand him.” I shrugged, folding the rag over and dropping it onto the stool beside me. “And I don’t expect you to agree with any of it, either. But I want you to drop it. I’m done talking about him.”

Hanji frowned and leaned back into the bar, searching my expression once before letting out a long
sigh and nodding. “Fine. But if he comes after you again, then I’m not going to stop, understand? I’m not going to stay quiet over this. I can’t. He’s taken so much from you already, and I’m not going to let him take this, too.”

“It’s already done, Hanji.” I spoke the words as if I actually believed them, even if I couldn’t bring myself to. I didn’t want to. I wasn’t ready to admit that I’d lost him, even though I knew I had. Once Armin got to him, once he learned what I’d done, that would be it. There would be no point. I wouldn’t be able to fight for us anymore. And it wouldn’t be because I didn’t want to.

It would be because he wouldn’t let me.

“No,” Petra’s voice was so sudden, so sharp, so strong, that I wasn’t sure how to respond. And she didn’t even give me the chance to. “No, I’m not going to let you do this. Not again, Levi. I’m not going to let you fall apart and ruin everything that matters to you. You can’t lose him. Not him. Not Eren. You need him, Levi. And whether you want to admit it or not, he needs you. And I’m not just going to let you throw that away. Not when you’re finally happy.”

“Petra,” I breathed her name through a sigh, knowing there was no other way to speak to her. Not when she was this worried, this concerned. I had learned that years ago. “There’s nothing you can do to change it. And trust me, it’s for the better. I’ve already hurt him so much, and it’s only getting worse. And I shouldn’t even be surprised. It’s not like I can—”

“You’re scared.”

The accusation caught the words in my throat and it was a moment before I could manage any kind of response at all. And when I finally did, I wasn’t even sure I believed it myself. “No, I’m not.”

“Yes, you are.” She pushed, “You’re scared that you’re going to treat Eren the same way that Erwin treated you. You’re scared that you’re going to hurt him that way. But you’re not, Levi. That’s not who you are.”

As desperate as I was to hold her stare, I couldn’t meet her eyes at that. Not after those words. Words that somehow managed to flawlessly describe the very fear I had kept buried in the depths of my chest. The fear that I would hurt him in a way I knew too well. That I would someday become his Erwin. That I would ruin him in the same way that Erwin had ruined me.

Because it was the only way I’d ever known.

“That is who I am, Petra.” I spoke softly into the quiet, holding up a hand before she could cut me off again. “And of course it is, who else would I be? Erwin is the only relationship I’ve ever had. The only way I learned how to approach things was through him, and I know none of it was right. I know that.”

“Levi—”

“And I have no fucking clue how to handle any of this, okay?” I pushed onward, needing her to hear the words. Needing her to understand. “I’m lost and I don’t know how to get out of this mess. I don’t know how to fix it. And I’m terrified that I’m only going to rip us apart by trying. And I don’t want to hurt him that way, Petra. He doesn’t deserve that. Not from me.”

Petra pushed herself off of her stool so suddenly that any words I had left quickly lodged themselves in my throat. She grabbed my hands in hers and twisted our fingers together, squeezing as if she had no intention of ever letting go. And for a moment I wasn’t sure I wanted her to. And then her forehead fell against mine, and her eyes were all I could see.
“Erwin is not the only relationship you had, Levi.” Petra’s voice was soft between us, soothing me to the bone. “You had me, too. And even if none of it was real, we were real. You are my best friend and you’re always going to be. And like it or not, I know you. Better than you know yourself. And you don’t have to admit that if you don’t want to, but I know you’re not going to hurt him that way.”

It was all I could do to get the words out of my lips. “What if I do?”

“You won’t.” There was so much certainty in her voice, as if no other alternative was possible. And to her, it wasn’t. “What you’re doing right now proves that. Honestly, Levi, you’re more worried about him than you are about yourself. And there’s no reason for it. You’re not going to hurt him by fighting for what you have. Not when you love him this much. You need him, Levi. You’re happy with him. Happier than I’ve ever seen you. Don’t just give that up.”

“Do you think it’s easy?” It was a whisper, even though I wanted it to be so much more. “I don’t want to give him up, Petra. Not when I’ve decided to fight. But I don’t think he’s going to let me.”

And there was no reason that he should. Not after I’d put Armin through so much pain, and over nothing.

“You won’t know that until you try.”

“I hurt Armin.”

“You did.” Petra agreed softly, releasing my hand to tap my chin once, bringing my eyes back to her. “And you’re going to let him drag you over the coals for it if that’s what he wants to do. But that doesn’t mean you’re going to lose him.”

“She’s right.” Hanji added, angling her head to the side. “As bad as it was, it was just a kiss. And unless it meant something—”

“It meant nothing.”

The words were out of my mouth so quickly that there could be no mistaking them.

“Then it doesn’t matter.” Hanji shrugged. “And you can prove that to him. Because it’s not over. Not until he says those words in a way that makes you believe them.”

“I don’t think it will take much to reach that point.” I muttered, finally leaning back from Petra’s touch. “Not when I did something to hurt Armin. I crossed the only line that Eren has. And I don’t think it can get much worse than this.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that.”

Hanji spun in the direction of Erwin’s voice, her expression caught between shock and anger. “How the hell did you get in here?”

“Did you forget I have a key?” Erwin asked, holding it up and raising a brow. “And here I was worried you would have changed the locks by now.”

“That’s at the top of my list.” Hanji shot back, moving around the bar to walk towards him. “Right behind getting your fucking ass out of my club.”

“It’s not just yours,” Erwin pocketed the key and folded his arms. “And with top of the line security like that, it won’t be yours for long.”
“You stupid, arrogant…”

“Enough.” I snapped, “Both of you.”

Hanji stopped moving the instant the words were out of my mouth, but by the way she trembled I knew she wouldn’t stay that way for long. Not when she was this angry at him, both over me and the whole mess with Armin. And it wasn’t like I could blame her for it; she had every reason to be mad. But a screaming match in the middle of The Wall wouldn’t help any of us right now, and I knew that.

“Why are you here, Erwin?” I turned my attention on him and moved off of the stool, crossing the small distance between us. “Shouldn’t you be chasing down a little blonde mushroom right now?”

The pain that crossed his face was more than I expected, and I tried to ignore the sudden twinge of fear I felt inside.

“That’s why I’m here.” His voice cracked and I felt the twinge again. “I need your help.”

“You need my help?” I asked, trying to understand the pain in his eyes. There was so much of it there. More than there should have been. “Erwin, if he didn’t want to talk to you then I’m pretty damn sure he won’t want to talk to me either.”

“I haven’t talked to him.”

And there was a reason for that, but I wasn’t sure I wanted to know why.

“You didn’t catch him?” I folded my arms and searched his expression. The answer was as clear as day. “And here I thought you wouldn’t let him make it out the doors.”

“I didn’t plan to, but…” It was a whisper that trailed off into nothing.

And it was the nothing that terrified me the most.

“Did you try to call him?”

“It wouldn’t matter if I did.” He spoke the words softly and looked away from my eyes. “He can’t answer the phone.”

I felt like the whole world was falling away from me.

“Why not?”

“Because he’s in the hospital.”

The shock was like being dropped into a pool of ice water, and I lost my breath just the same.

“What?”

“He got into an accident.” Erwin’s voice was tight and strained, and he kept his eyes fixed on the door as he pushed himself through the words. “After everything that happened, he got into the car and…”

I was already digging the phone out of my pocket, my thumb fumbling against the screen as I tried to collect myself. But there was only one thing racing through my mind right now. Armin was hurt, and there was a chance that Eren didn’t know. And I couldn’t let that happen.

I wasn’t going to let that kid suffer alone.
“He already knows.” My finger stilled on the screen at the sound of Erwin’s voice, my heart stopping along with it. “He was the one that I talked to. He was on the phone with Armin when—”

“I have to go,” I cut him off, shoving the phone back into my pocket. I turned once to glance at Hanji and Petra, trying to ignore the fear on their faces. It was the only thing I could feel right now, and seeing it reflected back at me was just too much. “Close up for the night. I’ll call you when I know more.”

“You’re going after him?”

The surprise in Erwin’s voice was almost insulting.

“Of course I am,” I snapped, moving towards the door. “Do you really think I would let him be alone in this? After what’s happened? After what I went through? The same shit stole everything away from me, and I’m not going to let it happen to him too.”

“You can’t stop it, Levi.”

“I know that,” I looked over at him and grabbed the door handle. “But I can at least be there with him through whatever happens.”

Erwin hesitated for a moment, as if he knew something I didn’t. “I’m not sure he’ll want you to be there.”

But I was already aware of that.

“Then he can tell me so himself,” I shrugged, trying to ignore just how much the thought terrified me. “But until he does, I won’t leave his side. I’m going to be there for him until he forces me out of that fucking door.”

“That might be sooner than you think.”

“It probably will be,” I agreed, “But I’m not leaving before that. Now are you coming or not?”

I wasn’t sure it even counted as a question when I already knew his answer. I could tell by his face that he wasn’t going with, but he had come here hoping that I would go in his place. And he hadn’t been wrong. Because nothing was going to keep me from Eren’s side right now, not when he was struggling through this. Even though I was sure my welcome in the room wouldn’t last. And I couldn’t blame Eren if it didn’t.

But that didn’t mean I wouldn’t try.

“Eren doesn’t want me there.” Erwin spoke softly, confirming the one thing I was certain of. “And I’m the last person Armin will want to see if he wakes up.”

I was sure the floor had disappeared from under me. “If he wakes up?”

“He’s in a coma.” Erwin’s jaw tightened around the word and he paused for a moment before continuing. “I got him a private room, but they won’t give me access to anything else. I’m not considered family to him, but I was hoping that you could…”

“I’ll do what it takes,” I murmured and gripped the handle tighter. “I’ll use every fucking penny if I have to. I won’t let him go.”

“Everything I have is his.” Erwin’s voice was strong for the first time since he entered the room, but
it didn’t last. “Don’t let him die.”

“I won’t.”

“I mean it, Levi,” Erwin pushed, holding my eyes. “Even if Eren tries to throw you out, even if he refuses you—”

“He’s not going to do that, Erwin.” I pulled open the door, already done with this conversation. But clearly he wasn’t.

“You don’t know how mad he is.”

“Yes, actually. I do.” I released the door for a moment, turning just long enough to face him. “I went through it, Erwin. I know what he’s feeling. And yes, he’s going to blame me right now. He sees me as the reason his best friend is there, and I can’t even blame him for that. I’m probably the last fucking face he wants to see and the first one he needs to see.”

Erwin searched my expression, as if he would find something else hiding there. But he wouldn’t.

“Then why do you think he’s not going to refuse you?”

I shrugged and tugged the door open once more. “Because I’m not going down without a fight.”

The smallest of smiles twitched on his lips, but it was gone just as fast. Crushed away by the pain of everything else. “I thought you were done fighting for him.”

“I thought I was, too.” I admitted softly, almost to myself. “But there’s no way in hell I’m giving up on that kid.”

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Eren

“This can’t be happening…”

I whispereded the words into the empty space, the sound muffled by the soft blankets covering my face. Knowing all along that no one would hear them. And there wouldn’t be an answer even if they did. Nothing that would matter. Nothing that would help. Not at this point, anyway. I was stuck in limbo; trapped at his side indefinitely and forced to wait for an answer. An ending to this all. Be it good or bad.

And I didn’t know how much more I could take.

I felt like I was snapping already.

I had been since I walked into the room to find his bruised and battered body in a bed that seemed too big for his little frame. Then again, I couldn’t remember a time when Armin had looked so small, despite the fact that he had always been shorter than me. But it was so much more than that now. He was frail and weak. Defenseless. The life draining out of his body as if it were meant to. As if he was supposed to give up.
And maybe that’s why his peaceful expression bothered me as much as it did. Because he didn’t look like he was in pain at all. Even more than that, he didn’t look like he knew what pain was. And I envied him for it. For his ability to sleep. His ability to forget. His ability to feel nothing, when pain was all I could feel. I wasn’t sure I would ever feel anything else again.

Not when he was in this bed.

My hand closed around his and I turned my face into his sheets, hiding it from the rest of the room and praying that it would somehow block it all out. But it didn’t. And it wouldn’t. Not when I could hear the soft beep of his monitor, a constant reminder of where I was and why. And that why was because of me. Because I had been too selfish to let him go.

And now it had cost me everything.

“Armin…” My voice was a dry croak that barely made it past my lips, but I wasn’t sure he would hear me anyway. Even if Mikasa had promised me that he could.

At least that was what the doctors had told her.

They had stabilized him over an hour ago, but he remained in a coma after. He had shown signs of responsiveness, which they assured us was a good thing but I couldn’t remember why. At the time, all I heard was that he hadn’t woken up. And that was all that really mattered. The knowledge that I was still losing my friend. That it might never change, and he might not ever wake up.

The rest of it was just a hopefulness that I couldn’t bring myself to have. No matter how much Mikasa insisted that I should.

Because apparently that was the only thing we could do for him right now. Stay at his side and wish him the best. Speak in soft, encouraging words. Promise him that everything would be okay, even when I didn’t know that was true.

When the only thing I wanted to do was fall apart.

“I’m so sorry, Armin.” I gripped his hand tighter and choked out the words, my face buried into the soft blanket covering him. Slow beeps were my only response.

And I wanted to scream at them.

This was so much harder without Mikasa sitting at my side, but I knew I couldn’t ask for her now. She had gone into the room with Armin’s grandfather to talk with the doctors; something I wouldn’t have been able to manage. Not calmly, at least. And even if I could, I wasn’t prepared to leave his side. Not now, not ever. I wasn’t going to let anything drag me away.

And I was already preparing myself for the struggle once visitation hours ended.

Not that I would be able to stop them, but I was sure as hell going to try.

Although I was silently hoping that I wouldn’t have to. It was clear enough that the shit stain of America had pulled some kind of strings to work Armin into this private room. I knew it didn’t come standard. Not at this size, and not with a bathroom. He had pulled some kind of magic trick, and I was willing to bet that it was in the form of a new hospital wing. And as much as I hated the idea of accepting his help, I was hoping that it wouldn’t end there.

Because if he cared at all, he wouldn’t want Armin to be alone. And if there was any way around that, I was sure he would find it.
The only question was whether or not he would.

“Damn it, Armin.” My voice was broken and lost against the sheets, to the point where I couldn’t even hear it myself. And somehow it seemed pointless that way. Pointless if he couldn’t hear it at all, even when I didn’t think that he could. So I lifted my head and breathed the words in a whispered sigh, praying that somehow they would reach his ears. “I need you to wake up.”

My eyes opened before I heard the sound, and for a fleeting instant I thought that it was everything that I wanted it to be. And a few days ago I would have been right. He would have been the only person I would want to see walking through that door, coming to my side. The only one who could comfort me. The only one that could help. But he wasn’t anymore. He was the opposite.

And the sight of him made my stomach turn.

“Get out.” The words were nothing more than a growl on my lips, but the sound only grew louder as I pushed away from the bed and stood. “What the hell do you think you’re doing here? You don’t belong here! Get out!”

“Eren.” Levi held out his hand as if to stop me, his attention moving once to Armin. And when it did I tried to ignore just how much pain I saw in his eyes before it was gone again. Washed away by resolve and command. Exactly what I expected from him. “You need to stop yelling.”

It was the funniest thing I’d heard all day.

“Why?” I shot back, gesturing to Armin. “Because I’m going to wake him up? He’s in a fucking coma, Levi! He’s never waking up!”

“Don’t say that!” Levi snapped, the anger in his voice as sudden and sharp as a whip. And yet somehow it was still low, controlled. As if he had no intention of letting it reach Armin. “I don’t care how angry you are with me, don’t you dare say that about him. Not now. Not when he needs you.”

“I can’t do anything for him.” The words were cold, hard and hopeless. But my voice lowered just the same.

“You can do everything for him, Eren.” His voice was as soft and insistent as Mikasa’s had been. And it didn’t help me at all. “He needs you here right now. He needs to hear your voice. He needs to know that there’s something to wake up for.”

“He can’t hear us.” I muttered the fear that I didn’t want to admit, but I couldn’t see it any other way. Because it didn’t seem possible that he could hear my pain and still look so calm. “And if he can, then you’re not helping. Trust me, you’re the last fucking thing he needs to hear.”

“I don’t doubt that,” Levi agreed in a voice that cracked, his eyes drifting back to Armin and lingering for no longer than a second. As if it were all he could bear. “He has every reason to hate me.”

“And so do I.” I forced the words out through my throat and kept my eyes away from him. Terrified that I would break if I didn’t. “Now get out.”

There was a moment of silence where I almost felt brave enough to look. But then I heard his voice again. “I’m not just going to leave you here like this.”

As if his presence could do anything to make it better.

“Yes, you are.” I bent over the bed and gripped the sheets tight, fighting the urge to lift my head or
cross the room. Anything that would bring me closer to him. “You’re not needed here, Levi. You’ve
done enough. And I don’t want you anymore.”

I hated my shoulders for shaking. And my arms for joining in the game. It was almost as if my entire
body was ready to break me apart in front of him. To show every vulnerability, every weakness, that
would tell him just how much I needed him to stay. No matter how much I wanted him to go.

“I know you don’t want me.” His voice was so calm, so collected. As if he’d come here knowing we
were over, and he’d already accepted that fact. And it made me want to hate him more. “I don’t
expect you to forgive me, Eren. I know I don’t deserve it.”

“Then why don’t you leave?”

“Because you’re not the only one I’m here for.”

I looked up at the words and met his eyes, and immediately wished that I hadn’t. Because the
calmness in his voice and the control of his words were just a mask for the pain on his face. One he
didn’t think I would see. One he couldn’t hide from me now. Even though I was sure that we both
wished that he could.

“I care about him, too.”

“Oh, do you?” The venom in my voice replaced any remorse I had felt for him moments ago. And
even the pain in his eyes couldn’t stop it now. Not after that. Not after he claimed to care about the
man he had put in this bed. “I’m sure he can tell after what you did today. You’ve given him a
memory and scars that are going to last him a fucking lifetime. He’s never going to forget your face
now.”

Levi opened his mouth and shut it just as quickly, holding my stare as he whispered the words. “I
deserve that.”

“You deserve more,” I shot back, dropping into my chair and shutting my eyes. My hands were still
gripping the sheet. “But I don’t have the energy for it now. I need you to go.”

“I already told you I’m not going to leave, Eren. Not like that.” His voice was just as soft. Just as
calm.

And I hated that I loved the sound.

“Then what? What is it going to take?” I twisted the sheet in my hands and lifted my gaze from the
bed, staring at him with my face half hidden. Praying that he could see the hate I wanted to have in
my eyes. Even if I was sure it wasn’t there. “I already told you that I don’t want you anymore. What
else do you need to hear?”

“I heard what you said.” Levi stepped closer to the bed, and the touch of sympathy in his eyes made
my blood boil. He wasn’t allowed to be this close, not with that look on his face. A look that said he
understood. When I knew it was impossible that he could. “And I know how angry you are. You
have every right to be angry, and I’m not going to take that from you. Because I know what you’re
feeling right now, Eren. I’ve been through this, too.”

“No.” I choked out the word before I knew what I wanted to say, but once it was out of my mouth
the rest came like an angry flood. “No, you don’t get to say that to me. Just because your mother died
when you were little doesn’t mean you know a damn thing about what I’m going through! Don’t
you fucking pretend that you do!”
“I felt that way, too, Eren.” I heard his footsteps and I wanted to lash out, but I kept my hands down on the bed. “I know it doesn’t feel like anyone could possibly understand what you’re going through right now. But I—”

“Don’t!” I shouted over him, cutting him off immediately. “You don’t! And you can’t, okay? Because no one killed your mother. No one took her from you like this. The person you loved didn’t take her from your life.”

“Eren, I—”

“You did this to me!” The pained cry ripped from my throat and Levi stepped back at the sound, every ounce of agony painting his face into a mask that I would never be able to forget.

No matter how much I wanted to.

“Eren, I…” The words broke immediately in his throat and his composure went with them. And suddenly I couldn’t look at him anymore. I was sure it would destroy me if I did. “I never meant to hurt you like this. And I wasn’t trying to hurt him… I just…”

“It doesn’t matter whether you meant it or not, Levi.” My voice was hoarse, exhausted. And I couldn’t bring myself to care. “It doesn’t take him out of this bed. It doesn’t change the fact that he might never wake up again.”

My fingers spread out against the sheet before curling into a fist again, gripping the soft fabric and pressing it into my palm. As if it could remind me that I was still here, beside his bed. Waiting for him to wake up. And that somehow it made a difference. And maybe it did. Because once I let it go, it would mean one of two things. Either he had woken up, or he never would again.

And I had the man across the room to blame for that.

“You were right, you know. These past few days, you’ve been right. You’re not good for me.” I whispered the words as I stared down at the blankets, keeping my eyes hidden from him. “You really do break everything you touch, don’t you?”

The sharp inhale wasn’t enough to pull my eyes to him.

But the door closing behind him was.

And in that moment I felt all of the pain that I had kept bottled up beneath everything else. The pain I had suppressed to keep myself from running after him. The pain that was ripping through me now. And suddenly I couldn’t keep myself still. I couldn’t keep myself next to the bed. I was running out the door before I even realized I’d moved, chasing down a man I was supposed to hate.

And yet for some reason I couldn’t bear to let him go.

And I wasn’t even sure why.

Because it wasn’t just love that was sending me down that hall. It wasn’t the only thing pulsing through my veins; there was too much anger in me for that. And even if part of me wanted to pull him into my arms, the rest of me wanted to scream at him until I had no air left in my lungs. And it wasn’t fair that he left me now. After everything he had put me through, he owed me this. This last moment, whatever it was.

And I was going to get it.
“You don’t get to leave me like that,” I snapped, grabbing his shoulder and jerking him to a stop. He spun around to face me and the agony in his eyes was almost too much for me to continue. But I did. “You can’t just walk away from this.”

He searched my eyes once and then shook his head, jerking himself free of my grip in a motion that made it look easy. “I thought you wanted me to leave.”

“I…” The word caught in my throat when no answer followed. So I gave the only truth that I had. “I don’t know what I want from you anymore.”

“Then what is this?” He shot back quickly, gesturing once between us before raising a brow. “Are you still trying to fight for us?”

There was so much hope in his eyes that it almost felt good to crush it.

“No.”

A sad smile crossed his lips and I felt my heart snap in two. “And here I thought you were going to be my living memory.”

I didn’t want that to hurt as much as it did. “That was before.”

“Before what?”

“Before I decided you weren’t worth fighting for.”

I wanted to take the words back the second they were out but they hung heavily in the space between us, inescapable and impossible to ignore. And by the look in his eyes I could tell that he was never going to forget them.

“So is that what this is?” He whispered softly, holding my stare. “Do you want me to stand here and listen to this? Do you want me to let you tear me down until you feel better?”

“That’s not what I’m trying to do.”

“That’s a shame because you’re a natural, kid.” Levi shook his head and turned his eyes away from me. “And believe it or not, you’re not the first to decide I’m not worth fighting for. But you’re going to be the last.”

“Why? Are you done breaking people?” The anger was back in my voice, but I was willing to bet he didn’t know why. “You’re not planning to find someone else to ruin?”

He searched my eyes as if he was looking for the reason behind my words, but I was sure he wouldn’t find it. Not unless I wanted him to. And I actually did. Because I knew he was done with me after this, and I knew exactly who he would go to in the end. The one person who wouldn’t turn him away. The one person he really loved, more than he ever felt for me. The reason this all happened.

“Or is it because you don’t need to?” I snapped, not bothering to keep the emotion from my voice. The jealousy I felt. Even when there was no point for it. It didn’t matter anyway. “Are you with him now?”

The realization that crossed Levi’s face was so quick that I almost missed it entirely. Because it was replaced an instant later by something else, something I didn’t understand at all. A kind of hope that was so strong it couldn’t be denied; as if I had just told him that he had a chance rather than accusing
him of being with someone else.

It didn’t make sense.

And I didn’t have the time to figure it out. A second later my back was pressed against the wall and suddenly the only thing I knew was him. His eyes, his scent, his lips. Hovering a breath from mine and lingering there as if their only purpose in life was to torture me. And they did it well. But not as well as him.

“Eren,” My name was the most beautiful sound on those lips, breathed like a sigh of relief. As if it were the only thing he would ever want to say. And I almost drifted away with it. But I knew that I couldn’t let myself do that. Not even with his next words. “My heart beats for one man, and one man only. And it sure as hell isn’t him.”

Why did life have to be this hard?

“It may as well be, because I’m not yours anymore.” Even I didn’t believe the words. And there was no strength when I tried to push him away. “Let me go, Levi.”

“No.” His voice had all the strength mine lacked. “No, I’m not just going to give up on you, Eren. Not now, not ever. I’m going to fight for us.”

And those words were just enough to bring me back. Back to what I needed to do. Because whether he wanted to fight for us or not, it didn’t matter anymore. It didn’t change what he had done or the fact that my friend was dying in the other room. And I knew I couldn’t forgive him for that. Even if I wanted to, even if I still loved him, it would never be enough to replace Armin. And he would be the only face I would see every single time I was with him. My friend who suffered because of him. Because I couldn’t let go.

And so I had to now.

“There is no us to fight for, Levi. We’re done.” I blessed my voice for the strength it gave me, praying it would be enough to convince him to stop. Before he broke me entirely. “Now let me go.”

“Five seconds.” The words cracked in his throat and even without seeing his eyes, I knew he believed me now. He was worried now. And maybe that was why he was pleading for the time. “Five seconds and you never have to see my face again if you don’t want to.”

He wanted to say goodbye.

And the thought of it ripped me apart inside. Because I knew this time it was real. This time I wouldn’t chase after him. I wouldn’t try to fix us again, and neither would he. He was going to leave me alone in this hall with nothing but his words stained on my memory. And I was sure I would never be able to wash them away. But even still, I had to hear them. Even still, I had to know.

So I nodded.

And as soon as I did, his hands were in my hair, holding the strands and gripping tight as if he didn’t want to let go. As if he were as unprepared to see this end as I was. The only difference was that I wasn’t going to stop it. No matter how much he was hoping that I would. And I knew he was. I could see it the instant his forehead pressed against mine, and I lost myself in his eyes.

But it was nothing compared to his words.

“I love you, Eren Jaeger.” His voice was soft. And I realized then that it was the first time he’d ever
said the words. The first and the last, all in the same breath. And suddenly the world was slipping away. “I’m never going to give up on you, even if you’ve given up on me. Do you understand that? Even if you don’t want me anymore, I’m yours. I will always be yours, Eren. For every fucking second of my life and every single one after. Because there’s no one else for me, kid. Not a goddamn soul in this world.”

My entire body was numb, as if my mind were trying to leave it entirely. And somehow I knew that it was, because I didn’t think I could take this anymore. I wasn’t even sure why I was trying. Something that was right shouldn’t have hurt this much, and giving him up made me feel like I was dying. To the point that I didn’t want to do it at all.

To the point that I almost gave in.

But almost was never close enough. And maybe that was why I whispered the dead words to my world. “You’ll find someone eventually.”

“I’m not going to.” The words were as sad as his smile, and as disconnected as I was I could have sworn I felt his thumb on my lips. “I already know I’m gonna die loving you, kid.”

“You might have to.”

More dead, empty words.

Why did I have to do this? I kept forgetting. Even if the reason was just down the hall.

“Maybe,” He agreed, pausing only long enough to touch my lips again. As if he were memorizing them. Memorizing me. “But I know I haven’t lost you yet, even if you say I have. And until that day comes, until I lose you completely, I’ll be waiting for you, Eren. Even if there’s no point to it.”

I wasn’t sure I could say anymore. I wasn’t even sure I could form the words. It was as if everything inside of me was shutting down; every emotion stacked up so high that I was crushed beneath it all. Forced into a catatonic state where I could do nothing but watch my life walk away.

And then his lips were on mine. Soft and sincere, holding all the passion in the world in the softest caress. And in that moment I felt my heart again. As if it couldn’t possibly remember what it felt like to beat until it had his to follow. And I didn’t want to let that go. I didn’t want to let him go. Because as angry as I was, as much as I wanted to deny it, he was right. I needed him.

I needed this.

And I wasn’t sure I was ready to survive without it.

“Goodbye, kid.”

The words were a soft brush against my ear and my eyes closed with the sound. And then my knees went, taking me down to the ground as if it were the only thing left in the world that wanted to hold me. Because as desperately as I needed his arms around me, I knew they wouldn’t be there. Because he thought I didn’t want them to be.

He thought he was giving me everything I wanted.

Everything I asked for.

Everything I thought I needed.
And it wasn’t until he was gone, that I finally started to scream.
Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

Ah, another Thursday update day! ^__^ And I'm especially excited about this chapter, because one of the scenes in it is a personal favorite of mine. Hopefully you'll all enjoy it, too!

And what's that? Ooooh, yes! I've finally updated the chapter total for The Intern! ^_^ I wanted to wait until I was working on the last chapter to put the final total up, but there it is! Yes, 60 chapters total. Which means that there will be four to go after this. The end is coming soon. XD

I'm really hoping you all enjoy it. ^_^ Thank you so much for all of your comments - it's so interesting to read all of them. There's so many different opinions and views, and it's just amazing to see what you all thought of the most recent chapter. So thank you all so much for taking the time to write them! I really do appreciate it. ^_^

A huge thank you to thenewinshayneity, super-rad-girl-7677, and leelynneth for the beautiful artwork they shared for The Intern this week! If you haven't already seen it, you can find it on the 'Intern Art' tab of my blog. Also, thank you to the cosplayers noticemecorporal, corporalnoticesyou, the-coporal,ask-titanboy69, ask-the-lazycosplayer, and askthecorporallevi for the gifs and photos they shared this week!

By the way, if I ever miss thanking you here, then please message me on tumblr! Sometimes it doesn't always show up in the tags and I end up missing it.

OH! And thank you to The Chibi Interns for the live action scene they did of Chapter 55! If you haven't seen it, please check it out! That and all the cosplay images can be found under the 'Intern Cosplay' tab on my blog or at any of the blogs I listed! ^_^

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you'd like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

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Eren

I couldn’t be sure of when I finally came to.

The last thing I could remember was the sensation of the wall sliding down behind my back as I dropped to the ground. And then there were the screams. But it took me so long to realize that they were coming from me. And by the time that I did I couldn’t remember them anymore. It was almost as if I hadn’t been there at all. And it might as well have been that way, because I couldn’t remember any of it. Nothing but the way his lips felt on mine, just before they left. Before he left.

And then it was all a blur.

Mikasa had found me in the hall after the staff went running for her. One of the nurses had stayed
with me, holding my hands and trying to bring me to a focus that I had no hope of reaching at the
time. And looking back on it now, I actually wanted to be grateful that they had tried at all. But I
couldn’t remember their face to do so. It was washed away with the rest of the events from
yesterday.

And that was probably the hardest part to believe.

That an entire night had passed since that moment when I was left on the floor. When I had gotten
exactly what I asked for, and everything I didn’t want. Because I would be lying if I said I did. I
wanted nothing more than to go back into his arms and forget the past week as if it could really
disappear that easily. Even though I knew that wasn’t possible anymore. Because although he might
have decided that he was ready to fight for us now, I knew that it didn’t make a difference in the end.

Not if I couldn’t bring myself to forgive him.

And I wasn’t sure I could.

But it wasn’t as if I hadn’t tried. Even while I lied there in the haze of unconscious consciousness, he
had been my only thought. The only one I could still remember. The only one that seemed to matter
at the time, even though there was so much more that should have come before him. But then again,
I wasn’t actively giving up the rest of my life. Just the part that he was in.

Which felt like everything.

And I tried to convince myself that it was. Because letting go was breaking me, and I didn’t want to
face it anymore. I wanted to hide in the calm of his arms and ignore the fact that he was the reason I
was upset at all. And for a time, it almost felt possible. I was almost able to believe that I could.
Because what did I have to hate him for? A kiss that had meant nothing to either of them coupled
with the worst timing in the world.

Admittedly he hadn’t done anything.

It wasn’t really his fault.

He never meant to hurt anyone.

But it didn’t change the fact that he had.

And that was what it came down to, wasn’t it? Armin wouldn’t be here now if it weren’t for what
they’d done. And that wasn’t to say he was entirely blameless; I knew that his driving had been
reckless. But it never would have been if it weren’t for what he’d seen. If he weren’t in such a state
of shock that he hadn’t been thinking clearly. And that was all that mattered in the end. Intentional or
not, my choice was going to have to be the same.

Because if Armin never made it out of that bed, I would always feel the blood on Levi’s skin.

And I couldn’t be with someone that I could never forgive.

Which was why I was sitting in this room now, vigilantly waiting at Armin’s side for the best or
worst to happen. And I had no plan to leave. No matter how desperately I wanted to run after him
now. No matter how much I wanted to go to him. That wasn’t the place I was meant to be, and this
was a struggle I had to survive. Because there was no way this was going to be easy. I knew that
going into it. It didn’t matter how angry I was with him, it was still going to feel as if I were tearing
my own skin off in the end.
It was going to hurt, and there was nothing I could do about it.

I just had to find a way to get through it.

And this was it. Forcing myself to stay here, my hands gripping the sheet tight as if it were the only lifeline I had. Which wasn’t far from the truth. It was my constant reminder that someone else needed me more, and that was what kept me here. Because I didn’t want him to wake up alone. I didn’t want him to open his eyes and have me too far away to come running to his side. I had to be there for him, just as he would be for me.

Which was probably the reason I had yelled at Mikasa this morning when I woke up in my own bed. Although I could barely remember it now, the conversation was still a hazy glimmer on my memory. I had been so angry that she took me away from him, and I refused to believe her no matter how many times she insisted that they wouldn’t let us stay. Even though I knew that was true.

But at the time it hadn’t mattered. I’d been so distraught that she pushed me out of the door with barely a change of clothes, and stuffed me into a taxi. Because it was the most she was able to offer me. No matter how desperate she was to be right at my side, she had a job to go to. And despite hours of negotiating the day before, the most she could get was an early leave. So I was here alone until she got off later in the day. And I didn’t know if I could wait that long.

The beeps were deafening when they were all I could hear.

And I was starting to pray for another voice.

“Eren?”

The whispered word was all at once the most calming and terrifying sound, and it was all because it came from her. Petra stood in the doorway, her eyes lingering on Armin’s body as if it were the last place she wanted to look and the only thing she could see. And I knew the pain that entered her expression as if it were my own; because it was the mask I had been wearing for over a day. Only mine was now filling with fear. Fear that she might not be the only one visiting today.

Fear that he would follow in soon after.

And I knew I wasn’t ready for that. I couldn’t handle it anymore. If he came in now, I was sure I would break in a way that no one would be able to bring me back together again.

“He’s not here.” Petra’s voice was so gentle, so reassuring. And yet I couldn’t bring myself to relax. And I knew she could tell; I could see it in the way her eyes softened. There was sympathy there and I wasn’t sure I wanted it. “I promise, Eren. He’s not going to come back.”

I didn’t want those words to hurt, but they tore at my heart just the same.

“Unless you want him to, of course,” Petra added, taking a step into the room. “And then he’s just a phone call away.”

“I’m not sure what I want anymore,” I muttered, finally allowing my muscles to relax. My grip loosened on the sheet and I dropped my hand to my side, watching her and silently trying to decide why she was really here.

Because somehow I knew it wasn’t just about Armin.

“That’s for you to decide when you’re ready,” Petra paused, her eyes lingering on Armin for a moment more before she finally forced herself to look away. “We should get something to eat.”
And suddenly I knew one of the reasons she’d come.

“Mikasa asked you to check on me.”

It wasn’t even a question, and I knew I was right the second the sheepish smile crossed her lips. “Yea, she did. She wants to make sure that you’re eating. And I was planning on coming here anyway, so…”

“I’m not hungry,” I cut her off, setting my hand on the sheet and gripping it once more. “And I’m not leaving.”

“You have to eat something, Eren. I know it’s already been a day since you have, and after what happened last night…” Petra hesitated; as if she wasn’t sure whether or not she could talk about that yet. And I wasn’t sure either. “You need to keep your strength up.”

“No, I need to stay here,” I retorted, gripping the sheet a little tighter. As if doing so could prevent anyone from getting me out of this room. “That’s what I need to do.”

“Do you really think that starving yourself to the point of a mental breakdown is going to do anything to help him?” Petra shot back quickly, draining the argument out of my words. “Armin needs you to be healthy, Eren. Don’t do this to yourself.”

I opened my mouth and shut it just as quickly, knowing that there was nothing I could say. Nothing that would keep me from stomaching food today. Although I couldn’t promise that I would be able to keep any of it down. The thought of it alone made me feel sick.

“We won’t go far.” Petra continued, glancing once over her shoulder at the hall. “They have a cafeteria here. We’ll pick up something small.”

“I don’t know if I’ll be able to eat it,” I muttered, staring down at my hand and the fabric squeezed between my fingers.

“I know.” Petra’s voice was soft again, understanding. And I felt temporarily grateful that she was here. “I just want you to try.”

I took in a deep breath and let it out in a rush, forcing myself to stand in the same moment. “Fine. As long as I don’t have to leave, I guess I’ll try.”

“Well, I can’t promise it’s great.” Petra wrinkled her nose slightly and adjusted the purse strap on her shoulder. “I mean, it’s hospital food. But it’s something.”

“I can’t say I’ll be able to keep it down anyway.” I shrugged and crossed the short distance to the door, trying to ignore how much I wanted to go back. “No sense in wasting a good meal.”

We walked down the hall and took a quick trip in the elevator to the floor with the cafeteria, and I tried to ignore just how much the enclosed space reminded me of him. Then again, everything seemed to. And it was even worse with Petra at my side. There were bits and pieces of her mannerisms that reminded me of him. Things she must have picked up over the years. And although as a whole they were two very different people, I could still see the smallest similarities clear as day.

“How about soup?” Petra asked, eyeing the menu with a critical stare. I could tell there wasn’t a thing on there that she liked. “Soup is simple, and you might be able to keep that down.”

“Soup it is.”
I order the chicken noodle and waited in line with my tray, briefly reaching into my pocket to grab the crushed dollar or two that I had stuffed in there before. But Petra snatched the cash from my hand just as fast and shoved it back in my pocket. And she handed the cashier a crisp twenty before I had the chance to get the money back out again.

“I could have paid for that,” I frowned as I sat down, setting my tray in front of me.

“I know you could,” she shrugged and then lifted the bun off of her sandwich to squirt mustard onto the inside. “But I wanted to pay.”

There was something about her face and the fact that she used a brand new twenty that told me she wasn’t the one who paid at all. But I didn’t want to get into that now.

“Thanks.”

She offered me a small smile and set the bun back on top. “So, how are you holding up?”

“Better than yesterday,” I paused between spoonfuls, trying to decide where I wanted this conversation to go. And where she planned to take it. “But I guess you already heard about that.”

“Mikasa called us after she got you in bed.” Petra took a bite of her sandwich and chewed slowly, watching my expression for a long moment before adding, “We had to hold him down to keep him from going back.”

It was like having an arrow shot straight through my back, and I had to force myself to look away before I broke again. I swallowed convulsively and reached for my drink, hoping it would be enough to subdue the sudden wave of nausea.

It was, but barely.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything,” Petra spoke softly into the silence, her voice stained with regret. “He told me not to, but…”

“Then why did you?”

“Because…” Petra hesitated and then let a sigh rush out of her lungs before continuing. “I hate seeing him in this much pain. I mean I’ve seen him hurt before, but nothing like this. This is too much. And I’m really scared he’s going to break.”

I closed my eyes and swallowed again, wishing the words away.

“I know you’re hurting, too, Eren.”

“I am,” I admitted in a voice that cracked. “But there’s nothing you can do about any of this, Petra, so—”

“Just because you can’t do something doesn’t mean you don’t try.”

My eyes turned back to her and the wave of pain on her face was almost too much to take. But I should have known that even without looking. The fact that she was here at all meant that he was worse than he had let on the day before. Although that was probably due to our conversation. I knew for a fact that it was hard on him, but I didn’t expect this.

“I appreciate you coming here.” I whispered as I lowered my eyes from her, taking a sudden interest in the bland soup. “But I really don’t think there’s any way to fix this.”
“Because you’re mad at him.”

“How can I not be?” I glanced up at her and wished I hadn’t. “Armin’s in there because of him.”

“Armin’s in there because he was upset by something he saw,” Petra countered so quickly that I knew she had been expecting my words. “But it wasn’t what he thought it was, Eren. And you know that, too. It didn’t mean anything. Levi never meant to hurt either of you.”

“What does that matter now? What does that change?” I shook my head and set my spoon down, pushing the soup away. “He still kissed him.”

Petra stared at my soup for a moment and then frowned, “Don’t demonize him this way, Eren. He does it so well himself.”

And I knew that much was true. Even if I didn’t want to admit it. No matter how angry I was with him, I knew it was nothing compared to how he saw himself right now.

But that didn’t change how I felt, and it wouldn’t change what I’d say.

“How can I not?” I muttered, leaning back as she slid the tray in front of me again. She was as persistent as he was. “I woke up alone, Petra. After we… after that night, he decided to go to Erwin. As if seeing him was more important than what we had.”

“He didn’t go to Erwin on purpose,” Petra shook her head and sighed. “Although I can understand why you would think that. But he didn’t go there for him. He went there looking for you.”

“Bullshit,” I rolled my eyes and ignored the surprise that crossed her face. “He knew exactly where I was.”

“No, actually, he didn’t.” Petra leaned back in her seat and folded her arms, regarding my expression for a moment before continuing. “He went to take a shower at Trost, and then he was going to come back to get you. But you were gone by the time he got there and you weren’t answering your phone, so he went to the office hoping that he might find you or Armin there.”

I felt my stomach bottom out and was suddenly grateful that I’d barely had two spoonfuls. I didn’t know that he had been looking for me, or that he had planned to wake me up. And that it had all been just another horrible occurrence of bad timing. But it didn’t really make a difference now. Whether he meant to see Erwin or not, it didn’t change the result of what happened when he did.

“Even if he was looking for me, it doesn’t make it an accident,” I shrugged, trying to buy into the words myself. “It’s not like he tripped and fell on his lips.”

“Did you trip and fall on Armin’s?”

I felt my brow furrow with confusion long before I was hit with the realization that she knew. “What?”

Petra searched my expression for a moment, “Armin told me he kissed you.”

“When?”

“When you were downstairs with Levi,” she paused for a moment. “And no, he doesn’t know. I figured that’s your own business.”

I hadn’t been expecting Armin to tell a soul, and I had never planned to do so myself unless it came
up with Levi. It hadn’t necessarily been cheating because we weren’t together, but it was nothing I would hide from him if he asked. Even still, it wasn’t something I thought would come out into the open, especially with someone like Petra. But she seemed like someone Armin would trust, so I could imagine he would confide in her.

I just didn’t realize he had any need to.

“It didn’t mean anything.” I shrugged and then hesitated. “To me, anyway. I know it meant a lot more to him, but he’s just my friend and…”

“And that makes what he did better than what they did?”

I frowned, already hating the angle she was taking. “Armin and I don’t have a past relationship.”

“That doesn’t mean you couldn’t have a future,” Petra countered, “If it was what you wanted, too.”

“But it’s not,” I shot back, “I don’t want him that way. He’s my friend and I love him, but—”

“But you love Levi more.”

I stared at her with my mouth open, trying to think of anything to correct her words. To prove them wrong. But there was nothing.

“And he loves you more,” she continued. “Their kiss didn’t matter because he doesn’t see Erwin that way. Erwin’s not the one he wants. He wants you.”

“I know that.” The words were out of my mouth before I was even aware they were in my head. “But, I…”

“If you know that, then why are you holding the kiss over his head?” Petra cut me off before I could hope to say more. “Why are you letting it tear everything apart?”

“Because I have to!” My hands hit the table hard enough to force a little soup from my bowl and onto the tray. And Petra went silent instantly, staring at me with wide eyes. “I don’t want to! I don’t want any of this, okay? But I don’t have a choice when he’s in that bed. When there’s a chance that I won’t get him back! Because if he never wakes up, if he never opens his eyes, I’ll never be able to forgive Levi!”

“Eren—”

“Even if it’s not his fault,” I cut her off, already knowing the words she wanted to say. “And I know it’s not. Trust me, I know. But it doesn’t make a fucking difference in the end. It doesn’t matter if he meant it or not, They’re still the reason he got in that car, and they’re still the reason he’s upset. They’re still the reason I’m losing my friend!”

“So you can’t ever forgive him?” Petra whispered into the silence following my words. “You’re just going to give him up?”

“No,” I choked out and gripped the bottom of my chair, shutting my eyes and hanging my head. “No, I’m not saying I’ll never forgive him. I want to, Petra. But I won’t be able to until Armin opens his eyes.”

“And what if he never opens his eyes?” The words were broken, as if she didn’t want to think the thought herself. “Do you really think that Armin would want you to give up everything that makes you happy?”
“No,” I whispered, still staring down at the table. “But if he doesn’t open his eyes, I don’t think I’ll have a choice.”

“You always have a choice, Eren.”

“I won’t,” I shook my head slowly, “Not until I know one way or another. Because as long as he’s lying there, that’s all that will matter to me. I can’t focus on anything else when I know that I could be losing him. And until he opens his eyes, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

Petra sat there in silence, listening to my words. Because that was all she could do now. She’d said everything I already knew, and now she had to live with the same knowledge I had. That it didn’t make a difference. No matter how desperate I was to have him back in my arms, no matter how much my body screamed for him, I couldn’t change it. Even though I wanted to.

Because Levi was my life.

And I wasn’t sure how I would live without him.

But I was terrified that I would have to try.

------------------------------------------------------------------------

Levi

“What, kid.”

I whispered the words into the empty space, knowing full and well that I wouldn’t get a response. At least nothing that wasn’t the soft chug of a machine or the gentle beep of a monitor. But I was familiar with those sounds by now. I’d heard them more than once and I’d grown to hate them over the years. Because no matter how many times I heard them, they were something I could never get used to. And I knew I never would.

But I wasn’t alone in that.

Those who had been graced with enough luck to forgo this experience could never hope to understand it. And those that could would only want to forget. Because even if the ending was a happy one, the stress and fear of these little rooms were nothing anyone would want to keep. Not that they would have a choice. Even in the most crowded rooms, overwhelmed by noise, it was still possible to hear the soft beep of a lifeline ticking away.

Just as his was now.

And it was all because of me.

And I would believe that, no matter how many times Petra and Hanji tried to convince me otherwise. Which had been their goal the night before when I’d come in a total wreck. Not that it worked; nothing would have at the time. Because I’d never fallen apart so completely before, and in a way that it actually terrified me. It had taken everything I had to get out of that building without running back to him. And after hearing how he reacted in the hall, I regretted leaving at all. More so than I
already did.

But I couldn’t do anything about that now.

I’d made my choice, and now I had to stick with it. Because I wasn’t going to force my way into his life if it wasn’t what he wanted in the end. And that was all I cared about at this point. Even if it meant I had to suffer, even if it meant that I would lose him, I would give him whatever he wanted. Which had been the entire point of my visit. I wanted him to know that I was willing to fight for what we had if he ever decided he wanted it, too.

Although shortly after seeing him, I started to lose hope that he would ever want us again at all.

And I couldn’t blame him for that.

Which was why I was here now, in this little room. Because if I couldn’t be in his life, I wanted to at least assure him a happy one. And maybe that wasn’t my promise to give, but I was going to try.

“I know he thinks that you can’t hear us,” I kept my voice soft as I closed the door behind me and crossed the room to the empty chair. “But I like to think that you can.”

I took a seat next to his bed and tried to ignore just how small he really looked. But it always seemed to be that way. Not that Armin had ever been an intimidating kind of guy, but there was something about hospital rooms and needles that reduced us all to a defenseless body on an oversized bed.

“I’m sure that I’m the last voice that you want to hear right now.” I continued, forgoing the fact that Erwin was probably the last one after what had happened. “But I promise that this’ll be the last time you have to hear me. I’m not going to bother you anymore.”

I didn’t bother to include the fact that my absence would be entirely dependent on him and Eren. Because although I was prepared to stay away, I would be there the second that Eren asked for me.

Not that I expected him to.

“I’m so sorry that this happened to you.” I whispered, my eyes drifting to the monitor beside his bed and looking away just as quickly. “I don’t ever expect you to believe me, but I swear that I never meant to hurt you this way. You were never supposed to see that kiss, no one was. Hell, it shouldn’t have happened at all.”

And I was positive that I wasn’t the only one wishing it hadn’t.

“But it did.” I continued, almost as if I were answering myself. “And I don’t know what went through your head when you saw it, but I can only imagine. And I’m sure it wasn’t good.”

After all, it had been enough to bring him to this point. I had no doubt that he’d assumed the worst.

“But whatever it was, you’re not right.” I paused and glanced at his expression as if I were actually expecting a reaction from that. And I realized then that part of me was hoping for one. “I’m sure you don’t hear that often, but this time it’s true. Because that kiss didn’t mean shit, kid. Not to me, not to him.”

I let a sigh rush out of my lungs and turned my eyes to the door.

“I don’t even know why we did it to begin with,” I shrugged, knowing that he couldn’t see it. “He called it a goodbye, and I guess it felt like one. But it wasn’t until you walked into the room that I realized I didn’t need it.”
The words were spilling out of my mouth now, filled with more truth than I was aware I had in my mind.

“And it’s not because it hurt you. Hell, it’s not even because I was worried that Eren would find out.” I hesitated, not sure whether I was ready to admit this to myself. But it came out anyway. “It’s because I don’t want to say goodbye to him.”

And it was true, I didn’t. It just took seeing the pain on his face for me to realize that.

“He’s been a part of me for so many years and I’ve hated him for most of them.” I closed my eyes and set my hand on the bed near his. “But I shouldn’t have. There’s so much good in him, and I’m sure that you saw that, too. And even if you can’t see it now, I know you did.”

My hand found its way onto his and my fingers closed around it.

“And he hasn’t changed, Armin.” There was so much certainty in my voice, and I could only hope that he would hear it. “I know you’re mad at him and you have every right to be. But he’s not the monster that you think he is.”

My thumb brushed slowly against his skin and I tightened my grip slightly, finding a lick of relief in the beat of his pulse.

“You didn’t see the pain in his eyes. You were gone too fast for that.” I paused and turned my gaze to his face. “He looked as if everything had been ripped away from him. As if he had lost the most important thing in his world. And that didn’t have anything to do with me, Armin. It had everything to do with you. Because you’re the one that he wants, regardless of whether or not he can have me.”

And I knew that was the case now. After seeing him react that way, I knew that he had truly moved on. I wasn’t the one he wanted anymore, and I was fine with that. I just wished it hadn’t cost him so much in the end.

“He’s found his life in you.” I lowered my eyes down to our hands, my voice softer now. “And I’m happy for him, I really am. Because after all of the shit I put him through, I think he actually deserved a little bit of happiness. Even if it didn’t last. But to be honest, he was lucky to have you at all.”

I paused for a long moment before finally drawing my hand back from his, reaching into my pocket to dig out something that didn’t belong to me anymore. A bracelet with the symbol for eternity on it. Something Erwin had given to me years ago, to show me that I belonged to him. But I didn’t anymore, and I knew that wasn’t my choice. I had decided it long ago, but it wasn’t true until yesterday. His heart didn’t belong to me anymore.

And neither did this.

“He gave me this back when I was still his,” I whispered, slowly slipping the bracelet around his wrist. “But I’m not anymore. And I know he doesn’t want me to be.”

I brushed my finger against the symbol before pulling back entirely. “You’re his eternity now.”

Although I was sure that wasn’t as appealing as it might have been before.

“Not that you ever have to forgive him, of course. But if you do, the bracelet’s yours.” I shrugged and folded my arms, leaning back in the chair. “Hell, it’s yours no matter what you want to do with it. It doesn’t have to be your future, but it’s still not going to be mine.”

I hesitated and turned my eyes to the clock. “Not that I have much of one now anyway.”
And I’d truly gotten to the point where I believed that. I didn’t expect Eren to react well to seeing me, but I didn’t expect him to push me away like that either. Even when he started to shut down, every word he said was just another goodbye. And I’d heard each one so clearly that he might as well have screamed them into my ears. Because I could still hear them even now.

He didn’t want me.

He didn’t need me.

I wasn’t worth fighting for.

I gritted my teeth together and gripped the sheet tight in my hands, my knuckles turning white as my arms began to shake. I could feel the tears hot in my eyes, and I cursed them for being there at all. I didn’t want to break like this. Not here, not where he could find me. But I couldn’t stop myself. Every time I heard his voice saying those words, my eyes blurred and the room disappeared around me.

Which meant I had to get out of here soon.

“I need you to wake up, kid,” I whispered into the soft silence of the room, my hand leaving the sheet to find his. “And I know that doesn’t sound easy, but it’s something you’re going to have to do. Because he needs you. So much more than he’s ever going to need me.”

I hated the truth that could be hiding in those words.

“I know you love him, Armin,” I continued, my stare drifting to the clock once more. As if lifting my eyes could keep the tears from falling. “And you deserve him. You really do. I know he’ll be happy with you.”

Because that was the only ending I could see. I was positive that Eren was aware of his feelings by now, and even if they didn’t end up together right away it would eventually lead to that. And I couldn’t bring myself to hate it. Even if it meant I lost Eren, I would do so knowing that he had found someone to be happy with. That he had found someone who could treat him better than I could ever hope to.

“So, I’m gonna leave him to you, kid.” I muttered the words I didn’t want to say and squeezed his hand tight. “But you have to give him the life that I couldn’t. You need to make him happy. Because I don’t want him to go through this shit again, understand? He doesn’t deserve it. He never did.”

My other hand slid to my pocket and lingered there, even though I knew I didn’t have the time anymore. But part of me was desperate to ignore that. Because I didn’t want what was coming next.

I wasn’t ready to let go.

But I knew I had to.

“I know you don’t owe me any favors. And I really don’t have the right to ask you for anything.” I drew it out of my pocket and held it tight in my grip, almost certain it’s print would remain there forever. “But I have to ask for one thing.”

I opened my hand and stared down at the key, knowing it might be my last chance to memorize the sight of it. Before I gave it up forever.

“This is my heart,” I whispered softly, my hand closing around it once more. “And it belongs to him. Every single beat. Because before him, this was the most important thing in my life. It was the only
thing I truly cared about.”

And that had been true, at one point.

“But it never really mattered until I saw it around his neck.” I continued, my grip tightening. “And that was when I knew, the only reason it was ever important to me was because it meant I cared. So deeply that it broke me to lose the person I cared about. It became my living reminder of a life I had. A life I was never going to get back. A happiness I would never have again. And I really believed that was true until him.”

I closed my eyes and let a sigh rush out of my lungs.

“But he changed everything, Armin.” I spoke softly. “He changed me. He gave me a reason to care about all of the shit in this world just because he was in it. He made it beautiful again. He became my color, my depth, my light.”

The moment he walked into that room, it changed my life.

“And I’m so fucking scared to go back into a world without it.” My voice cracked and I gritted my teeth against it. Against everything I didn’t want to admit. “Because I can remember how cold it was without him. Like it’s been stained onto my bones. And it terrifies me that I’m going to have to live there now. But I can’t see any other choice. Because as much as I want to hold onto him, I don’t want to put out his light. And I’m starting to think that’s the only thing I can do.”

And I wouldn’t destroy him because I was too weak to let go.

“He’s too damn perfect for someone like me.” I muttered, “So I know I have to give him up. But I want to give him everything first.”

I opened my hand up once more and stared down at the key that had once hung from his neck. The only place it belonged now.

“This is everything to me.” I whispered, reaching out to set the key down on Armin’s chest. “Everything that matters. And it’s really nothing without him.”

I took a deep breath and tried to ignore how it shook on the way in, but I knew I was already starting to break. So I pushed up from the chair and set my hand down on Armin’s, searching his expression as I spoke the words. “Wake up and make sure he gets that for me, kid. I’m counting on you to make him happy.”

I walked out of the room without another word, digging my phone out of my pocket to check for any messages from Petra. She had told me she would be taking Eren to breakfast, so I knew that I would be walking into an empty room. But it still surprised me when her face lit up on my screen.

“How did it go?” Her voice was more concerned than I expected it to be. It made me wonder how upset I must have sounded. “When I didn’t hear from you, I started to worry. When did—”

“What are you talking about?” I hit the button for the elevator, frowning at the memory behind it. “I just got out of there.”

“You what?” There was too much surprised there. “How long did you stay there, Levi? You said you were going to be there at ten.”
I felt dread rush through me as the doors opened, but the elevator was empty. “No, we said eleven.”

“No, we most definitely said ten,” she shot back. “You didn’t see him?”

“No, I didn’t.” I moved into the elevator and punched the button for the ground floor. “So you weren’t at breakfast with him?”

“No, we finished up in half an hour,” she replied, the worry in her voice now. “I thought you might run into him, but when I didn’t hear from you…”

“Well then maybe I got lucky.” I shrugged, even though she couldn’t see it. “Although it doesn’t really feel like luck.”

“How did it go?”

I hesitated and watched as the doors opened. But he wasn’t waiting on the other side.

“I’ll talk to you when I get to The Wall.” I replied, ending the call.

Where the hell was he?

Eren

The room spun as I slid down the door to the private bathroom, a trembling hand covering the lower half of my face. I could feel the hot tears slipping slowly over my fingers, but the rest of my body had long since gone numb. I couldn’t feel anything. Say anything. Think anything. I wasn’t even sure there was a thought in my head anymore, save for the sound of his words. Echoing through my skull as if they had no plan to leave. And I wasn’t even sure I wanted them to now. Not after what he’d said.

Not after what he’d done.

He had given me up. And somehow I’d managed to listen to it all from the other side of the door. All the while praying that he wouldn’t leave. That he would open the door to find me here rather than walking out of the room. Out of my life. And yet I let him do just that. And I wasn’t chasing after him now.

Even though it was the only thing I wanted to do.

If I could just get my body to move.

But it was stubbornly holding me to the floor. To a choice I’d already made. One I wasn’t sure I could change now.

Even though I was desperate to.

“I love you,” The words were sudden and I blurted them out against my hand, the sound choked on a sob as a river of tears came to join the rest that had already fallen. “I love you… I still love you…”

And slowly it became my mantra. A hopeless one whispered into the silence of this small little room.
Echoing over the walls as I let myself fall apart. My forehead pressed tight against my knees and my legs pulled to my chest. Praying that I could get them to run. And knowing all the while that I couldn’t. Because there was still something tying me to this room. To this choice I didn’t want anymore.

One that I couldn’t tear myself away from now.

And so it left me stuck here in my agony.

Whispering, begging, and pleading.

“Please don’t let me go.”
Chapter Notes

Yay! ^__^ It's Thursday! And I'm especially excited for that, because it's been a loooong week. But woo! Chapter update and it's almost the weekend!

Thank you all so much for the comments on the most recent chapter! And the past few chapters, because I know there are some new readers catching up. ^_^ It's always wonderful to read what you all have to say, so thank you for taking the time to write it!

A huge thank you to danchou-bitches and alois-trancy-pants for the wonderful art work they shared this week! ^_^ And thank you to the lovely cosplayers noticemecorporal, corporalnoticesyou, katcosplay97, whiskeylevi, levi-tch, and ask-the-lazycosplayer for the gifs and pictures they shared this week! If you haven't seen any of it yet, the art and cosplays can be found under the 'Intern Art' and 'Intern Cosplay' tabs on my blog, or on any of the blogs listed.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you would like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

“I don’t know what to do.”

I whispered the words into the empty silence and barely managed to hear them at all. Although I wasn’t sure whether or not they could even count as words. Not when they were nothing more than broken sounds twisting out of my throat in a gurgled mess that wouldn’t have made sense to anyone. If there had been anyone around to hear them. But as it was, I was almost alone in the room. With no one but my unconscious friend, who wouldn’t be able to hear me even if I did make sense.

So in the end it didn’t really matter what I sounded like.

It didn’t change a thing.

But I had gotten used to that by now. I was at the point where I was positive that nothing was ever going to change.

No matter how much I wanted it to.

And I did. So strongly that I could feel it down in my bones. Because I didn’t want this life anymore. Not as it was now. Not after what it had become. Not when I felt as if I were trapped in a hell that I would never be able to claw my way out of. Forced to watch my friend waste away in a bed as the love of my life walked out of the door. All the while convincing myself that it was entirely my fault.

Even if I knew that wasn’t true.

Although it was hard to see it any other way when I knew that the lie had started it all. Even though it hadn’t been something I wanted to keep, it was my choice to do so in the end. I’d lied to him,
despite every chance I had to come clean, and if it weren’t for that I knew I wouldn’t be here now. In this small little room, where everything seemed to go wrong. I wouldn’t have to endure any of it. Because they never would have kissed. Armin never would have seen it. And I would still have my best friend and my life.

If it weren’t for that fucking lie.

And maybe that was why it was so hard to let him go in the end. I couldn’t bring myself to blame him for all of it, even though I knew this would be easier if I could. Because it would take the blood off my hands and give me a reason to turn away from him. One that wouldn’t leave me as guilt-ridden as he was. But that would be a lie, wouldn’t it? None of us were blameless here.

I had lied and pushed him away. He had been stubborn and unforgiving. Erwin had been the manipulative bag of crap we all knew so well. And Armin, for the first time in his life, hadn’t bothered to think things through.

So here we were.

Trapped in a fate where none of us were happy. In a hell where we had all successfully lost the thing we wanted most. In a place where I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, brilliant and perfect, but too far and unrealistic to reach. And I couldn’t bring myself to try. I was stubbornly dragging us down, deeper and deeper into this black-hearted pit, because I refused to forgive him for something he never meant to do.

And I hated myself for it.

I wanted to forgive him.

I wanted to run after him right now and return to the life we had lived just days before.

But nothing was ever that simple. And I was quickly beginning to realize that it never would be.

I slipped out of the bathroom and shut the door behind me, leaning back against it and gripping the handle as if it could keep me from falling to the ground. I wasn’t sure I could trust my legs to hold me up anymore after they’d failed me so many times now. And I’d already promised myself that, if nothing else, I was going to stand. Because at this point it felt like the only form of control I had left.

Although that also started to fade away the second my eyes fell on the key resting against Armin’s chest.

The one Levi had left for me.

Something I thought I’d never see again, and wasn’t ready to see now.

Although it shouldn’t have surprised me this way. I’d heard every word through the barrier of the door, and in the depths of my heart I had known what he was doing. But somehow, in the panic of my mind, I had managed to convince myself that it wasn’t what I thought. That he had left something else behind, or perhaps nothing at all. Nothing but words that couldn’t change anything now. And it had helped. I’d kept myself sane with those thoughts.

But I was quickly losing it now.

I walked over to the bed on legs that trembled and reached out for the cool, hard metal that I knew better than I knew my own skin. My fingers closed around it and I gripped it tight against my palm, remembering it as if it had never left at all. But I knew it had. In the mess of everything, I’d lost it. In
the same moment that I lost him. And no matter how easy it was to pick up now, somehow I knew
the rest wouldn’t be the same.

Repairing the past was never as simple as returning a key.

Pain didn’t disappear like that. It didn’t return my friend to me. It didn’t reverse the things we’d done
or said.

And by now I was certain that nothing could.

Because if the words he’d whispered to Armin hadn’t been enough to sway me, then I knew nothing
would ever be. We’d said everything at this point, and there was no denying how he felt. How I felt.
And I knew beyond a doubt that if I ran to him now, everything would be forgiven. The lie I’d told
and the mess we’d made, all washed away as if it were nothing. And he was ready to take that step.

Even though I wasn’t.

And how could I be, when my friend was still in that bed? Whether Levi meant to do it or not, it
didn’t change the fact that Armin was still there, still leaving me. And until I saw those soft blue eyes
again, I knew I wouldn’t be able to move on from this point. And I didn’t want to. Because there
would be no happy future waiting for me if Armin never woke up. Never opened his eyes. Never
whispered my name as if it were his favorite thing to say.

“Eren.”

I could still hear him even now, standing here awake. And it really wasn’t fair. He’d already plagued
every single dream I had, but somehow I knew it wasn’t going to stop there. Although I wasn’t sure I
wanted it to. Not when I missed his voice this much.

“Eren?”

The soft, confused sound caught my attention quicker than anything and I found myself spinning
around to stare at him with wide eyes. And for the first time in a day, he was staring back. That
gentle blue I knew so well, filled with a quiet amusement that must have been due to my expression.
But I couldn’t bring myself to care, not when I was finally looking into those eyes. The same ones I
thought I would never see again, just seconds ago. And here they were now.

“Oh my god…” They must have been words on some planet, but they were nothing more than a
muffled mess behind my hand. Although I dropped it from my face just as quickly and they were still
unrecognizable and choked around his name the second time. “Oh my god, Armin!”

I couldn’t remember where I had been in the room before I met his eyes, but in the short second that
the words fell off my lips I found myself beside his bed and forgetting my promise to stand. Not that
it mattered anymore. Not when I could see his eyes. They were all I cared about now. And for the
first time in over a day, I could finally bring myself to relax.

“Hey, Eren,” Armin whispered the words and his voice cracked around them. But he didn’t seem to
care. “I missed you.”

“Water.” I blurted it out before I could even be sure of what I was saying. “And a nurse. You need a
nurse. You need a—”

Armin’s touch was so gentle, so weak that it made my skin crawl. Not that he had ever been the type
to be rough, but the lack of strength he had now was enough to turn my stomach. And yet it stopped
me just the same. I didn’t even need to see the pleading look in his eyes or hear the words that
followed soon after. The second his hand was on mine, I knew nothing could drag me out of my chair and away from his side.

“Please don’t leave me.” The words were so soft that I barely heard them at all, and he looked annoyed with himself when he cleared his throat to try again. “There’s a button for that, right? So we can push that instead. You don’t have to go. Please, Eren, I—”

“I’m not going anywhere,” I cut him off quickly, looking over to the desk beside the bed. There was a cup and a straw sitting there, but I had no idea what I was allowed to give him. And I wasn’t about to make anything worse by guessing.

So I hit the button instead.

“Promise?”

I tried to give him a look that would ask if he knew who he was talking to, but it all faded into a soft, reassuring smile. “Nothing could drag me away from you, Armin.”

My hand found his and closed around it, our fingers lacing together as if they were meant to fit that way. And somehow I knew he felt it, too. His entire body relaxed as if it had been tense since that moment, and he sagged into the bed with an expression that looked more at peace than when his eyes had been closed. And for a moment I was terrified that they would close again and remove the one thing I had wanted to see more than anything.

But I should have known that wouldn’t happen.

He knew me better than that.

And so he stayed there, silently holding my stare and barely blinking at all. As if I would disappear from his side if he did. As if he needed to see my eyes just as badly as I needed to see his. And maybe he did. Because unconscious or not, it didn’t mean that he hadn’t been aware over the past day. That he hadn’t been praying along with us. And seeing his eyes now, I had to wonder if Mikasa had actually been right in the end. Maybe he could hear us. Maybe he did.

And maybe he’d heard him, too.

“Armin, did you—”

“Well, look who’s awake!” A woman with black hair twisted into a tight bun came walking into the room, a wide grin on her face. She snagged Armin’s chart and gave it a quick scan, glancing once in my direction with a kind smile. “Have you been taking good care of him?”

I unconsciously squeezed Armin’s hand in response to the question and shrugged, glancing to the side. “He just woke up when I came in the room.”

“Well, maybe he was waiting for you.” She replied with the same smile, flipping over one of the papers before setting the clipboard beside the bed. “Either way, the important thing is that he’s awake. How are you feeling, Armin?”

Armin opened his mouth to attempt a word but it cracked on the way out and he gave up just as fast, touching his throat with an annoyed look in his eyes.

“Yea, that’s pretty normal.” She walked around to my side of the bed and grabbed the jug, filling the cup beside it with water. She slipped the straw into the cup and held it out to Armin, letting him get a few small sips in before she set it down on the table again. “Better?”
“A little,” he croaked, glancing at the water as if he were waiting for more.

She caught on quickly and lifted the cup again, glancing to me as she did so. “Could you give us a few minutes?”


“Well, I can promise you that it’s only going to take a few minutes,” she continued, smiling and nodding once to the hall. “You can wait right outside the door, and as soon as I’m done you can come back in. Is that alright?”

I had a feeling it wasn’t actually a question, but I nodded anyway. “I guess if it’s okay with Armin.”

Not that he had a choice, and I was sure he knew that, too. I didn’t even have to look up to know that he would agree. So I took the time to dig my phone out of my pocket instead, checking the screen quickly before holding it up for him to see. He caught my eye and I mouthed Mikasa’s name before ducking out into the hall, fighting every urge I had to lock myself in the room before the doctor could tell me otherwise.

But I knew that wouldn’t do any good at this point.

And I needed a moment for myself.

As soon as I was in the hall, I started to shake. As if my entire body were getting ready to break itself apart, joint by joint. And maybe it was, but I was grateful for it. Because as horrible as it sounded, it was the most exhilarating and liberating feeling I’d had in my entire life. To have every fear suddenly pulled away as if there was never any reason to worry at all. Like waking up from a bad nightmare, on the largest scale.

It was a level of relief I didn’t know how to deal with. Which was probably why I gave into it so easily. I let my body shake against the wall, my shoulders heaving as the tears started to fall free from my eyes, hot and happy and everything I never thought they could be. Because tears had never been a happy thing for me. They’d only come in moments of pure devastation, and suddenly now they were nothing but joy. Joy that I hadn’t lost him.

Joy that it wasn’t over.

Joy that I still had a chance.

But that wasn’t what she saw when she stepped off of the elevator.

“Eren!” Mikasa came running down the hall, the terror as strong in her voice as it was in her eyes. “Eren, what happened? Is Armin… is he…”

“He’s awake.”

The words were choked up in my throat, but she understood them the second they were off my tongue. And relief swept through her as quickly as it had gone through me, carrying her down to her knees as she held onto my hand.

“You jerk…” Mikasa’s voice broke and she gripped my hand tighter, her hold trembling. “I thought that he… that Armin… that you were crying because he…”

Each word cracked along with her voice until she finally gave into the tears, her shoulders shaking as she moved her arm to cover her eyes. And she stayed like that, even after I joined her on the floor.
and pulled her into my arms.

“You’re crying, too.” I pointed out, my words shaking just as hers had a moment ago. If not more so. The fact that she was crying at all was enough to break me further.

“Of course I am! I’m happy!” Mikasa shot back, the words strained between tears as she wiped at her face. She looked thoroughly annoyed with herself now, but I knew the relief was too strong for her to feel anything else. And it was. Because the moment she met my eyes she started to cry again, each tear caught between growing laughter.

And soon that was all I could hear. The sound of us laughing through our tears. Hysterical and happy. Blissfully relieved. Overwhelmed with a joy we never thought we would feel again. And yet it was the only thing I could feel now as I held her in my arms, my face buried against her shoulder as we gave into our emotions. Days, weeks, and months spent over anger, anguish, and pain. All building up until now. And suddenly none of it mattered. Not as along as we had him.

Because even if the rest of it went to shit now, it didn’t matter. Our one little prayer had been answered.

And our trio was still alive.

“I didn’t know that she snored.”

Armin eyed Mikasa with an amused look in his eyes, the tip of the straw balanced against his lips as he paused between sips. I glanced over at Mikasa, whose face was half hidden in Armin’s blanket, and listened for the faint snore rising from her. Although I already knew it was there. I’d spent enough time with her over the years to catch it one or two times before, but it had only happened once she exhausted herself past the point of no return.

And there was no denying that she had now.

“She hasn’t slept,” I murmured, shifting in the chair and leaning against Armin’s bed. We had each taken a side, but Mikasa had fallen asleep closer to his feet while I chose to remain awake and beside him. “Not since…”

I trailed off, not even sure I wanted to think about the words that would describe what had happened. I was more than happy to bury it all now if I could. Now that I knew he would be out in a few days with a clean bill of health. There was no sense in lingering on the past after that.

“But since I was stupid and almost got myself killed?” Armin asked, pausing to take another sip as he scanned my expression. I flinched and looked away, as I’m sure he knew I would. “I’m sorry.”

“You’re not the one who needs to apologize.” I shook my head and snagged my cup of coffee from the windowsill. It was one of the reasons I was still able to keep my eyes open, even hours after he had opened his.

“Yes, I am,” Armin whispered softly, drawing my attention back to him. But his eyes were fixed on the cup in his hand. “I almost got that family killed. If they hadn’t been lucky… if it hadn’t been worse for me, I…”
“They’re fine.” I filled the silence that lingered after his words and paused to take a sip from my cup. “And yea, you shouldn’t have been driving while you were that upset, but you weren’t thinking. And who could blame you? After what you saw—”

“I’m not even sure what I saw, Eren,” Armin interrupted me, turning his cup in his hand and keeping his stare on the straw. I had a feeling he wasn’t ready to look at me yet.

“What are you talking about?” I frowned and set my cup back on the windowsill before leaning against the bed. “You know what you saw, Armin. They kissed.”

The pain that crossed his face was more than I wanted to see anytime soon, but somehow I knew he wasn’t going to let me change the subject now. He had already tried for it a few times before, but every time I’d managed to find a distraction that pulled him away from the conversation. Of course, I’d had Mikasa to help me then and she’d caught onto what I was doing quickly enough. Not that it mattered now.

I was stuck and there was no way of getting out of it.

“I know they kissed,” Armin continued, his voice softer now. “I’m not saying that they didn’t, or that it’s not what I saw. It’s just that… I don’t think it meant that… that they…”

A sigh rushed out of his lungs and he pushed his cup of water onto the dresser, shaking his head. “I don’t know how to say it. It’s not coming out right.”

“I don’t think it will after you hit your head that hard.” I teased, resting my hand against his forehead before moving my fingers through his hair. “And besides, I don’t think there’s any good way to say it. What they did was wrong, and you’re here because of it. That’s really all there is to it.”

“No, it’s not.” Armin shook his head once more and then flopped back against his pillows, his brow furrowing. “It’s not that simple.”

“I told myself that, too.” I muttered, glancing to the window. “And trust me, I wanted to believe it. I don’t like the idea that he’d do anything to hurt me. And I hate being mad at him this way. But what other choice do I have?”

Armin fell silent and in that small moment I couldn’t help but hope that I’d managed to convince him, even when I couldn’t do the same for myself. And I had tried. Ever since he opened his eyes, I knew I had a choice to make. Just as I had promised Petra. Although at the time I had been hoping that it would be so much easier than this. That I would see his eyes and feel the anger rush out of me as if someone had flushed it from my body. But it didn’t happen that way.

And I knew it wouldn’t now.

Not when I had no idea how Armin felt about him. Because even if I wanted to go back to that life, none of it would matter if he didn’t approve. And I wasn’t about to lose my friend over something I wasn’t even certain I could return to now.

Even though I was sure it would kill me to stay away.

Which seemed to be the most likely outcome, considering it was almost impossible to stay on neutral ground. I was desperate to tell him that the kiss hadn’t meant anything to either of them, although I wasn’t sure whether or not that was true on Erwin’s part. Not that I could bring myself to care. I was content with the idea that Armin might hate him forever, just so long as it meant that Levi wasn’t despised as well. Although at this point I was worried that he might hate them both.
And I wasn’t even sure I could blame him if he did.

Not after what he saw. Anyone would have reacted that way if they had walked in on their lover kissing another...

“What would Levi have done if he walked in on us?”

My brow furrowed in confusion and I looked between Armin and the door, trying to decide why it would make a difference if Levi walked in now. “I think he’d be surprised to see you awake, if that’s what you mean.”

“No, not now.” Armin shook his head and touched his lips, his fingers lingering there for a moment. And suddenly I knew exactly what he meant.

“Oh.”

The word was soft and lacked any substance, any answer that he might have been looking for. But I wasn’t sure there was one to give. Because I honestly had no idea how Levi would’ve reacted if he had walked in on us then, or if he would have even cared if he did. We weren’t together at that point and we were apart by his choice, so I couldn’t see why it would have mattered one way or another to him. If anything, it would have surprised him. But to be fair, it had surprised me as well.

“Do you think he would have been angry?” Armin continued, filling the temporary silence with worried words. “Do you think he would have reacted like I did?”

“Fuck.”

I shook my head and pushed back in my seat, running a hand through my hair before fixing him with a stare that I knew was questioning his sanity. Because I was, now that I knew where he was going with this. I had thought that the question had been nothing more than a curiosity, rather than a comparison from them to us. And I refused to accept that there were any kind of similarities there, just as I had when Petra had brought it up this morning.

“You’re not actually trying to defend what they did, are you?” I asked even though I already knew the answer. “After what they did and what you’ve been through, do you really think that any of it was okay?”

“I’m not saying that it was.” He shrugged and stared down at the sheets, twisting them slightly in his hands. “But what we did wasn’t any different, Eren. Just because we weren’t caught in the act doesn’t mean that—”

“Caught in the act?” I cut him off, raising a brow. “Armin, all we did was kiss. And it’s not like it even meant anything.”

“That’s how Levi feels.”

I fell silent and he stared at me with a small smile, as if he was fully aware that he’d trapped me in his logic. And he’d done it so easily that I didn’t even realize what he was trying to do until the words were spinning through my head. And they made more sense than I wanted to admit, even in the quiet of my own mind. Because although I had allowed Armin to kiss me, and enjoyed it when he did, it wasn’t what I wanted. It wasn’t the man I loved. And because of that it had remained just a kiss and nothing more.

But I still couldn’t accept that it had meant so little to them.
“You know how they feel about each other, Armin. You know their past.” I shrugged once and folded my arms. “So it’s not the same.”

I wasn’t sure I wanted to believe that myself.

“But it is,” Armin whispered, his eyes pausing on the bracelet wrapped around his wrist. The one Levi had left behind. “I mean, yes. They care about each other. But so do we.”

“Yea, but it’s different,” I shot back, not even sure why I was arguing in the first place. If he was ready to forgive Levi, I was willing to take it. But at the same time, I didn’t want him to do it just for me. “You’re my best friend, Armin, and I love you. But you already know I don’t feel that way.”

“I do,” he agreed softly, a sad smile touching his lips. “And you know exactly how I feel about you. You knew that when I kissed you. But you let me do it anyway.”

“I…” The words caught in my throat and I forced myself to look away as a wave of guilt crashed over me. I hadn’t realized that what I was doing was unfair or that I had been getting his hopes up. At the time I had just been trying to help. “I thought it was what you needed.”

“I know.” He patted the top of my hand and he gave me a reassuring smile. It was almost enough to hide the pain underneath. “And I’m not upset. I was aware of how you felt about me before I did it. I wasn’t expecting to change that.”

I turned my hand over to hold his and laced our fingers back together, trying to ignore how badly I missed Levi’s touch. As warm and right as this felt, it was never going to be him. And Armin knew that. I could hear it in his voice, cracking over the edge of pain when he spoke.

“Armin…”

“Don’t.” He shook his head and squeezed my hand gently. “I’m not looking for your pity, Eren. I’m trying to make a point.”

I glanced back down at our hands, wondering how futile it all was. “You might be wasting your time with that.”

“I’m not.” There was so much certainty in his voice, as if he didn’t have a doubt in his mind. And knowing Armin, he didn’t. “You thought it was what I needed, right?”

I could already see where he was going with this. “Erwin didn’t need it, Armin.”

“It’s really easy to say that when you’re not him,” he whispered, watching my eyes. “When you’re not the one giving up something that you can’t have.”

There was a level of understanding in his voice that turned my stomach. I hated the idea that he was defending him at all.

“You don’t even know if that was why he kissed him,” I shot back, hating the words and knowing all the while that they would do nothing but hurt him. But I was sure that returning to Erwin would hurt him more. “Maybe he was trying to get him back. Maybe that’s what you saw.”

“That is what I thought I saw,” Armin admitted, his voice holding none of the pain that I expected to hear. “And at the time it made sense. But I’ve seen it in my head so many times now, Eren. And I know that’s not what happened between them. What I saw wasn’t a start. It was an end.”

I rolled my eyes and looked away, shaking my head slowly. “They already had their end. They
already had their goodbye. They didn’t need that one.”

“What, on stage?” Armin asked, drawing my attention back to him almost immediately. He had a bemused expression I didn’t want to understand. “Do you really think that some dance in front of everyone would count as a goodbye?”

“They said it did,” I shrugged. “So what else was I supposed to believe? Was I supposed to expect this?”

“No.” Armin hesitated and then looked down at the sheets. “Even I didn’t expect this. But I can’t really say that I’m surprised, looking back on it now.”

“And that makes it okay?” I raised a brow. “Armin, you almost died because of them.”

Armin sighed softly and gripped the sheets tight. “I almost died because I was stupid and decided to drive when I was upset.”

“Because of them!” I snapped, feeling a sudden wave of anger. I hated the idea that he would blame himself at all. “None of this would have happened if it weren’t for them. This is their fault, Armin. You can’t just deny that like it didn’t happen.”

“If it had been us,” Armin started, his gaze turning to meet mine. “If he had walked in on us kissing and reacted the same way, if he was in this bed instead of me, would you still feel this way?”

“I…” The words caught in my throat and I shook my head as if doing so could free them. “It’s not the same, Armin.”

“If he was the one in this bed, almost dying, and Petra and Hanji hated you for it,” Armin paused, searching my eyes. “Would you think that it would be fair?”

“No,” I blurted out, my stomach twisting at the thought. At the idea that he could be in this bed now. And I wouldn’t want them to hate me for it. I wouldn’t want to know that I had been the one to put him there, over something so stupid. Something that didn’t matter. Something he was never meant to see.

“Then why do you think it’s fair to do this to him?”

There was a tightness in my throat that wouldn’t go away no matter how many times I swallowed. “Because you’re the one in this bed.”

“But that’s not his fault, Eren.” Armin whispered, his hand finding mine with the strength I needed in that moment. “He didn’t put me in that car and force me to drive. He didn’t ask for me to walk in on them. He didn’t do any of it. And I know he never meant to hurt me.”

“How?” The word broke on my lips and I shook my head against the sound. “How can it be that easy for you to say that? To know that? After what they did to you, after what you’ve been through… how?”

“Three reasons,” he shrugged, offering me a small smile. “One, I’ve had a lot of time on my hands. And two… well, I know you don’t want to accept it, but I really do understand what’s going through Erwin’s head.”

He was right. I didn’t want to accept that at all. “I don’t see how you can understand him after he betrayed you like that.”
“Betrayed me?” Armin frowned and tilted his head. “Eren, I did the same thing to him. Even if it didn’t have as big a mess attached to it, it doesn’t make what I did any better. It doesn’t mean I wouldn’t have hurt him, too.”

“Yea, but you didn’t hurt him.” I shot back. “That’s the difference.”

“That’s only because he didn’t see us.” Armin countered. “And to be honest, what I did was worse in the end. Because he was never planning to give me up. I could see that in his eyes when I walked in there, even if I didn’t want to admit that then.”

“How does that make you worse?”

“Because I would have given him up in a second for you.” Armin whispered, a small flush touching his cheeks as he turned his eyes away from mine. “If you had wanted more than that kiss, I would have…”

“Well, damn,” I teased, grinning widely at the sight of his blush. It was good to see color in his cheeks again, and suddenly I wanted to see more. “Is that where it was going? Looks like I missed my chance.”

Armin huffed softly and rolled his eyes, looking back at me with a faint smile. “Eren, stop.”

“Fine, fine,” I shrugged and leaned back in my seat, the playfulness still in my eyes. “Although we’re both single men now.”

“Not for long.”

The grin slid off my face immediately. “Don’t tell me you’re going to take him back like nothing happened.”

“No,” Armin shook his head, staring down at his wrist. “If he actually wants me back, then he’s going to have to work for it. And I’m not going to make it easy on him, not this time. But I don’t think it matters, any way.”

“Why not?”

“If he still wanted me…” Armin’s brow furrowed and pain filled his features once more. “He would have come to see me, wouldn’t he?”

I tried to ignore how much guilt I felt right now, but it was inescapable. “I told him not to.”

Armin’s expression brightened slightly, and I hated the reason for it. “He asked about me?”

I rolled my eyes and waved a hand. “How do you think you got this room?”

“Levi,” Armin admitted with a shrug. “Although I guess that makes sense, too.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he had a hand in it,” I muttered, already knowing that Levi had probably taken care of everything at this point. Although I was willing to bet it was under Erwin’s encouragement.

“He’s a good man.”

The words had my attention fixed on Armin, but his eyes weren’t on mine. He was staring down at the bracelet hooked around his wrist, his fingers brushing slowly over the symbol for eternity. His expression was soft and content, more so than I had seen it at any point today. And I knew now that
it wasn’t because of me. It was because of Levi.

“Why would you say that?”

“The third reason.” He murmured softly, his fingers lingering on his wrist. “Mikasa was right.”

My brow furrowed. “About what?”

“I could hear you.” Armin whispered. “Every word.”

Which meant I hadn’t been the only one listening to Levi earlier.

“Did you…” I hesitated, certain I already had my answer. But I couldn’t stop myself from asking anyway. “When he was here earlier, did you…”

“Every single word.” Armin paused and met my eyes, searching them with a million emotions hiding in his own. “He really loves you, Eren.”

It was like being shot through the heart, but after so many days of pain it was almost nothing at this point. Still, the dull sting of it had me rubbing at my chest and looking at the window. As if doing so could hide my eyes and the truth from him. But I was sure he knew anyway.

“I know he does.” I muttered, my eyes still trained on the night outside. “But I don’t see how that can make any difference now.”

“It makes every difference, Eren.” Armin’s hand closed around mine and I fought the urge to look at him. “If you’re willing to let it.”

He actually made it sound easy. As if I could turn away from the nightmarish hours that had become my life and wipe away a past that was becoming insurmountable. And in truth, I wanted to. I wanted to forgive Levi for the mistakes he’d made and hide away in his arms as if none of it had ever happened. And I had a feeling it would be almost too easy to slip back into that life, if I weren’t terrified that Armin would hate me for doing so.

And I was. Despite every kind word that came out of his mouth, I kept waiting for the truth to follow along with it. Because I couldn’t imagine how he would be able to forgive them both so easily, as if it were nothing. And part of me was certain that he was doing it for me; selflessly urging me towards a man that he knew I wanted. Regardless of how he felt about him. Regardless of what he’d done.

And I was terrified to have that secret between us.

“I know you were listening when he was in the room.” Armin’s soft voice filled the silence and I found my eyes back on him once more. “I know you heard what he said.”

“How?”

“Because I was starting to wake up when you came into the room.” He gave a sheepish smile and a small shrug, watching my eyes as if he could read every word I wasn’t saying. “I heard you slip out of the bathroom and… I know you heard him.”

And there was no denying it now. So I didn’t even try. “I did.”

Armin hesitated for a long moment after that, his eyes lingering on our hands as if he were carefully choosing his next words. “Then you know how deeply he cares about you.”

“I already knew.” I shrugged as if it didn’t matter. Even though Levi’s words had meant the world.
“I didn’t need to hear it.”

“Bullshit.” The word shot out of Armin’s mouth so quickly that it surprised him as well, and he covered his mouth with his hand as a flush stained his cheeks. He blinked for a moment and then lowered his hand and looked down, shrugging. “I’m sorry, but it is. And you need to hear it, Eren. Because I know you didn’t have a clue that he cared about you like that. Not that much. Even I didn’t know.”

“What does it matter now?” I muttered, trying not to let the words get under my skin. “It didn’t stop him from hurting me, so obviously he didn’t care that much.”

“You know that’s not true.”

“I know you’re in this bed because of him.”

Armin groaned and flopped back against his pillows, holding a hand over his eyes and sighing. “Would you stop saying that, Eren? He’s not the reason I’m here. I am. So stop trying to blame everyone else for my stupid mistake. I was the one who got into that car and decided to drive. I was the one who used my phone. I was the one who messed up. Not them, not him. Me.”

“But you wouldn’t have if—”

“Stop.” Armin cut me off; pulling his hand off his head to point in my direction and fixing me with the sternest stare his face was capable of. “I don’t want to hear it anymore. I don’t blame them for this, so you shouldn’t either.”

I frowned, trying to fight back any surprise I felt. I had expected Armin to be angry with him, and yet he didn’t seem to blame him at all. Even after I had tried to maintain neutral ground. Even after I gave Armin a chance to express his true feelings. And I was starting to realize now that maybe he had. Maybe he was. Maybe he didn’t blame Levi after all.

And suddenly the small flame of hope left flickering in me was starting to grow.

“So you don’t hate him?”

“No, I don’t hate him.” Armin sighed, shaking his head. “How could I ever hate someone that loves you that much? Who’s willing to give you up because they think it’s what you want, even if it kills them?”

This time the pain hurt enough to feel, and I knew I didn’t have time to hide it from my face before he saw it.

“I don’t think it’s hurting him as much as you think it is.”

“And I think you’ve lost your mind.” Armin countered, staring at me as if he truly thought just that. “That or we didn’t hear the same thing. Because he was falling apart, Eren. And it had everything to do with you.”

And I knew that was true, deep down in my bones. But I hadn’t allowed myself to admit it at the time, and that had been the only thing that kept me in the room. Otherwise I would have been out there with him. Taking that key into my hand. Forgetting the walls I had placed between us.

“I know you’re falling apart, too.” Armin whispered, breaking the silence. “And I’m sick of seeing it. I don’t want to watch you break apart again. Not when you’ve finally found your life. Because we’ve already been through that, Eren. For three months. You were broken after she left, to the point
that I thought you were never going to be the same again.”

And I had been. So much that I’d actually lost hope of ever feeling the way that I had before she left. I couldn’t even remember what happiness was back then, and I had begun to accept that. I’d grown to know misery and nothing else, and no one was able to drag me away from it. Until Levi.

“But then you found him, and everything changed.” Armin continued, searching my eyes as if he could see the thoughts hiding behind them. “You were happy again, more than I’ve ever seen you. More than I ever thought you could be. You found a life you wanted to live, and I know you’re not the only one who did.”

Each word tore away at the thin wall I had placed around my heart, breaking away something that had barely been there to begin with. Because keeping him out was too hard. Impossible, even. It was like trying to deny the fact that I wanted a life at all. That I wanted happiness. Adventure. Laughter. Joy. All of the things that I’d found in him.

“You’re his light, Eren.” Armin’s hand squeezed mine and pulled my eyes back to him. “And I know he’s yours. Don’t just give that up.”

“I don’t want to.” I choked out the words and felt two hot rivers fall from my eyes. As if there was no way of holding them back anymore, and I knew there wasn’t. The emotions were overwhelming now, pulling free of the thin barrier I had placed around my heart. But part of me was terrified it was all coming too late. That I had hurt him too much. That I had waited too long. That this goodbye had truly been his last. “I don’t want to lose him, Armin. But I’m scared. I’m scared it’s too late now. I’m scared I don’t have a chance.”

“Eren,” Armin’s voice was as soft and warm as his eyes, “Open your hand.”

I stared at him with a look of confusion and uncurled my fingers, the key resting in the palm of my left hand. Where it had been since I picked it up, the print so deep in my skin that I was certain it would be with me forever now.

“That wouldn’t be there if you didn’t have a chance.” Armin pointed at it, searching my eyes. “He’s forgiven you, Eren. And now you need to go forgive him.”

And I wanted to, more than I wanted anything in the world. But at the same time I knew I couldn’t leave Armin. Not now that I finally had him back.

“I don’t want to leave you here.”

Armin raised a brow and regarded me with an amused expression, a small smile on his lips. “I’ll wake Mikasa up and have her kick your butt out of here if I have to.”

Now it was my turn to smile. “You’re assuming she’s gonna side with you.”

“Oh, I know she will.” Armin shrugged and folded his arms, looking a little too confident. “She likes Levi, even if she doesn’t want to admit it. Those two bicker like siblings. And I’m sure she’s just been waiting for you to get him back.”

The smile slipped off my face and confusion came to replace it. “I thought she was mad at him.”

Although she hadn’t been as mad as I expected her to be. Even when she first heard the news, she had been unwilling to believe that Levi would purposely do anything to hurt me. And looking back on it now, she had been right.
“She probably is. But sometimes we get mad about the people we care about.” Armin drew my attention back to him and fixed me with a small smile, angling his head to the side. “Now go get him back, Eren.”

I was already moving out of the chair, despite the words coming out of my mouth. Because in the end, I knew there was no arguing with Armin.

“You’re really going to make me leave?”

He nodded once to the door and kept his arms folded, as if somehow that added to his determination to get me out of here. And maybe it did, but when it came from him I knew I could never find it intimidating.

But I was willing to listen just the same.

“Visiting hours are almost over, and you’re going to have to go anyway.” He shrugged, the smile still on his lips. “So you might as well go somewhere that matters.”

And there was only one place I wanted to be.

“Fine.” I agreed, acting reluctant as I slipped the key into my pocket. Although I couldn’t have been more anxious if I tried. I knew I would have to leave soon anyway, and if it meant I would be going to Levi’s side then I couldn’t get there fast enough. “But I’m going to be back as soon as the doors open.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

Armin stared up at me from the bed that didn’t seem quite as large as it had when his eyes were closed. And I realized then that I never wanted to see them closed again. Not after a day of suffering through it.

“You better have your eyes open when I get here.” I whispered and bent down to press my forehead against his, drinking in the blue that I never bothered to memorize before. “I almost forgot how beautiful they are.”

The last part was for him, and I knew it was a tease. But I couldn’t bring myself to feel even an ounce of guilt when the flush colored his cheeks with more life than I had seen in days.

“Eren, you’re such an ass.”

I grinned and wagged my eyebrows at him before pulling away, saying the words as I walked to the door. “You know I love you.”

Armin rolled his eyes and leaned back against his pillows, looking once to Mikasa and then to me. A soft smile touched his lips and he angled his head to the side.

“And you know I love you more.”
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

YAY! It's Thursday! ^__^ Hopefully you've all had a wonderful week. I know I'm definitely looking forward to the weekend. XD

Thank you all so much for the comments you left on the last chapter! ^_^ As always, it's great to see what you thought about the update. Good or bad, because hey... everyone differs. XD But hopefully you all enjoy this update! I know I've been excited for this one.

There is a song in this chapter, and it is a song that many of you might have heard before. There are many different arrangements for the song, and I have a very specific one that I used for this particular song. It is...

A la claire fontaine by Hart Rouge

Their pacing and overall flow of the song is how I pictured it as I was writing. So if any of you were curious as to how it sounded, there it is! ^_^

A big thank you to aaapple-jax for the hilarious art piece they shared this week! If you haven't already seen it, definitely check it out! XD It was a much needed smile for me. And thank you to the cosplayers noticemecorporal, corporalnoticesyou, and katscosplay97 for sharing gifs and pictures this week! ^_^ You can find the art and cosplays on my blog, or you can go to the blogs listed.

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr, then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you'd like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

Levi

Letting go is the hardest thing that anyone will ever have to do.

Although I’m sure that there are more than a handful of people who would disagree with me. Many, in fact, who truly believe that fighting takes more energy, strength, and determination than giving up ever could. And up until a few hours ago, I was one of them. Fighting had always been the one choice I’d made and admired through every challenge. And although the battles varied, my will to persevere had remained the same. Because throwing in the towel had always seemed like the easiest option; the one that people chose when they lacked the courage to try.

I’d never really known just how difficult it was to give in.
To let go of something, in the truest sense of the word, is a near-impossible thing to do. And I wasn’t even sure I’d managed to do it at this point, despite the fact that I’d left my heart behind in that room. Because every inch of me was still aching with the raw, uncontrollable desire to run back to that hospital and scour the floors until I managed to find him once more. And I knew that with every step I took, I was only seconds away from turning back again.

From fighting again.

Because that was the only thing I wanted to do now, and the one thing I knew I couldn’t. As much as I hated to admit it, the kid didn’t need to see my face anymore. Even more than that, he didn’t want to. That became clear the instant he stared at me with those eyes; the same eyes I’d had when my father told me my mother was dead. I’d hated him in that moment, the same way that I was sure that Eren hated me now. Only I couldn’t say that his anger wasn’t justified. I knew I deserved the hatred in his eyes.

Which was why I had decided to stay away, despite Hanji and Petra’s many attempts to convince me otherwise. Because what would be the point in the end? He’d made it clear that he didn’t want me near him, that I wasn’t worth fighting for, and I had to respect that. It was what I would have wanted myself had the situations been reversed, and I wasn’t about to deny him the things I would have expected in return. No matter how much it killed me to give them to him.

And it did.

After walking out of Armin’s room, I’d quickly reached a point where I was certain I couldn’t feel anything anymore. A hollow emptiness started to eat at the remains in my chest and threatened to consume me whole. And I wanted it to at the time, if it meant that the pain would stop. But it didn’t. Somehow it had gotten worse, and hours later I found myself trapped between feeling nothing and everything all at once. And there was nothing I could do to change it. Being away from him willingly was a pain I’d learned how to control, but knowing I couldn’t go to him now was something different. Unfamiliar.

And it was driving me fucking insane.

To the point where I was beginning to calculate the amount of time it would take me to get back to his side.

So I locked the door instead.

As if doing so could actually stop me from going anywhere at all.

I walked past the kitchen on my way down the hall, the entire room nothing more than a shiny, sterile display. Not that it wasn’t normally spotless, but over the past day I had managed to clean it into a cold, lifeless place to be. And the same went for the rest of the apartment. Every room had been scrubbed clean of memories, warmth, and anything that had ever made this place somewhere I wanted to be. Just as it had been before he’d stepped into it.

Before he made it into a place that I wanted to call home.

Everything had been interchangeable until that day. I could have walked into any clean apartment and it would have been the same to me. Save for one room, of course. And right now that was the only place I wanted to be. If for no other reason than to fill the apartment with something other than the emptiness that was surrounding me now.

The silence echoing off the walls was deafening.
And it made it far too easy to remember the sound of his voice.

My hand brushed along the length of the piano, tracing its smooth surface with two fingers and coming back without a speck of dust. Although that was to be expected, considering I had cleaned this room earlier. I had been determined to take my mind as far from the situation as I could, and cleaning had always been an easy outlet. A way to reset everything back to a familiar, cold state. But no matter how many times I scrubbed the inches of this room, I knew the memories would always remain here. Even the ones of him.

And somehow those were more painful than the rest.

Because despite the fact that my mother’s death had hollowed me out more than anything ever could, I’d learned to understand that she was gone. Which was as close to acceptance as I would ever get, without crossing that line. I knew I would always blame the angels for taking her from me. But at the same time I understood far too well that there was nothing I could do to change that now. It was the one light I would never get back.

And I was quickly losing the only one I had left.

The only one that mattered now.

And maybe that was why this room was so painful to be in. The memories of him clung desperately to the walls as if they had no plans to leave. It was all as stained with him as I was, marked with happy memories I would never be able to forget. And I knew I didn’t want to. Not when they were the only pieces of him I had left. Fragments of a life I’d been too careless to deserve.

One I wasn’t sure I could earn back now.

All because I’d been too concerned with a lie that shouldn’t have mattered nearly as much as it did. Although that wasn’t to say that he wasn’t wrong, too. We’d both had a hand in fucking everything up, and I wasn’t the only one to blame for that. I’d given the kid plenty of chances, begged him even, but none of it had been enough to pull the truth past his lips. And part of me wanted to hate him for it, because this could have all been so simple, so avoidable, if he would have just been honest with me. Not that it mattered now. I couldn’t bring myself to give two shits about the lie when it caused this much pain to the both of us.

When it meant I was losing him.

I would forgive him for it all if it meant seeing him again, although I was sure he already knew that at this point. There was no doubt in my mind that he’d found the key by now, and that he knew exactly what it meant. What I was trying to say by giving it to him.

I belonged to him.

Even if he didn’t belong to me.

I took a seat at the piano and moved my fingers along the smooth keys that were somehow familiar and distant all at once. It’d been months since I’d played anything and, save for cleaning, I hadn’t touched the keys since. But I needed to now. Just as I always had when I was struggling with something that seemed insurmountable. Not that it improved anything, but it was a release nonetheless. One that my mother had taught me so many years ago.

Because even as I child, I had a habit for bottling things up tight. Only I’d managed to hide it behind a smile back then, and no one but her seemed to know. And she’d accepted it; so easily that I’d always wondered if she’d survived by doing the same thing. But it was always hard to tell when she
smiled at me the way she did. As if she were truly happy. The only time I had to wonder was when she looked at anyone else without the same light in her eyes. And when she did, I knew.

We kept our real smiles for each other.

She’d started to give me lessons when I was only five, teaching me every song I could learn and softly singing and playing the ones that I couldn’t. And those had quickly become my favorites. She looked so alive, so happy when she played. As if every emotion were capable of flowing out of her just by touching the keys. And I’d learned to do that for myself in time, playing the songs that reflected my insides better than my words ever could.

I could live in those songs.

And those who didn’t understand would think it was just a pretty tune.

I pressed down on the keys and listened for a quiet moment as their notes vibrated through the air. And then my fingers began to dance. As if it were second nature to fill the room with a song I had only played twice in my life and heard once before that. But it had been the memory behind it that stuck with me now. The reason I’d been so desperate to learn it above all the rest.

À la claire fontaine m’en allant promener…
J’ai trouvé l’eau si belle que je m’y suis baigné.
Il y’a longtemps que je t’aime… jamais je ne t’oublierai.

The words rolled off of my tongue as my fingers met the keys, weaving both sounds into a song I knew only by memory. One I didn’t truly understand until now. I’d only wanted to learn it at the time because my mother’s voice had always cracked and ached with every syllable. And I’d wanted to feel that same emotion, but I hadn’t been able to put it into the song the way that she did. It had always been lacking, and after playing it twice I had given up completely.

It never sounded like hers. But it couldn’t back then.

Because I had never lost someone in the way that she had until today.

Sous les feuilles d’un chêne, je me suis fait sécher.
Sur la plus haute branche, un rossignol chantait.
Il y’a longtemps que je t’aime… jamais je ne t’oublierai.

And I was sure that she had lost someone now, even if I hadn’t known it then. She’d never spoke a word of another love in her life, but as the words moved through me in the same way that they’d gone through her, I knew. She’d lost someone. Someone who had mattered more to her than my father ever could. Someone who would have changed everything for us, if she been able to hold onto them. And although she loved me and the life she had, I knew now that she had always ached for the one she’d lost.

The one she could never have.

And I knew exactly how she felt now.

Chante, rossignol, chante, toi qui as le cœur gai.
Tu as le cœur à rire… moi je l’ai à pleurer.
Il y’a longtemps que je t’aime… jamais je ne t’oublierai.

The one thing I had hoped for as a child was to understand this song and the way it made her feel, and now it was the only thing I didn’t want. No matter how close it brought me to her, it wasn’t
worth this pain. And yet the pain was all I could feel, surrounding me now in more than just words. Because it had always been there, hiding in the soft, gentle sound of her voice. But in those moments it had never been mine.

Not as it was now.

And now it was the only thing that I could feel. Twisting around with the emptiness that seemed determined to stay and mingling with the one thought that wanted to consume me.

This was my fault.

J’ai perdu mon ami sans l’avoir mérité,
Pour un bouton de rose que je lui refusai…
Il y’a longtemps que je t’aime… jamais je ne t’oublierai.

I’d allowed my dark thoughts to tear apart everything that mattered to me. I’d told myself, convinced myself, that I didn’t deserve him or the life we’d had together. I’d truly believed that he would have been happier with someone who wouldn’t slowly destroy him in the ways that I was sure I would. When really I would have done nothing but love him. Because pain was something I couldn’t bear to see in his eyes, and something I would never willingly or intentionally put there.

No matter how much I tried to convince myself otherwise.

And I knew that now, even if it didn’t help.

I had hurt him in the end, and it was mostly because I’d been unwilling to trust myself. I’d stayed away from him when I should have done the opposite.

And now I had no choice but to do the one thing I didn’t want to.

I had to let him go.

Je voudrais que la rose fût encore au rosier,
Et mon ami encore à m’aimer.
Il y’a longtemps que je t’aime… jamais je ne t’oublierai.

The words tore through my mind as the last line of the song drew out of my throat in a sound that was hauntingly broken. And I knew I was breaking with it. Because I didn’t want to let him go. I didn’t want to learn how to survive without him now that I’d had him in my life. It had been different before, when the darkness was familiar and all I’d known. But when he stepped into my life, he brought in a light that showed me the world I was living in. And at first it was confusing. And I wasn’t sure I wanted it, because I’d gotten used to feeling around for things in the dark.

But everything was so much easier once I could see. I started to love life in a world I was sure I hated.

And I didn’t want to lose that now. I was scared I wouldn’t be able to find anything once the darkness returned. I’d never bothered to remember where everything was, because I’d gotten so used to living in a world where I didn’t need to worry about things like that anymore.

But I had to worry about it now.

Because I had lost him.

And the light was going out.
Eren

I would never know how I’d managed to stay away from him for so long.

The instant I walked back into his apartment, it was as if I’d never left at all. The entire place was the same pristine clean that I’d come to love and appreciate over the past few months. And part of that was because his expectation for cleanliness had never really applied to me. Although that wasn’t to say that I could run across his carpet caked in mud, but I knew he wouldn’t care if I hadn’t used a coaster or left crumbs behind on the table.

Not that he wouldn’t mention it in that scolding tone of his. But the affection in his eyes was always there when he did.

I was a brat for leaving a mess behind, and I’d felt loved for doing so.

And looking around now, I could understand why. The entire apartment was clean to the point of being sterilized, as if no one had ever lived here. As if we had never lived here. And although it had been a while since I’d seen the Trost apartment, I knew this cleaning was recent. Today even. And it reminded me of the first time I’d walked through those doors, back when his apartment had been as cold and distant as he was. Before we’d breathed life into it.

Before it became a home.

And to see that home forced back into its former shell shattered my heart faster than his tears ever could. Because I knew what it meant. Levi had given up, and he truly believed that I wasn’t coming for him now. That I never would. And he was scrubbing away the memories from every surface as if it could actually make them disappear with me. But I was sure that wouldn’t happen for him, because it hadn’t happened for me. Not even when I tried. Not even for a second.

There was no getting rid of us.

And I didn’t want to anymore.

But I was starting to worry that I had taken too long to realize that. And even though the key hanging from my neck told me otherwise, I was terrified that I would go to him only to find out that he’d already moved on. That I’d been scrubbed from his memories like the dirt on the shelves. And as ridiculous as that idea was, as ridiculous as it sounded, it was almost enough to have me inching back towards the door.

But I was too fucking stubborn for that now.

And I wasn’t going to lose him again.

I slipped his apartment key into my pocket and adjusted the collar around my throat; both items I’d picked up before coming here. Because I knew I couldn’t get in without one, and I knew I couldn’t stay without the other. Not that he wouldn’t let me, but it didn’t seem right to say that I was his without the proof of it tied around my neck.
And I’d missed the weight of it there.

“Levi?”

His name left my lips, but my voice didn’t travel far past that. Although that was mostly because my eyes had stilled on the door to his mother’s room and the light streaming out of it. And then I heard the music. The soft sound of a piano playing a melody that I could have sworn I’d heard at one point in my life, although I couldn’t hope to place it now. Not when I could hear his voice, breaking over unfamiliar words and lyrics spoken in a foreign tongue.

I couldn’t focus on anything but that. Not even the movements of my own body as it carried me towards the door, leaving me to lean against it as I watched the only man I’d ever loved fall apart in the music that was weaving around us both. A hauntingly beautiful melody that held every bit of the agony in the world. And I knew he was feeling all of it now. Even without the crack in his voice or the pain in his eyes, I knew. Because I could feel it, too. Laced into every word.

And even though I didn’t speak the language, the meaning was all too clear.

He thought he had lost it all.

When he didn’t lose a thing.

“Il y’a longtemps que je t’aime…” Levi’s voice swelled with the words and his eyes closed, his face becoming nothing more than a mask of pain. One I was desperate to change. But I couldn’t get myself to move. I was stuck in place, trapped by the broken lyrics as they carried the song to its end. And in that moment, I knew my heart was breaking with his. “Jamais je ne t’oublierai.”

His fingers stilled on the keys, but their vibrations continued to carry through the room moments after. Etching into me with a sound I knew I would never be able to forget. And I didn’t want to. Because despite all of the pain, there was beauty in it, too. And that beauty made it enough to remember. It made it more than just a song. It made it us.

And we were worth holding onto.

I let a sigh rush out of my lungs and leaned further into the door, forgetting where I was and why my presence would be a surprise to anyone.

But it was to him.

And I realized that the instant his eyes snapped up to meet mine and widened as if a ghost had just stepped into the room. And to him, it probably had. Because I was sure, after everything that happened, I’d become a ghost to him now. Something he never expected to see again.

And yet here I was.

“Eren.” My name left his lips as broken as the song that came before it, and any response I had vanished quickly with the sound. But after a beat of silence, he tried again. “What are you doing here?”

And suddenly the words were found.

“I forgot how to live without you.” I whispered softly, knowing somehow it would carry across the room to him anyway. And it did. I could see it in his eyes. A light I hadn’t seen before. And I could feel myself smiling at the sight. “And then I realized I didn’t want to remember how.”
Levi swallowed convulsively and his hands pressed against the piano as he stood. And for a moment I was sure he would close the distance between us, a distance we had suffered with for far too long. A distance I wanted to destroy now. But he didn’t move. He didn’t even try. And save for the small step he took away from the piano, the space between us remained.

As if he wanted it there.

And I couldn’t understand why.

Because the love in his eyes didn’t match his movements. And it was the only thing I could see when his gaze lowered and lingered on the collar and key wrapped around my neck.

“You found the key.”

It was such a simple statement, but the pain in his words made it so much more than that. And my heart cracked further at the sound.

“You left it there for me.” I touched the key as if I had to remind myself that it was there at all. And that wasn’t far from the truth. Even hours later, I was still having trouble believing that he had given it back to me.

“I did.” Levi’s gaze remained on my neck as if he were tracing the collar with his eyes. And for the briefest moment I could have sworn I saw hopefulness hiding in them, but it was gone too quickly to tell. As if he couldn’t bring himself to believe in it. “I wanted you to have—”

“Your heart.”

I cut him off quickly with the only words I had to clear his doubts. And I knew they would, even before the surprise filled his eyes. Because there was no way I should have known what the key meant to him. Not unless I’d been in the room, too. And if I had, it changed everything.

Both for me, and for him.

“How did you…” Levi trailed off as he searched my expression, suspicion entering his own. “Why would you say those words, Eren?”

“Because I heard you say them first,” I answered simply, watching his eyes as carefully as I could from this distance. I hated this distance. “That was what you said, right? It was hard to hear you through the door, but…”

“What door?” Levi shook his head and stepped closer, and I felt a small victory inside. “Eren, I didn’t see you when I left. Not in the halls. Not in the elevator. Where the hell were you?”

“In the bathroom.”

“Shit.”

“Well, no,” I muttered, not even trying to keep the teasing smile off my face. “I wasn’t doing that. I went in there to piss, and then—”

“You heard everything?” Levi cut me off, holding my stare with no humor in his. Even more than that, he looked worried. And that didn’t make any sense.

“Every word.”

A sigh rushed out of his lungs and he pushed a hand through his hair before turning towards the
balcony and the nighttime skyline beyond it. And he stood like that for a long moment, his expression pained and conflicted in a way I never expected it to be. As if he had done something horribly wrong, and was blaming himself for it now. But I couldn’t imagine why.

“I didn’t know you were there.” He whispered at last, breaking the silence and leaning into the piano. His eyes turned back to me. “I swear, kid. I had no idea. I just went in there to talk to him. To say my last words and leave the key. I never thought that you would be in the room. I didn’t know you would hear any of it. I didn’t…”

And suddenly it all made sense. He had been worried that I would think his words were nothing more than an act to get me back. Something used to sway me. When really the possibility of it had never even crossed my mind.

And it wouldn’t have.

Because that wasn’t the type of person that he was.

“I know you didn’t, Levi. Trust me, I never thought for a moment that you did.” I spoke the words as I took a step closer, determined to close the space that remained between us even if he didn’t want to. “I know you didn’t say any of those things to convince me, even though I know you said everything for me. And I know I was never meant to hear any of it. I shouldn’t have.”

And I’d known that at the time, when I was stuck in that small little room. The words weren’t meant for my ears, even though every single one of them had been spoken for me. And whether or not he wanted me to hear them, I would have never changed the fact that I had. Because those words, unfiltered and honest, had made every difference at this point.

“But I’m glad I did.” I continued, searching his gaze. “I’m here now because I did.”

And suddenly I could see the hope in his eyes once more, dim and yet unmistakable. Like a small flame that was beginning to grow. And I wanted it to. I wanted him to try. I wanted him to fight.

Anything that would take this distance from us.

“I honestly can’t believe that you’re here at all, kid.” Levi whispered, filling the silence. And I could have sworn I saw him move. Just a step and nothing more, but he was closer now. “I didn’t think I was ever going to see you again.”

“Neither did I. To be honest, I didn’t even plan on coming.” I admitted with a shrug, a small smile touching the corners of my mouth. “But Armin can be a very convincing person when he wants to be. And he has a knack for helping people realize when they’re being an ass.”

“What do you mean that Armin…” Levi trailed off as if he couldn’t believe the words himself. And I realized then that he didn’t know. He hadn’t heard. “Is he awake?”

“Yea.” The word was so simple, but it was enough to make his entire body go weak. I could tell by the way he gripped the piano for support, and I knew all too well how it felt. Because I had been there, too. The rush of relief was overwhelming, and I had a feeling that was an understatement.

“When?”

“Just after you left, actually.” I paused, watching his arms tremble and wanting nothing more than to go to him. But I didn’t know if I could. I didn’t know if I was wanted. Not when he was keeping this space between us. “I walked into the room and picked up the key. I was looking out of the window and then… he started talking. He said my name.”
“Oh, thank god,” Levi breathed the words and shut his eyes, gripping the piano tighter as if he would fall if he didn’t. “I thought that… I was worried he would never…”

The words broke off twice and he looked annoyed with himself for a moment. And then a sigh rushed out of his lungs and he angled his head back, staring up at the ceiling. “Damn it, the kid must have been listening after all.”

“He was,” I whispered, still fighting the urge to cross the room to him. “He heard everything.”

Levi nodded slowly, a sadness in his eyes. “Does he hate me now?”

“No,” I paused and shook my head, as if the words surprised me, too. And in a way, they did. Armin’s response hadn’t been what I expected. “No, and to be honest I actually thought he would. Even though I shouldn’t have. It wouldn’t be like him to hate you.”

Levi stared at me for a moment and then leaned back against the piano, his body starting to relax. “What do you mean by that, kid?”

“I mean he doesn’t hate people like that,” I shrugged and folded my arms. “Not without thinking it through first, anyway. And even after that, even if they’re wrong, he still tries to understand them. It’s just the way he is.”

“Well, that makes him better than the rest of us, doesn’t it?” Levi angled his head to the side and glanced out the window. “Although I already knew he was. Honestly, I think that’s part of the reason I went to talk to him. Because if anyone was going to understand or try to, it would be him.”

Which meant that Levi had gone there with the vain hope that maybe one day Armin would talk to me about it. Although he’d left that choice up to him in the end. After all, he’d given me over to him. And Armin could have just as easily kept the information to himself and lived a life with me. Not that he ever would, but it had been an option that was left to him. So either Levi truly trusted Armin to do the right thing or he really didn’t care either way, just as long as it meant that we were happy.

And somehow I already knew what he wanted.

I could tell by the way he reacted.

“You were actually worried, weren’t you?” I whispered, filling the beat of silence with the one question rolling around in my mind. Because before today I had always thought that Armin was my friend and nothing to Levi. And I was beginning to realize that wasn’t true. “You care about him.”

Levi stared at me as if I had lost my mind, and I wanted to smile at the sight. He was finally starting to look like himself again, and the pain was beginning to leave his eyes.

“Of course I do. I care about everything to do with you, Eren.” Levi rolled his eyes and glanced to the collar around my neck before folding his arms. “I thought you would have realized that by now, kid. Every fucking thing about you affects me. Even the small shit.”

I fought back a second smile. “He’s not that small.”

He shot me a look. “You know what I mean.”

And I did, all too well. Because everything he did affected me, too. We were tied together that way, so tightly that it had hurt us both in the end. And I realized now that it was because neither of us knew how to handle another heart in our lives. One we could so easily break. It was too fresh and new, and we’d been so wrapped up in our own worries and concerns that we’d never considered
each other. I’d only thought about myself when I kept that lie, and what it would mean for me if he found out.

It was selfish.

And I knew that now.

“I’m sorry, Levi,” I blurted out the words but he held up his hand before I could say anything more.

“No.” He shook his head and lowered his hand. “Whatever it is you think you need to apologize for, just stop now. Because I don’t want to hear it anymore. I don’t want to fight over this pointless shit again. It’s already destroyed us too many times now. It’s taken away everything. And I don’t know about you, Eren, but I’m sick of it.”

“I am, too,” I whispered, taking a step forward and suddenly feeling as if I were treading on thin ice. Because I didn’t know what those words meant. I didn’t know if he was done fighting because we were together or over. And I was scared to find out. “But just because I’m tired of fighting about it doesn’t mean I shouldn’t apologize for what I’ve done wrong.”

“What you’ve done wrong?” Levi raised a brow and fixed me with a stare. “Do you mean the lie?”

I felt a sudden wave of worry that there might be something else. “Did I do something other than that?”

“No,” Levi shrugged and angled his head to the side. “You haven’t done anything wrong, kid.”

“Except lie.”

“Fuck the lie,” Levi shot back quickly, pushing away from the piano. “I don’t want to talk about it anymore, Eren. I don’t want to fight again, not over this. Not when it’s already cost me everything that I gave a shit about. Not when it cost me you.”

I felt my brow furrow in confusion. “But I’m here now.”

“I know you are, and I don’t know why, okay? I’ve been trying to figure that out since you walked into the fucking room and I…” Levi sighed roughly and pushed a hand through his hair, looking away. “If it’s because you want closure, then fine. I get it. I forgive you, Eren. I do. And I should have done that days ago.”

My head felt like it was spinning, and I was having trouble grasping onto my thoughts. But I managed to find one. “I didn’t come here to make you forgive me, Levi. And I would actually understand if you didn’t want to. After you told me how you felt about lies… I mean, I kept it anyway and—”

“And you were wrong. I know that, Eren. I know I had every right to be angry.” Levi dropped his hand back to his side and turned his eyes to me. “What I’m saying is that I wish I hadn’t been. I shouldn’t have held onto my anger like that, and I shouldn’t have been scared to come back to you. Because honestly, none of this was worth it. None of it was worth losing you.”

“But you haven’t lost me!” The words shot out of my mouth and it took everything I had not to go to him now. Not to close the distance he was trying to keep. “Don’t you get that, Levi? Don’t you understand why I’m here?”

“I—”
“I put this on because I’m yours,” I cut him off and grasped the collar, searching his eyes and praying that he would see the emotion in mine. “Because I don’t give a shit about the rest of it. We both fucked up, Levi, okay? And I’m tired of losing you over this. I’m sick of this fucking distance. I hate that you’re standing there when all I want is to have you in my arms again!”

“Eren—”

“No!” I clenched my fists at my sides and stared at the space between us. The space that was still there. The distance that wouldn’t go away. No matter how much I wanted it to. “Why are you not coming to me?”

“Honestly, kid?” Levi stared at me with an expression that told me he wanted this just as badly as I did. And yet somehow he was still holding himself back. “Because I’m waiting for you to decide that you don’t want me to.”

The words spun in my mind and the room went with them.

“Why would I ever decide that?” I shook my head, as if it could clear away the confusion that was building up inside it. “Why would I want that?”

Levi opened his mouth and then paused, closing it slowly as he searched my eyes. As if he were trying to decide whether or not he wanted to tell me at all.

“Eren, after everything I’ve done and after everything we’ve been through…” He trailed off and the pain in his eyes had me moving forward. But I stopped when he met my stare. “Can you honestly tell me that I’m not broken?”

And there it was. The fear he was holding inside, and the one I knew too well. Although it wasn’t just because he had mentioned it before, and I was sure he didn’t know that now. In fact, I was positive that he expected me to disagree with him entirely. He probably even had a comment ready for it when I did.

But I wasn’t going to.

“No.”

He went still as a statue and held my stare, trying not to show the pain in his own. But it was there, and I saw it anyway.

“See? That’s why I won’t come to you.” Levi muttered softly after the silence had started to fill the room. I knew he hadn’t been expecting this. “I don’t want to ruin you anymore than I already have, Eren. And trust me, that’s not to say that I won’t. Because damn it kid, if you want me then I’m yours. Every fucking inch of me. But I’m not going to force any of this if it’s not what you want. Even though you’re the only one that I want. Because I know you deserve so much more than I can give you.”

There was so much hopelessness in his voice. And although I had expected it all, it still broke me to hear it there. Because I knew now just how hurt he really was, and exactly how much his past had torn him down over the many years. Just as mine had done to me.

And he had no idea how I could understand exactly how he felt.

But he would now.

“Levi, who do you think I was before I met you?” I whispered the words and held his eyes, refusing
to look away. “I wasn’t put together either. I was broken, too.”

“You’re not broken, Eren.”

“Yes, I am.” I shot back, my voice stronger now. Because I needed to say this just as badly as I needed him to hear it. “I’m as broken as you are, Levi. And you know what? I was actually okay with that until I met you. Until I knew what it was like to be whole again, and after that I didn’t want to lose it.”

And I didn’t want to lose it now. I refused to.

“And when everything happened, I shattered further.” I continued, watching his eyes as if there were nowhere else in the world I would rather look. And there wasn’t. There was only him. “And even though I was broken again, you were still caught in me. Because we broke apart together and all of our pieces got mixed up, and now I don’t know how to get you out of my skin. And I don’t want to, Levi. Because I don’t want to remember what it was like not to feel you in me.”

“Eren…” My name was a soft word on his lips, and I felt my body relax at the sound.

Because he hadn’t said my name like that in days.

And I knew what it meant now.

“You’re a part of me, Levi. You’re always going to be.” I took one step closer and stopped, searching his eyes again. “You’re the reason I was ever whole in the first place. And I don’t want to lose that again. I don’t want to be broken again. Not when I can remember what it was like to be with you. Because I don’t feel right with anyone else. You’re the one who makes me whole.”

The distance between us was ripping me apart at this point, and I couldn’t understand why it was still there.

“And maybe you don’t feel that way about me,” The words tightened in my throat and the thought twisted around in my gut. Because I didn’t want to admit that it could be true. But I couldn’t explain the distance otherwise. “Maybe you don’t want to rebuild this, but I—”

My words vanished at the taste of his lips, and every thought I had went with them. And suddenly they didn’t matter anymore. Because I could feel him, taste him, and in that moment it was as if he had never left me at all. As if I had been trapped in his arms all these days and just forgotten where I was. Where I was meant to be. And somehow all it took was the feel of his mouth on mine to remind me of it.

And now there was nowhere else I wanted to be.

“Eren,” Levi breathed my name between our lips, but each word after was swallowed in a kiss, breaking off until he finally gave up entirely and surrendered to my taste.

There were fingers twisting in my hair, tugging hard and pressing me further into the mouth I craved more than I cared to breathe. And I couldn’t seem to get enough of it. My tongue was on his, winding and moving and memorizing every single inch of a place I should have never forgotten. I could feel his nails in my skin, scalp and hips, as he lifted me up and shoved me onto something that held my weight and brought his hips into mine. But I couldn’t bring myself to care what it was when I could feel him on me.

In me.
Filling me until I couldn’t remember the moments when our bodies were ever apart. And I knew they never would be again. I knew that even without his breath hot at my ear and against my neck as he moaned my name and whispered words that made my heart ache in the only way I wanted it to. And soon I was saying them back. Whispering, moaning, screaming. Words we had never said this way. Words that were quickly becoming the only thing I wanted to hear.

The only thing I wanted to say.

“I love you,” Levi’s voice was nothing more than a guttural moan, and I felt my body tremble at the sound. “Damn it, kid, I love you.”

“I—” The words broke off on my lips and turned into a cry as I felt the pleasure take over again. And I could feel his soft laugh against my neck as I dug my nails into his back, and forced the words past my lips against the onslaught of it all. “I love you, Levi.”

It was a rushed breath at most, and the hundredth time I said it at least. But I knew he heard it through the moans spilling from my lips.

And I didn’t remember much else after that.

Not until later, at least.

We were on the floor when my mind finally came to, his arms wrapped around me as if he had no plan to ever let go. And I was fine with that, because I was willing to bet I couldn’t move even if I wanted to. And I didn’t. I was content here, with my head pressed against his chest. Drifting off to the beat of his heart and the soft whisper of his words.

And I knew, even before sleep took me away, that he would still be there when I woke up. Just as I would be for him.

Because there was no reason to run anymore.

This was home.
“I’ve missed this.”

Levi’s voice was low and deep against my ear, vibrating softly in his chest and rousing me from what had been the best night of sleep I’d had in over a week. I could feel his touch, gentle and lingering, slowly tracing the collar that was still wrapped around my neck. Serving as my constant reminder that I was once again his, and he was finally mine. And it was still hard to believe, even hours later despite the fact that my mind had done nothing but try to convince me of it. He had been the only thing I dreamed about.

And for the first time in days, that was actually a good thing.

“I’ve missed it, too,” I murmured against his chest, pausing to brush my fingers against the key as if to remind myself that it was still there. And it was. Exactly where it should be. “It’s only been a week, but I felt wrong without it.”

“You looked wrong without it.” Levi hooked his finger in the ring and gave it a small tug before releasing it again. I had a feeling that he was also trying to reassure himself that it was there. “Seeing you these past few days… it was like something was missing from you. And I don’t think I realized what it was until I finally saw it again.”

I angled my head to the side and my fingers caught the end of the key, tilting it up into my field of vision. Just as I had a dozen times before finally falling asleep in his arms. I’d memorized the sight of it months ago, and it was as familiar to me now as my own hand. And yet I couldn’t seem to stop myself from worrying that I would somehow manage to forget it anyway.

And I knew I couldn’t let that happen.

“I’m sorry I ever took it from you.”
The regret in his voice pulled my eyes to him, and I found him staring at the key gripped between my fingers. And immediately I wanted to wipe the pain away. I’d seen too much of it over the past week, and now that things were finally okay I knew I didn’t want to see it anymore. Not that I had wanted to see it to begin with, but I understood it then. And it was unnecessary now. Now that we had forgiven each other. Now that we were together again.

Now that I finally understood.

And I did understand, even before tonight. Days ago, when he had removed the key from my neck, I knew exactly why he had done it. Why it had been important for him to do so. And I hadn’t blamed him for it then. And I couldn’t bring myself to blame him for it now. Because I’d learned at the start of our relationship that Levi saw revenge as closure. Or at least he had with Erwin.

And that was what he’d needed with me.

A moment of my pain in exchange for the lie.

I couldn’t say I didn’t earn it.

“I know why you had to do it.” I shrugged, my eyes returning to the key. “And I get that you needed your revenge in that moment. I mean, you never really got it with Erwin, and after I lied to you about everything… well, I can understand why you would want to hurt me over it. And—”

“Wait, what?” Levi cut me off so quickly that the words caught in my throat and stopped completely. He sat up and I moved, my eyes meeting his and finding more confusion than I ever expected to see there.

“I said that I—”

“No, I know what you said.” He shook his head and then grabbed me by the shoulder, pulling me forward until I was practically in his lap. With nowhere else to look but his eyes. “You think I hurt you on purpose?”

Now it was my turn to look confused. “Why else would you take the key from me?”

“Because it was the only way to show you that I was actually done. That we were over.” Levi searched my eyes for a moment and tilted his head to the side, the corner of his mouth twitching slightly with mild amusement. “I mean, come on, kid. I know you. You would have been pounding at my door five minutes later if I didn’t try to convince you. And would you really have believed that I was serious if I left the key with you?”

I opened my mouth and then closed it just as quickly, frowning as the realization started to settle in. “No, it didn’t seem real until then. I think that’s why it hurt so much.”

“I know it did.” Levi muttered, the smile vanishing from his lips. “And trust me, that’s not what I wanted. I was just trying to make it a clean break for the both of us, and that was the only way it was possible. It had nothing to do with revenge or hurting you.”

My fingers closed around the key once more and I looked down, reminding myself that it was there now. “I thought that was what you needed.”

“No,” Levi shook his head slowly and then suddenly I felt his fingers on my jaw, his touch soft and gentle. Angling my head until I was staring into his eyes again. “Eren, your pain is something I would never want to see, for any reason. And I swear, I will never intentionally hurt you. Mentally, physically, or emotionally.”
Levi paused for a moment and then his hand closed around mine, the two of us holding the key together. “This was the most important thing in my life before you, Eren. And I would never give it to someone that I was willing to hurt.”

My hand flexed under his and his fingers parted long enough to intertwine with mine. As if he knew exactly what I was looking for. “I wouldn’t have blamed you if you wanted to hurt me over that.”

“I would,” Levi shrugged, his thumb brushing slowly against mine. “Being angry with someone is no excuse to hurt them. And I’m sorry that you thought that I was trying to hurt you with that.”

“It’s done now.” I glanced down at our hands as if seeing them would solidify the statement. “You gave the key back to me, and it doesn’t hurt anymore. So there’s really no point in talking about it. It’s the past.”

“It’s the past,” Levi repeated, his hand leaving mine to touch my chin. Keeping my eyes focused on him. “And you’re my future, Eren. Which is exactly why we need to talk about it.”

I wrinkled my nose at the thought. I was perfectly fine forgetting everything that happened and pushing forward into our future. I really didn’t see what lingering on the pain of the past could solve.

“Do we have to?”

“Probably not as in depth as you’re thinking,” Levi’s mouth twitched again with the smirk I’d missed so much. “But there is one thing I want to say before we drop it completely.”

I felt his fingers slipping into my hair and suddenly all I could manage was a nod. The words wouldn’t come to my lips, and I couldn’t bring myself to care when I could feel the touch of his skin against mine. I had craved it so deeply over the past few days that it was too hard not to give into it. So I didn’t even try. He could say whatever he wanted so long as I could look into his eyes as he did so.

“I don’t know if anything will ever happen to us again,” Levi started, his voice soft and calm despite the words that came with it. “And I can’t promise that we won’t fall apart in the future. But I know I’m going to do everything that I can to keep us together. I’m going to fight for you, Eren. If it ever comes to that again. And while I hope it doesn’t… I want you to promise me something if it does.”

I tried to ignore the worry that stirred inside me. I hated the idea that any of this could happen again. But given the past few days, I could understand why he would do this. Why he would worry about a possibility that he couldn’t predict.

Because there were only so many promises that the future could keep.

And they were rarely the ones that we wanted.

“If something ever happens to us,” Levi continued, holding my stare as if he never wanted to look anywhere else. “Whether it’s your fault or mine, don’t let me hurt you. Because I don’t care how angry I am or what you’ve done, hurting you is never going to be something I want to do. And if I do, it’s unintentional.”

“But I don’t blame you for that. I understand that you—”

“I don’t care if you blame me,” he cut me off quickly. “I’ll blame me. Enough for the both of us, trust me. So just do me a fucking favor and tell me if I ever do something to hurt you. Whether you think I meant to or not, tell me. And I’ll grovel for it.”
I felt a smile curve my mouth, “Even if you’re mad at me?”

“Even if I’m fucking furious with you, kid,” Levi smirked and pushed his hand through my hair, playfully tilting my head back and pressing a kiss to my exposed throat. “And that’ll probably be the case, but I don’t care. You can be a brat if you want to and piss me off, but I’m still not going to hurt you.”

I felt the collar move on my neck as I angled my head, and suddenly our bedroom games flooded my mind. “What if it’s a punishment?”

Amusement twitched on his lips and his fingers slid from my throat to travel slowly down my chest. “You already know those don’t hurt, Eren.”

And it was true, they never had. Although I had read that they weren’t meant to be satisfying. “I don’t think that punishments are supposed to feel good.”

“Technically, no,” Levi agreed, pausing to kiss the base of my throat. “But I prefer them the way I do it.”

I had to admit that I did, too.

“You still have to promise me, kid,” Levi murmured softly against my skin, his lips decorating my neck in slow kisses.

I tilted my head to the side to give him more access. “Fine, I promise. But there’s really no point. To be honest, you leaving me hurt more than anything else.”

“Well, you know I can’t do anything about that.” Levi’s lips traveled to my jaw, and I had a sudden feeling that he was teasing me. Or tempting me.

But either way, this was something I wanted to talk about. Something I needed to understand.

“You did something about it this time.”

He pulled away from my neck and raised a brow, settling back into the pillows behind him. “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that you didn’t let go of me. You didn’t just give up on us,” I paused, not even sure of how I wanted to say it but knowing that I had to. “I had been so worried that you were going to walk away from us, Levi. That you were never even going to try. That you didn’t want us anymore.”

“I always wanted us, Eren.” Levi’s arms tightened around me and I realized then that he had pulled me against him. “I just didn’t know if that would be the best thing for you.”

“How could being apart from you be the best thing for me?” I frowned. “How would that ever be something I want?”

“I’m not saying it would be.” Levi shrugged, holding me closer. For what should have been such a tense conversation, he was so at ease. So willing to talk. “I just know how angry I was at the time, and I was worried that would carry over into whatever relationship we tried to have after that.”

I wasn’t sure I wanted to point out the very obvious fact that we were in a relationship now.

“Was it because I lied?”

“It probably seems that way,” Levi admitted, “But that’s not what got to me in the end. It was the
fact that you were never going to tell me… that you said you wouldn’t. It destroyed my trust in you. And honestly, I was worried that I would never be able to let that go. That it would become this stain on our future that would eventually ruin everything we had.”

I couldn’t see how the stain wasn’t there now. And suddenly I was worried again. “But wouldn’t you be willing to risk it to find out?”

“I’d be willing to risk my heart,” Levi paused and angled his head to the side, searching my eyes. “But not yours, Eren. And that was the part that scared me the most. The reason I stayed away. I couldn’t promise myself that I wouldn’t hurt you. Not that I would do so purposely, but I was worried that I would unintentionally punish you for something that you couldn’t change.”

I could feel the fear racing in my heart, and I had to wonder if he could feel it, too. Because I didn’t understand how he could seem so calm, so relaxed when he was talking about this. Holding me in his arms as if he weren’t telling me how he couldn’t trust me anymore. That we didn’t have a future. That there was nothing we could fight for.

“Levi…” My voice trembled, and I knew he heard it. I could see it in the way his eyes widened just slightly. “Are we even together now?”

“Of course we are. Why wouldn’t we be?”

“Because of what you said,” My voice wavered again and I hated it for doing so. “You can’t trust me, right? So how can we have a future?”

Levi searched my eyes with a hint of amusement in his own. As if he were actually surprised that I didn’t know. “Because you’ve already given me a reason to trust you, Eren.”

Confusion flooded my face and the word popped out of my mouth, “Huh?”

“I actually thought he would have told you,” Levi remarked, tilting his head to the side. “Although I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. It’s not like you two were having a normal conversation.”

And suddenly I knew exactly who he was talking about.

“Erwin’s the reason you trust me?”

“No, you’re the reason I trust you,” Levi corrected me, pausing to move his fingers through my hair. As if he knew just how calming his touch was for me. “He just happened to tell me about it.”

“What did he say?”

“That he offered himself to you, and you refused.” Levi’s hand slipped from my hair and his fingers came to rest on the key, his eyes never leaving mine. “And honestly, kid, that made every difference to me. Because the fact that you would refuse a sure thing just to keep yourself from lying to me again… it tells me that you’re never going to. Because if you were going to lie, it would have been then. And you didn’t.”

I could feel my heart racing again, but fear was no longer the issue. “I didn’t want what we had to be a lie.”

“I know.” A genuine smile crossed his lips and I felt myself go weak at the sight. “And I love you for it, kid.”

I was still getting used to the sound of those words on his tongue, and I was sure I would never be
able to hear them enough. And if I didn’t have one lingering thought in my mind, I might have actually asked him to say them again.

But as it was, I had to say this.

“You know I still hate him for what he did, right?”

“I think the whole world knows that you hate him,” Levi rolled his eyes, a smirk twitching on his lips. “And trust me, none of us blame you for it.”

“I’m pretty sure Armin does,” I admitted.

“That’s because Armin understands him better than you do,” Levi moved his fingers through my hair once more and then shrugged. “That doesn’t make you wrong, though.”

I hesitated on my next words. “You understand him, too, don’t you?”

I was sure that he knew where I was going with this, but I couldn’t tell whether or not he would let me.

“I understand him better now than I used to,” Levi paused after the words and fell silent for a moment, searching my eyes with a knowing look in his own. When he continued, the words were a command. And I realized then how much I had missed the sound. “Ask, Eren.”

“Why did you kiss him?”

“Honestly?” Levi let the air rush out of his lungs and leaned back. “Because in that moment, I wanted to. But not because I wanted him.”

I felt like the last part was added for my benefit, but I appreciated it anyway. “Then why?”

“Because he had his goodbye.” Levi angled his head to the side as he held my stare, never once trying to look away. As if he wanted me to see the truth in his eyes. “The thing at The Wall was for him, but it didn’t do shit for me. If anything, it just pissed me off more. And you already know that the conversation we had in my office didn’t help me either.”

The image of him shaking and walking out of his office ran through my mind, and I nodded. I was sure I would never forget that moment. I had just barely held down my desire to kill Erwin for doing anything that would cause Levi to react that way.

“I hated him for all of that. I really did.” Levi shook his head, and then his eyes went back to mine. “But I didn’t hate him when he convinced me to go to you. When he convinced me to fight for you, Eren. And that was the first time in years that I felt something for him that wasn’t attached to hate. Even more than that, I was actually grateful that he was there.”

I wasn’t sure whether or not I could feel the same, but at the same time I knew that Erwin was one of the reasons I’d had a chance at all.

“I don’t think I was ever able to let go before, because the hatred made me hold on.” Levi continued, his eyes pausing briefly on the key hanging from my neck. “But after everything he said, and everything he did… I started to forgive him for it. And I realized then that I didn’t want the revenge anymore. I didn’t want to hurt him. I didn’t want to hate him.”

And somehow I knew he never did. At least not to the point that he hadn’t felt anything other than hate. Because there had always been something strong between them, something more than that, and
I would have been crazy to deny it. They’d had a life before me. A relationship. One they never truly got to end. And yet I knew it was over now. I could see it in his eyes.

He was finally able to let Erwin go.

“When he asked if he could kiss me,” Levi hesitated and searched my eyes, as if he were actually worried about my reaction. “I really wanted it in that moment. I wanted that end, that closure that I never really had. I wanted to let him go. And I didn’t want to do it through anger or hatred… I wanted to do it through something we never really got to have. And I know that doesn’t make what we did right, but—”

“Do you still love him?”

The question was out of my mouth before I could stop it, but I knew I didn’t want to. And it wasn’t because I needed to hear the answer, because I already knew what it would be. But I needed him to say it anyway. Both for himself and for me.

“Not in the way that I love you,” Levi spoke softly, saying the words I wanted to hear. Even if he didn’t know how I would respond. “But I do love him as a friend, Eren. I’m not going to lie and pretend that I don’t. He’s a part of my life, and I know now that he always will be. But trust me when I say that he’s no threat to you.”

And I already knew that he wasn’t, even before the words were out of Levi’s mouth. Because I understood far too well what it was like to love a friend. A friend who could have been so much more, if everything had been different. But it wasn’t. I was in love with Levi, and I knew he felt that way for me, too. Regardless of the other relationships we could have had in our lives, and the feelings attached to them. It didn’t make a difference. Because we wanted each other.

And that was really all that mattered.

“I know he’s no threat to me,” I shrugged and a small smile teased the corner of my mouth. “And honestly, I’m probably too stubborn to let him be. You’re mine, and I’m not going to let anything change that.”

I paused, hesitating on my next words. “And I understand.”

“You understand?”

“What it’s like to love someone as a friend.” I explained, not even sure whether or not I should continue. And yet I knew that I had to. “I don’t want any lies between us, Levi. But you have to promise me that you’re not going to freak out when I tell you this.”

Levi raised a brow, regarding me with a wary expression. “You don’t make it very easy when you put it like that, kid. But you know I’d prefer you to be honest over anything else.”

And I had every plan to be.

I looked down and clenched my hands into fists, pressing them against my thighs as I tried to ignore the nervous feelings stirring in my gut. Because I honestly had no idea how he would react to it, and I didn’t know what I would do if I actually upset him now. But at the same time, I refused to have another lie burning between us. So I knew I had to do this.

I let the air rush out of my lungs and forced the words along with it. “Armin kissed me before I went to The Wall.”
There was a long silence, in which I refused to look up. Mostly because I was terrified of what I would see in his eyes when I did. Anger, betrayal, hatred. I was expecting any and all of them at once.

But I wasn’t expecting him to laugh.

“Did he?” Levi asked, his tone colored with amusement. “Well, that kid certainly moves fast, doesn’t he? He barely waited for me to get out the door before he jumped on you.”

I felt like my heart was going to beat right out of my chest, and it was overwhelming when it was combined with the complete relief that spread throughout my body. Because he wasn’t angry. He didn’t seem to be upset at all. Which meant that either he didn’t see Armin as a threat, or he trusted me so much that it didn’t really matter. Which was exactly how I felt about him.

And not at all what I expected. “You’re not mad?”

He moved so quickly that my brain barely had time to register what he was doing, and even then I didn’t realize what was happening until I was pinned beneath his body. He twisted his fingers in my hair and tugged playfully on the strands until I was staring into his eyes. And I saw amusement there. So much of it that it actually answered my question before he even said the words.

“Should I be mad?” Levi asked, his voice low and sensual. And I knew he was doing it on purpose. I could tell by the way his lips curved into a smirk, an inch away from mine. “Should I be jealous, Eren?”

It took everything I had to say the word normally. And even then it sounded like a moan. “No.”

“Good,” he murmured softly, his lips barely touching me. “Because I’m not. I know you’re mine, kid.”

I could feel my mind starting to haze with desire and I leaned in towards his lips, desperate to feel them parting against mine. But he pulled away before I could, with a teasing smirk on his lips that told me I wouldn’t be getting laid anytime soon. At least not as soon as I wanted to. Which just so happened to be about thirty seconds after I had woken up.

“Levi…” I groaned in protest, rolling onto my stomach and reaching out towards him as he stood up from the bed. “That’s not fair.”

“Oh, I know it’s not,” he agreed, snatching my shirt from the chair and tugging it on. The way it just barely cleared the top of his thighs made me want him even more. “But I heard that you barely had a bowl of soup yesterday, and after our activities last night I’m surprised you haven’t passed out yet.”

I rolled my eyes. “I slept the whole night.”

“You know what I mean.” Levi shot back, tossing my pants onto the bed. “You’re eating something before we do anything else. I’m not going to have you wasting away on me now that I have you back.”

And that last bit was just enough to make me pull on my pants without complaining.

I leaned against the kitchen island and watched him move around the stove as the familiar smells of breakfast filled the air. And even though it had only been a week, it seemed as if it had been so long since I last watched him cook. Although technically it had, when it came to this kitchen. I hadn’t been in Trost in so long that I’d almost managed to forget how comfortable it was.
But then I remembered why I had to stay away.

And realized that I hadn’t last night.

“Levi,” I spoke his name as I looked around the apartment, trying to decide why he hadn’t brought it up yet. He had told me not to come here, and obviously I’d gone against that. “Are you sure you’re not mad at me?”

“Positive, kid.”

I hesitated for a moment, glancing back to him. He was still cooking at the stove. “About anything?”

He paused for a moment and then pushed the eggs onto a plate, tossing it in front of me. “What is this about, Eren? What am I supposed to be upset about?”

I picked up the fork he had set in front of me earlier and poked at one fluffy piece of scrambled egg. “I’m in Trost.”

I could practically feel him staring at me as if I’d truly lost my mind. Which made me want to look at him the same way.

“You told me not to come here,” I continued, glancing up from my plate to watch the realization cross his features. “Don’t you remember that?”

I didn’t think that he would ever be able to forget. And the fact that he had made me wonder just how truly upset he must have been last night.

“I didn’t forget,” he said at last, filling the momentary silence. He shoveled the rest of the eggs onto his plate and turned back to the kitchen island. “It just doesn’t matter anymore, that’s all.”

My fork stilled in my hand and I stared at him, wondering what it was he’d done that would keep my father’s presence from mattering. “What happened? Why wouldn’t it matter?”

“You’re staring at me like I’m a murderer, brat,” Levi fixed me with a quick look and then popped a bite of eggs into his mouth.

I actually had to wonder how accurate that was. “Are you?”

“For you, kid, I would be.” Levi paused, taking a sip from his cup and eyeing my expression with a mild amusement in his own. But that amusement quickly faded with the look on my face and finally he set the cup down, sliding it away and raising a brow. “You’re not actually serious, right?”

“Well, what the hell else am I supposed to think?” I shot back, gesturing once at the apartment. “A few days ago you were telling me I couldn’t come here. That you would move if I did. And now it doesn’t even matter?”

“That’s because he was here a few days ago,” he answered, watching my expression carefully. I was sure he could see the shock there. “But he left earlier this week. And honestly, kid, I didn’t find out about it until yesterday night when I was coming in. They were bringing boxes of your clothes downstairs.”

I felt my stomach twist uncomfortably and I wasn’t even sure why. It hadn’t been my home in months, despite the fact that my clothes were still there. And yet for some reason it felt as if I was being thrown out all over again.
“Why did he leave?” It was all I could manage. All I could think.

And by the way Levi looked down, I knew he was involved.

“Levi?”

“I wasn’t going to let him hurt you.” Levi spoke softly, staring down at his plate as if he were worried about what he would find in my eyes. “And I wasn’t going to let him hurt her, either. I couldn’t give him that chance. Not again. I decided that months ago, before everything happened between us.”

I felt like the room was spinning around me. “What did you do?”

“He’s a fucking coward, Eren.” The vehemence in his voice was so strong and unexpected that it actually surprised me. “He attacks people who he believes are weaker than him. And honestly, those people are easy to take down once you know what to do with them. Especially when you have cunning and powerful friends like I do.”

And even without asking, I knew exactly who he was referring to.

“Erwin?”

“Armin came to him after what your… after what that piece of shit did to you.” Levi paused and pushed his plate away. “He didn’t like seeing him upset, so he came to me about it. And at that point I had already been digging up shit to use against him. And trust me, there was a lot.”

After seeing who he really was that night, I had no doubt that there were plenty of horrible things that he’d done. Things I didn’t know about. Things I wasn’t sure I would ever want to know about.

“It doesn’t take much to get rid of men like him.” Levi continued, his voice still cold. “The right kind of blackmail, a certain amount of money. And it took both, because he was so fucking adamant about what he wanted. But not so much that he was going to risk ruining the perfect façade he’d built up all these years.”

The loving, caring doctor who would never hurt anyone. I was sure they’d found enough to ruin his practice and his life. I couldn’t see why they would give him money, too.

“You paid him to leave?”

“That was Erwin’s choice, not mine.” Levi muttered, a hint of annoyance on his face as he glanced to the side. “Personally, I wanted to destroy him. But Erwin’s a born diplomat, and he took care of everything before I had a chance. Like I said, I didn’t know it was done until I saw your clothes in the lobby.”

The relief settling into my body was the strangest thing I’d ever felt, because I hadn’t known just how tense I’d been for all these months. Constantly worrying about what might happen.

And now there was no reason to worry at all.

“He’s not going to come back, Eren.” Levi drew my attention back to him as if he knew I needed to hear the words. “Not without us knowing about it first. Erwin’s not a trusting kind of guy, and I already know he’s having him watched. If he so much as leaves the area he’s in, Erwin will use everything he has.”

“Why hasn’t he?” It was the one question that kept turning in my mind. I couldn’t understand why
they wouldn’t ruin him if they had the chance.

“As Erwin put it, it’s a long and messy process,” Levi waved his hand dismissively. He didn’t look thrilled with the decision himself. “He wanted to get him away from you as soon as possible. So he chose what he believed would be the quickest path to that.”

And as much as I hated to admit it, I knew it made sense. If they went after him legally, there was always a chance that it wouldn’t work out. And even if it did, it could be a slow process. And during that time he would be around us. There was too much risk involved, and although I hated the idea of him continuing on in his life as normal, I was grateful that the threat was gone.

Because I finally felt like I could breathe again.

“Where did he go?”

“Across the country.” Levi paused, eyeing my expression. “Do you want to know the actual state?”

As long as it was far away, I didn’t care. “No.”

Silence settled over us for a moment, and I could feel his eyes on me. And even without looking, I knew he was worried. Just as I knew the words that were coming before he said them.

“Are you mad at me?”

“For giving my life back to me?” I asked and glanced up, watching the relief flood his eyes. Because I wasn’t mad. How could I be? He’d done so much to protect both me and Mikasa, and I was sure I would never be able to repay him for that.

“I was worried that you wouldn’t see it that way,” he admitted, sliding his plate back in front of him. “And I wasn’t sure how to tell you.”

“I don’t think there’s any good way to tell someone that they’re an orphan.” I shrugged as if it didn’t matter. Even though we both knew it did. “But I already knew that, so it’s not like it’s a big change. I just don’t have to be scared to come home anymore.”

“You’re not an orphan, Eren.”

“Well, he’s not my father.” I shot back, not really in the mood to discuss it. “And she doesn’t see herself as my mother. So what else would that make me?”

Levi stared at me quietly before shoving his plate away. And it was barely a second later that I was wrapped up in his arms again, lost in the comforting scent and warmth that I needed so much more than I realized.

“He manipulated her, Eren.” Levi whispered the words into my hair and I fought the urge to fall apart at the sound. “But that doesn’t mean your mother doesn’t love you.”

I hated the fact that I was trembling. That I was seconds away from breaking. “She stopped talking to me.”

“I know she did. But that doesn’t mean we know the reason why.” I could feel his fingers in my hair, and part of me wanted to relax. “And if I had to guess, I’m sure it has everything to do with him. But he’s not going to go near her anymore. That was one of the conditions Erwin made.”

I wasn’t sure it would matter whether or not Grisha was in her life. It didn’t mean her mind would
change. It didn’t mean that I would ever hear from her again. “What if she doesn’t want me anymore?”

“That she’s insane,” Levi muttered softly, pulling me closer. “But give her a chance before you decide that.”

I didn’t know if I could. And even if I wanted to, I knew it would take time before I could reach the point where I would want to talk to her again. Where I would want to talk to anyone about any of this. And for a moment I had to wonder if this was how Mikasa felt, and why she hadn’t talked about it with me. Or Armin, for that matter.

Actually, the only person I was sure she had talked to was Levi.

And he hadn’t said a word about it. He refused to.

But after everything that happened, it was possible that had changed.

“Does Mikasa know about this?”

“I think she suspects that I was doing something,” Levi admitted with a shrug, “But I haven’t told her directly. I figured that was something for you to do, as her brother.”

“I don’t see how I can do that when I don’t even know the whole situation,” I started, trying to lead him to where I wanted this to go. But he caught on too quickly for me to get any further.

“You know I can’t tell you about any of that, kid.” Levi cut me off immediately. Just as I knew he would. Just as he had before. “That’s for Mikasa to tell you when she’s ready. If she ever gets to that point. And honestly, you need to learn to respect the fact that she might never be able to.”

He paused for a moment and moved his fingers through my hair, holding my stare. “But if she ever does decide to talk to you about it, then you better listen the fuck up, kid. Because she needs you more than she needs anyone. You’re her rock, and I know she needs that strength.”

I didn’t know if I could be strong, but I could almost promise that I would be furious. Because if it was bad enough to hide from me, then I knew it meant that there was someone out there I would want to kill. And I would, gladly; if I knew that they had caused her pain.

Although I wasn’t sure I would ever get the chance.

“What if she never tells me?”

“Then you drop it.” He replied simply, as if it were the only response possible. And to him, it probably was. “She doesn’t have to talk about it, Eren. And she shouldn’t have to. Not after she had to live through it. That’s not who she is, and it shouldn’t shape her. You shouldn’t care one way or another whether she tells you or not.”

“It’s easy for you to say that.” I muttered, pushing away from the kitchen island. Suddenly I wasn’t hungry anymore. “She told you.”

“That’s not why it’s easy for me to say that.”

I didn’t want to think about those words and what they meant. Mikasa had told me before that they were alike, and the fact that he could understand her pain was almost too much. I didn’t want to believe that either of them had ever been hurt, even though I knew that was the case. Despite the fact that she never told me, and she probably never would.
I just hated the idea that she didn’t trust me as much as she trusted him.

“Hey, kid.” Levi tapped my chin gently and brought my attention back to him. And somehow I was sure he knew exactly what I was thinking. “It’s not that she doesn’t trust you. And it’s not that she doesn’t want you to know, because I’m sure she’s dying to confide in someone other than me. I know I’m not the best for that.”

I was willing to bet that he was better than he realized.

“Then why did she?” I muttered, trying not to sound like a sulking child and failing miserably. I hated that there was something I didn’t know about her. Something I couldn’t fix. “Why won’t she talk to me?”

“Because sometimes it’s easier to talk to strangers about things like that.” Levi said the words in a way that I knew that they had come from experience. “Strangers don’t know how to look at you anyway, so how the fuck will you know if they’re staring at you any differently? You won’t. Not like you will with family. Because with them, you’ll know the second their expression changes. You’ll see the judgment or the pity in their eyes…. And then pretty soon that’s the only thing you see.”

I wanted to say I could promise that I wouldn’t look at her any differently, but I knew that wasn’t possible. Because I knew there were things that she could say that would change everything. Whether we wanted them to or not.

And suddenly I understood.

“You’re the most important face in her life, Eren,” Levi continued, his thumb brushing once over my lower lip. “And I don’t think she wants to see that change.”

“I get it,” I muttered softly, although I wasn’t happy with the outcome. “It’s just that I hate the fact that I can’t help her.”

“Can’t help her?” Levi raised a brow and regarded me as if I’d lost my mind yet again. “Eren, you help her everyday. And you don’t need to know what happened to her in order to do that. You just need to be there for her. As her brother, as her friend. That’s what she needs from you. You’re her strength.”

“I’m pretty sure she’s strong on her own.”

“Oh, she is. Mikasa’s incredibly strong,” Levi agreed, pausing for a moment before a smile touched the corner of his mouth. “But trust me, kid. She may act tough, but sometimes it’s the strongest looking people who need your help the most.”

I tried not to linger on the word, but I couldn’t help it. “People?”

“Is that surprising?” Levi asked, his eyes amused. “I thought you knew how important you were in my life.”

I tried to keep the teasing smile off my face. “It doesn’t hurt to be reminded.”

A smirk twitched on his lips and he leaned close, his heart beating against mine as he whispered softly at my ear. “You’re my home, Eren.”

It was a wonder my knees continued to hold me up at all. “And you’re mine.”
My arms tightened around his waist and I drew him close against me, my mind wandering back to the bedroom. I had managed to get half the plate in my stomach, and I was hoping that would be enough to satisfy him for now. At least for the next few hours.

“Speaking of being there for your friends,” Levi broke the silence as he drew back from me and pulled out his phone, checking the time. “Visiting hours opened a while ago. Armin’s probably waiting for you.”

The bedroom quickly vanished from my mind, and suddenly there was only one place I wanted to be.

But I still wanted him to be with me. “Will you come, too?”

Levi paused for a moment and stared down at his phone as if it had something important to say. “Would he even want me to be there?”

“Considering he’s the one who talked me into coming here in the first place,” I snatched his phone and turned off the screen, so he had no choice but to meet my eyes. And when he did, I smiled. Because I knew he needed it. The reassurance that everything was okay now. “I think he’d be insulted if you didn’t show up.”

The relief in his eyes made my heart skip a beat.

“Good. Because I actually have something I need to give him.” Levi started to walk across the room towards the work desk in the corner and then he paused, glancing back to me. “And something for you, too.”

I could feel the curiosity stirring inside me as I followed him into the living room. “What is it?”

“Certificates,” he replied simply, pulling out two documents that had been placed into protective casings. “For completing the internship program. Believe it or not, today was actually your last day.”

I couldn’t believe that I would actually get anything for that, considering all of the days I’d missed. But I was sure that Levi and Erwin had more than a little something to do with the fact that I had passed the program.

“Although I do have to say that Armin probably deserves this more than you after all the work he put in,” Levi commented with a small smirk teasing the corner of his mouth.

I rolled my eyes and felt my lips curve. “Well, that’s not fair. He slept with the president of the company, and I was only with the vice president. How does that even compare?”

Levi raised a brow, the amusement shining in his eyes. “You’re lucky you’re cute, you know that?”

“Oh, I know,” I grinned, pointing at the certificate, “It’s the reason I’m getting that.”

“You’re getting this for more than just your ass, kid,” Levi shot back, holding it out to me. “Because believe it or not, you earned it. You’re actually a good employee when you put your mind to it.”

“When I’m not sleeping with the boss,” I added, taking it from him and drinking in the sight. I never thought I would hold it in my hands, and I was surprised by how happy I was to see it there.

“Oh, I think that added to your performance,” Levi commented, the smirk still on his lips.

“It better have,” I shot back teasingly. “I worked hard for that. All nighters and everything.”
Levi rolled his eyes and pushed a hand through my hair, messing up the long strands. “Well, the newcomers always have to deal with the annoying shit like that. And long hours are a bitch.”

“Yes, they are,” I agreed, still staring down at the paper in my hands. The paper I had earned. “But I don’t have to deal with that anymore. I’m moving up in the world.”

“That you are.” Levi paused and looked down at the certificate. “Congratulations, kid.”

He glanced up to me, and my heart started to race again.

“You’re no longer the intern.”
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

This is it! The last update for The Intern! ^___^ I still can't believe it's already here. I think I'm gonna be a little bummed next week when Thursday rolls around with no chapter to update with. XD But either way, I hope that all of you have enjoyed the journey, and that you will like the ending as well.

I'm going to add a little bit more at the end of the chapter. XD So I'll try to keep this opening piece more or less brief. Thank you all so much for all of your comments, both on the last chapter and throughout the fic. I always look forward to reading them and it really does make me so happy to hear what you all thought of the story. So if you get the chance, please let me know what you thought of the ending! ^_^

A huge thank you to thenewinshayneity and danchou-bitches for the absolutely beautiful piece of artwork they shared this week! ^__^ And thank you to the cosplayers noticemecorporal, corporalnoticesyou, kidofmischief, ask-cutie-eren, and yuukixchan for the pictures and gifs they shared this week! ^__^ And if you haven't already seen it, ask-cutie-eren and yuukixchan shared an amazing CMV for The Intern! ^__^ If you'd like to check out the art or the cosplays, you can find them both on my blog or any of the blogs mentioned.

JUST TO NOTE: THIS CHAPTER TAKES PLACE ONE YEAR LATER

As always, please feel free to leave comments either here or on tumblr. If you're not already following me on tumblr then you can do so at lootibles. I'm also tracking the tag 'fic: the intern' if you'd like to leave anything there.

ENJOY!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

 Approximately one year later...

Levi

“'You’re gonna be late, kid.'”

I muttered the words around an amused smirk and leaned into the doorframe, my eyes lingering on Eren’s hips as he stretched up to tape a photo onto the wall. His red shirt lifted slightly with the movement, and revealed the soft tan skin that my lips had teased just hours ago. And yet somehow I was already forgetting the taste of it, as if it had been days or weeks since I’d felt him last. And I was damn near desperate for a reminder now; to the point that I was almost willing to forgo the plans I had to get it.

But I knew I couldn’t.
As tempting as Eren’s body was, I wasn’t about to let anything get in the way now.

Not even myself.

“I won’t be that late. It’s not like they had a set time to start, anyway. They said around five-ish.”
Eren glanced over his shoulder and grinned at me before snatching another photo up from the dresser. “Besides, I wanted to hang these up before tonight. Otherwise they’re just gonna pile up on me.”

More stretching.

Damn, that brat had a nice ass.

“You’re going to take more tonight?” I asked, pushing away from the door and stepping into the room. The entire half of one wall was nothing but a collage of landscapes and faces; something he had been building for the past year since I’d given him the room.

“Well, everyone’s going to be there. And I want to have more than just scenery on the walls.” Eren shrugged and fiddled with the position of one of the photos, trying to line it up with the rest. “You told me to make it my own, right?”

“Yea, I did,” I agreed, my attention lingering on the images that I knew all too well at this point. Either because they were a fond memory, or because I’d spent hours in this room admiring them.

I’d given it to him shortly after he had moved into the apartment with me. The room had been used for nothing more than storage before that; countless trinkets and shit I had no use for piled up into every corner. Things that I had planned to throw away long ago, but never had a good reason to. Not until him. And then suddenly none of that crap mattered anymore.

It was just taking up space.

Space I knew he could use.

And so I gave it to him.

Not that I expected him to know why at the time. Even though he knew I had a room of my own, I was willing to bet that he didn’t understand the whole reason behind it. My mother’s room had always been something special to me and there was no denying that, but it wasn’t just because it reminded me of her. It was because it was the one place where I could feel safe, regardless of what happened. Even if the entire world went to shit around me, I would have that room to escape to. Surrounded by memories of her, and what it had been like to have a normal life.

And I needed that. Even now, when things were comfortable and happy, there were still days when I needed that room.

A place to run to. A place to settle my mind.

And I knew he needed that, too.

Even if he wasn’t willing to admit it just yet. And after a year, I was beginning to think that he never would. But I wasn’t going to push him into trying. I knew he had to heal at his own pace, and I wouldn’t force it any faster than that. Even if I wanted to know what was hiding in that head of his. And I did. Because he hadn’t talked about his parents in months, and I was pretty damn sure that it wasn’t because he had forgotten them or what had happened. But he wouldn’t talk about it, even after the few times that I had asked.
For whatever reason, he was choosing to suffer in silence.

And maybe that was his healing process. I could understand it if it was, considering it had been mine as well. I had never been eager to talk about the problems in my head or the pains in my chest, but I had learned to stand again just the same. Because contrary to popular belief, not every problem could be solved through conversation. Some of us preferred to fight the battle inside, alone, and I’d come to accept that there was nothing wrong with that.

We were all striving to heal in our own ways.

And there was more than one path to take.

And this was his. A room painted in photographs of every memory he wanted to keep, covering up the ones he didn’t want to see anymore. His new life captured in vivid color, and plastered all over the walls. Or half a wall, anyway. But considering the sheer amount of space he had available to him, the kid had done an impressive job over a short span of time. And I knew he wasn’t even close to stopping yet. Not with the plans we had laid out ahead of us.

And there were many.

Shortly after Armin had left the hospital, the two of them started planning a cross-country trip for the summer. Apparently it had been something they’d wanted to do for a long time, and they had been saving up little by little over the years. Or at least Eren had up until he threw all of his funds into the scarf that was now tied around my neck.

Amazingly, the two brats actually thought I would let them get away on a budget trip with the spare funds they had left.

Even more hilarious, they thought Erwin wouldn’t interfere.

But it didn’t take much more than two hours before Erwin had an itinerary planned out for the both of them. All expenses paid, of course. Although they didn’t know it came from him. Erwin and Armin were still on shaky ground at the time, and although they were starting to talk again, Erwin didn’t want to risk the chance that Armin might turn down the trip if he knew who provided it.

So I gave it to them instead. Although I was willing to bet that Armin still knew.

Especially after he found out that the whole trip was planned for the two of them, and that I wouldn’t be going with.

And it had been a little slice of hell to be without Eren for an entire month so shortly after mending everything. I had to go from having him at my side everyday to waiting for my phone to buzz whenever he had the chance to call. But somehow I was happy for it. He had a life outside of me, and it was something I didn’t want him to ignore. Not when it made him the person that he was. The man I’d grown to love.

And the loneliness that I felt without him all seemed to be worth it the second he walked through my door again. The smile he had on his face had been so wide, so bright that it was still stuck in my mind even months later. And he’d come back with so many stories and photos, that it almost felt as if I had been there at his side the entire time.

And after that I was.

He wanted to see the world, and I was more than happy to see it with him.
So we traveled.

Sometimes just the two of us, and other times with friends. Armin and Mikasa were with us for most of the trips, and Hanji and Petra had joined in a couple times as well. Even Erwin managed to find his way onto the plane once or twice after he and Armin had repaired their relationship. Although I couldn’t say that Eren was too happy with that one. Not that he said much about it.

At this point I was sure he just wanted to see Armin happy. And for whatever reason, he was happy with Erwin.

And that joy was the only thing I could see in the pictures he took of them. Then again, everything Eren captured seemed to have a quality of light and happiness to it. Regardless of what he was feeling at the time.

Because even if he wasn’t happy, the moment was.

And that was the memory he wanted to keep.

“You have a real talent, kid. I hope you know that.” I murmured as I paused on one of the latest photos from our trip to Paris. Isabel, Farlan, and me, all sitting on a bench together. I had done my best to look unamused, but Eren had caught the light in my eyes anyway. Just as I had known he would.

“I don’t think this really counts as a talent,” Eren shrugged and then paused, his eyes lingering on the strip of photos we took on the boardwalk back in February. He had to drag me into that dirty little photobooth, but the results had been worth it in the end. “Anything can take a photo.”

“Not in the way that you do,” I countered, tapping the photo we’d taken on the carousel exactly one year ago today. One of the first he’d ever taken of me. One of the first where I’d actually had a genuine smile. “You always manage to make me look happy in these. And trust me, that’s not an easy thing to do.”

“Really?” Eren smiled as he stared at the photo, a playfulness entering his eyes. “And here I thought that I was the reason you were happy when I was taking them.”

“It helps that you’re the one behind the camera,” I shot back with a small smirk curving my lips. “But that only works when I know you’re taking the picture.”

“You look happy in other photos, too.” Eren held up one of me staring off at the river, a calm expression on my face. One I hadn’t seen before. “It’s not just when you know I’m taking it.”

“That’s kind of my point,” I rolled my eyes and snatched the photo out of his hand, eyeing it. “When did you take this?”

“When Isabel and Farlan went to get the pastries,” Eren shrugged and snagged the photo back from me.

“You mean when you said you were going with them?”

Eren opened his mouth and then shut it just as fast, smiling sheepishly before turning to add the photo to the wall. “I wanted one where you weren’t looking at the camera.”

“You could have just asked,” I pointed out, glancing around at the others he’d taken. There were so many new ones I hadn’t seen yet.
“It wouldn’t be real if I did that.”

“No, it wouldn’t,” I agreed, my eyes stilling on the photo once more. I never imagined that I could look so peaceful. “Like I said, kid, you have a talent.”

Eren shrugged off the words, but I could see an accomplished smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. He was proud of what he’d done, and something about that made my heart race.

“Where are we going next?”

It was a question I’d been waiting for ever since we got back from France, and I was almost surprised that he’d taken this long to ask it.

“Well, I’ll be using the jet to bring Isabel and Farlan back home after a month,” I paused, watching him fix one of the final photos onto the wall. “We can go wherever you want after that. Erwin already knows that I’ll be taking vacation.”

Not that I had to clear it with him, given my position in the company. But I did it anyway, because somehow I knew that Erwin enjoyed giving me shit about it whenever I told him that I wouldn’t be in the office for a few weeks. And the relaxed humor we had between us now was something I took advantage of whenever I had the chance.

Because he was someone I had almost lost.

And someone I knew I needed now.

“I was thinking it would be nice to see Germany.” Eren glanced over at me, as if he were actually waiting for me to tell him no. Even though we both knew I wouldn’t. “I mean I am German, right? At least on his side.”

The way he referred to Grisha was sharper than usual. And even without asking, I knew something had happened.

“Eren—”

“She called,” he cut me off, focusing his attention on hanging the last few photos.

I didn’t even have to ask who she was.

“She hasn’t called you since December,” I spoke softly, watching his expression as if he would break at any moment. “What did she want?”

“To say happy birthday,” Eren sneered the words and shook his head, like he was trying to clear them away. “And to tell me that she wants to see me.”

I let a temporary silence settle into the room and waited for him to continue. But he didn’t.

So I asked.

“Are you going to?”

“I don’t know,” Eren let a sigh rush out of his lungs and turned to lean back against the wall that was still clear of photos, resting his head against it. “I’m still so mad at her for leaving me like that. With him. When she knew that he could hurt me… when she knew what he was like.”

I closed the small space between us and leaned into the wall with him, my hands taking hold of his
and threading our fingers together. “No one’s going to make you see her, Eren. Not until you’re ready.”

Pain crossed his features and he turned his eyes to the photos on the wall. “What if I’m never ready?”

“Then you’re never ready,” I answered simply, squeezing his hands. “And she’ll have to respect that. Because it’s not her choice anymore, Eren. She made her choice when she left.”

“I know she did,” Eren muttered, his eyes still fixed on the memories he had pinned into place. “But I feel wrong for not giving her a chance. It makes me feel like I’m a bad—”

“You’re not a bad son, Eren,” I cut him off, refusing to hear the words that I knew he wanted to say. “Don’t even think that. Not for a second, understand? You haven’t done anything wrong, and you don’t owe shit to the people who hurt you. Whether they’re blood or not, it doesn’t matter. If you’re not ready, then you’re not ready. Don’t force yourself into it just because you feel guilty over something you shouldn’t.”

“It’s easier said than done.”

“I know it is, kid,” I muttered, tapping his chin softly to turn his eyes back to mine, “So take it from someone who’s both said and done it. You don’t owe her anything, Eren. If you talk to her again, that’s your choice. It’s not hers to make.”

Eren paused for a long moment and held my eyes as if he were looking for another truth in them. “If I did make that choice, would you go with me?”

“You wouldn’t be able to keep me away,” I spoke softly, surprised by the temporary relief that filled his eyes. As if he didn’t really know whether or not I would. When really there was no other choice. “I’ll always be there for you whenever you need me to be, Eren.”

“I know.” He nodded slowly and took a deep breath, letting it rush out of his lungs before he nodded again. “And honestly, I might actually be able to do it if you’re there.”

Not that I would let him force himself if he couldn’t. Which was why I actually preferred to be there. I would be able to read him well enough to know whether or not he could stay.

“And if you can’t, then we’ll leave.”

“I think I’m just scared to revisit that past,” he admitted softly, “I’ve done so much to move on from it, and I’m worried that it will all come back if I see her now. And it makes me feel like he’ll find me again if it does.”

I knew what it was like to have that fear. As if the past were actually capable of reaching out and dragging you back under its surface. Even when that past was dead and buried.

“That’s not going to happen, Eren,” I said the words even though I knew they could never fully chase the fears away. But it was the most I could do. The most anyone could do. “Trust me, Erwin hasn’t taken his eyes off of him. That piece of shit hasn’t moved, and he won’t. He can’t. Not without us knowing first.”

“I know that,” Eren muttered, his eyes cold with the memory. He stared down between us, and for a long moment the silence dragged on around us as if it had come to stay. And then finally he whispered. “Do we have to talk about this now?”

And that was it.
The most he wanted to say about it, and the most he had said in months. But I wasn’t about to push him for more, because I knew it wouldn’t help him if I did. It never had.

What he needed right now was the memories that were happening downstairs.

With the family he had made. The only one that really mattered to either of us.

The one that was waiting for us now.

“Honestly, Hanji’s probably gonna come up here and skin us if we keep talking.” I mused, glancing at the clock on the wall. “Your five-ish is bordering on six, kid. You’re late.”

His expression relaxed almost immediately and he rolled his eyes at the comment, taking a moment to walk over to the remaining photo resting on the table. “Six is close enough.”

“You’ve been to enough of Hanji’s parties to know that’s not true.” I muttered, a smirk curving my lips as I walked out of the room. “Although I’m pretty sure it’s Petra who actually cares about the time. Hanji’s just her attack dog.”

Eren followed me out of the room and paused to turn the key in the lock, “Hanji’s not that intimidating unless she’s teaching me how to dance or trying to dress me up.”

“I can’t promise you won’t get either of those tonight.”

Eren groaned and turned to look at me, “But it’s my party.”

“Hey, you’re the one that decided to be late,” I shrugged, the smirk still teasing my lips. “You don’t get a free pass just because you’re old now.”

“Nineteen isn’t old, old man.”

“Watch it, gramps.”

A grin tugged at Eren’s lips as he leaned into me, slipping the long black chain over my head and bringing it to rest on my neck. The key to his room hung at the end of it, the metal a strange hue that matched the unique color of his eyes. Green and yet blue. Blue and yet green. Completely captivating.

Just as he was.

“I’m never going to get over how this looks on you,” Eren murmured softly, tapping the key once and holding his finger against it to slide it just over my heart. I grabbed his hand with mine and held it there.

“You’re a sentimental brat, you know that?” I whispered, a soft smile on my lips. One that was meant for him and him alone.

“I learned from the best,” he shot back, an amused look in his eyes.

“I know you did.” I agreed, giving his ass a playful smack before nodding once to the door with a smirk. “Now get a move on, kid. You’re going to be late.”

“Yea, yea,” Eren rolled his eyes and pulled back from me, walking across the living room and towards the door. It wasn’t until he was hitting the button for the elevator that he actually turned around to notice that I wasn’t following him. “Are you coming?”
“I will be,” I shrugged and paused for a moment to dig out my phone. “Hanji asked me to come in after you. Something about a surprise.”

“Something?” Eren raised a brow. “Do you know what that something is?”

“Of course,” I replied, my eyes amused. “But it’s not like I can tell you.”

A frown took over his mouth as the elevator chimed behind him. “Why not?”

“Because it’s all part of the surprise,” I waved my hand towards the open doors and kept my eyes on my phone. “Hurry up, Eren. I’ll be down in a moment.”

I didn’t bother to look up from my screen, because I was willing to bet that he would question me further if I did. So I waited until I heard his soft sigh near the elevator, and the sound of the doors sliding shut.

And then I sent the call.

“Is he gone?”

Erwin’s voice came over the other end almost immediately, as if he had been waiting for nothing other than the call.

Although with as late as it was coming, that was probably true.

“Yea, but I don’t have long.” I answered, glancing at the clock once more. “So hurry and get your ass up here. I don’t want him walking in on this before we have time to finish.”

“Oh? Should I call you Corporal now?” He spoke through a soft laugh, his voice teasing. “It’s weird to have you ordering me around like this, Levi.”

I rolled my eyes.

“Shove it, Erwin,” I snapped quickly. I wasn’t in the mood to waste time. Not on this. Not when I knew what was coming next. “If you’re not up here in five minutes, then I’m coming down there and dragging you up myself.”

His laughter filled the gap of silence and I fought the urge to roll my eyes again. It almost felt as if the entire world were trying to delay me at this point. But at least I knew he was in the building now.

“With your elevator, you might have to.” Erwin commented and then paused, a quiet amusement filling his voice. “You’re really looking forward to this, aren’t you?”

That was the understatement of the year.

“Oh, Commander,” I smirked, free to tease him now that I could see that the elevator was moving back up towards my floor. It wouldn’t be long now. “You have no fucking idea.”

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Eren

“There you are!”
They weren’t exactly the first words I expected to hear when walking into The Wall, but I shouldn’t have been that surprised when I was coming in this late. Then again, I had prepared myself for a barrage of party poppers and birthday wishes, and the greeting I got wasn’t even close to that. Hell, right now there was only one set of eyes on me and they weren’t even Hanji’s. She wasn’t in the room at all, as far as I could tell.

So where was everyone?

“I have been so bored waiting for you two,” Isabel huffed as she walked up to me, folding her arms across her chest. Her red hair was pulled into the usual spiky pigtails, just as it had been when I first met her over a year ago. “Where were you? And where’s Levi?”

Isabel leaned to the side and glanced around me as if she would actually find him hiding behind my back.

“He’s still at the apartment,” I shrugged, scanning the room. I couldn’t shake the feeling that they were all going to pop out at any minute. “He said he had to come in after me because of some surprise.”

Isabel’s face lit up with realization and a wide grin stretched across her mouth. “Oooh, that’s right! Silly me, I almost forgot about that.”

I couldn’t keep the frown off my lips. “So you know what it is, too?”

“I think everyone knows what it is,” Isabel mused, glancing once over her shoulder before turning her attention back to me. There was a teasing hint to her smile when she did. “Except you, anyway.”

“Thanks.” I rolled my eyes and stepped further into the room, wondering briefly if I would be able to see them crouching behind the sofas. “Where is everyone? Are they hiding?”

“Hiding?” Isabel raised a brow and turned to look at the room, setting her hands on her hips. “Why would they hide from you?”

“Because…” I trailed off, suddenly realizing that the answer didn’t really matter now. If she had to ask, then there was no surprise waiting. “Never mind. Where are they?”

“Well, I know Farlan’s near the bar with your sister,” Isabel paused to wag her eyebrows knowingly at me. I tried my best to ignore what that meant, even though I was willing to bet I already knew. “And Hanji and Petra are getting the cake ready.”

Somehow I knew that cock would be a more accurate description than cake.

“And what about Armin?”

Isabel blinked once and then started to point in the direction of the bar. “Armin is—”

“Eren!”

Hanji’s arms wrapped around me so suddenly that I almost jumped right out of my skin. Luckily I was used to these kinds of greetings when it came to her, especially after a year of them, and I’d come to expect them when I walked into The Wall. Just the same, she always managed to surprise me with them anyway. Although I had a feeling she did it on purpose.

“Hey Hanji,” I managed between breaths as she squeezed. “Sorry I’m late.”
“Late?” Hanji pulled back and raised a brow, looking once to the door and then back to me. “What time is it?”

“A little after six,” I shrugged, “I lost track of time when I was putting up the photos I took in France.”

Despite Levi’s constant reminders and the clock hanging in the room.

“Oh, we said five, didn’t we?” Hanji frowned and folded her arms. She pursed her lips for a moment and then shrugged, grinning. “Not that it matters. Armin was as late as you were, and Levi wouldn’t have started without him.”

“Armin was late?” I’m sure I sounded as surprised as I looked.

“Yea, he actually just came in a few minutes ago.” Hanji pointed her thumb over her shoulder. “He’s over at the bar with Mikasa and Farlan right now. Or he should be, anyway. I told him that’s where they were.”

“That’s where he was heading when I…” Isabel trailed off and stared at Hanji, frowning. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

Hanji grinned and tapped her crop once on Isabel’s shoulder. “You’re wearing blue.”

I fought back the urge to smile and glanced over in the direction of the bar. It wouldn’t be hard to break away from this, considering Isabel was about to be hauled off and dressed according to the standards of The Wall. I’d only had to suffer Hanji’s strict enforcement of the dress code a handful of times, but they were times I would never forget. I had a feeling she looked forward to people coming in outside of the approved attire just so she could play dress up with them.

And it was a rare occasion when she could dress girls; despite the countless corsets she had ready and waiting.

“What’s wrong with blue?” Isabel looked down at her shirt and set her hands back on her hips. “I’ve seen Petra wear blue plenty of times.”

“Not here she doesn’t,” Hanji corrected, the same wide grin plastered across her face. “Now come on. We’ve got to get you up to standards before the Corporal arrives!”

Hanji hooked her arm with Isabel’s and started to lead her backstage, glancing once over her shoulder to look at me. “You can go ahead and hang out with Armin and Mikasa. We’ll let you know when we’re ready.”

“Is he going to dance?”

The words were out of my mouth the second the question popped into my head. It was the only thing I could think of when she referred to him as the Corporal. Not that she didn’t do that on a regular basis at The Wall, but considering that tonight was special it made me wonder. It would definitely be a surprise if he did, and one I could look forward to. He hadn’t stripped for me in months.

“You mean for the surprise?” Hanji asked, pausing just long enough to fix me with an amused stare. I nodded and her smile grew. “He might have a dance planned. But trust me, it’s not going to be what you’re expecting.”

The confusion on my face was more than enough to make her laugh. And it almost bordered on maniacal as she dragged Isabel through the backstage door and into her closet of goodies.
I was actually grateful that Levi had approved my outfit before sending me out the door.

I walked over to the bar and immediately caught sight of Mikasa nestled into one of the corner booths with Farlan at her side. And even from this distance, I could see the smile that had taken over her mouth, lighting up her entire face with a kind of happiness I never thought I’d see in her again. And suddenly I thought of Levi.

And how he had done the same for me.

“Hey.” I heard the voice and felt a finger tap once on my shoulder. I didn’t even need to turn to know who it was.

But of course I did anyway.

I pulled Armin against me and held him close, hugging him tight as if I never wanted to let go. Just as I did every time I saw him now, ever since the day he finally opened his eyes again. Of course, I had to be gentle during the first few weeks until he was fully healed and back to normal. But that didn’t keep me from holding him in my arms when I saw him. Nothing could. Not after I’d come so close to losing him entirely.

Not when I knew there had been a chance that I would never hold him again.

“I missed you, too, Eren.” Armin spoke through a laugh, patting my back once. But not in a way that was meant to end the hug. I knew he wouldn’t do that. Not when he needed this as much as I did.

“I heard you were as late as I was.” I teased, pulling back to look at his outfit. I shouldn’t have even been surprised that it fit The Wall’s dress code perfectly. Then again, I had a feeling that Armin secretly enjoyed the different type of style compared to his own.

“Ah, yea,” Armin smiled slightly and pushed a hand through his hair. “I kind of got tied up.”

“Please tell me that doesn’t have anything to do with Commander Crapbag.”

Armin frowned. “I wish you wouldn’t call him that.”

“You know I can’t help it,” I shrugged. And it was actually the truth. I’d tried my best to avoid the words, but they always had a way of popping out of my mouth. “Besides, I say it in the most loving way possible.”

“Somehow I doubt that,” Armin rolled his eyes, but the smile returned to his lips. “And yea, it was kind of his fault. We—”

“Forget I asked. “I cut him off, waving my hands in front of myself as if they could clear away all the unwanted thoughts popping into my head. “I don’t think I need any mental pictures of the two of you.”

A flush stained his cheeks almost immediately. “We weren’t doing that, Eren! It’s your birthday. I wouldn’t be late for your birthday just because I happened to be…”

Armin trailed off on the word, but I already knew what it was. And I couldn’t help but tease. “Horny?”

“Don’t say it like that!” Armin’s blush deepened and he rubbed at his cheeks as if doing so could actually wipe it away. “And for your information, I wasn’t. We were just busy with… other things.”
I raised a brow and he shot me a look, stressing the words. “Nonsexual things, Eren.”

“Good to know. Because honestly, he’s a gummy bear to me.” I paused and then grinned. “You, on the other hand…”

“I think you get a real kick out of teasing me…”

“I can’t say you’re wrong.” I admitted, the smile still tugging on my lips. As unamused as he was trying to look, I knew Armin loved it just as much as I did. But I also knew when to stop. “So, what are you doing all the way over here? I expected to find you with Mikasa.”

“I was going to, but…” Armin glanced over at Mikasa and angled his head to the side, his expression softening slightly. “They looked so comfortable together, and I didn’t want to intrude. So I went to get a glass of water and wait for you.”

“What about Erwin?” I asked, looking over at the bar as if I could have actually missed him there before. “Didn’t he come here with you?”

“He dropped me off,” Armin replied, his attention turning briefly to the door. “He had something he had to take care of first, but he should be back before it starts.”

I heard Armin’s words as if they were in the distant background, my eyes temporarily focused on Mikasa as she started to laugh. There were tears coming to her eyes as Farlan continued to talk, a smile stretched across his face. And even though I couldn’t hear what he was saying, I was grateful for it. For anything that could make her look like that again.

“She’s really happy, isn’t she?” Armin spoke up from my side, following my gaze.

“More than I ever thought she would be,” I agreed, still watching her smile. “After everything that happened, I didn’t think she could laugh like that again. I was worried she forgot how.”

“I don’t think it was that she forgot,” Armin shrugged. “More that she was scared to let herself relax. But after Levi and Erwin told her what they did… I think she finally realized that she didn’t have to be afraid anymore.”

I felt my body tense slightly at the memory. It was one of the few times I’d seen her cry, but it was with so much relief and joy that I knew the sight was scarred into me forever. “I hate that she was afraid. And I hate that I don’t know what happened to her. That I couldn’t protect her.”

“You’re protecting her now.” Armin’s voice was so certain, as if there weren’t a doubt in his mind. “You’re protecting her from the memories she doesn’t want to relive. From the things she wants to forget. And I know it’s hard. Trust me, I want to know, too. But this is what she needs, and we have to respect that.”

“You sound like Levi,” I muttered, my eyes still fixed on her.

“Is that a bad thing?”

“No,” I shrugged. “She trusts him.”

Armin looked at me, his eyes curious. “Why did you say it like that?”

The confusion in his voice pulled my attention to him. “Like what?”

“Like you don’t understand why she would trust him.”
“It’s not that I don’t understand,” I frowned, trying to think of how I wanted to say the words. “I just never thought she would trust someone so much. She had a guard up around herself that I didn’t think she would take down for anyone. But she did for him. Despite the fact that she ran for months, she trusted him when he said everything would be okay.”

“But he had proof that it would be,” Armin pointed out. “Doesn’t that make a difference?”

“With most people, yea,” I shrugged. “I just didn’t think it would with her. At least not with someone she didn’t know that well.”

“I think she knows him better than she lets on,” Armin mused quietly. “Especially now. At this point, they’re practically family.”

“Well, they definitely can fight like siblings,” I muttered, rolling my eyes. “Although I don’t think that either one of them would admit it.”

“I think they might surprise you.”

“Are you just going to stand there staring at us?” Mikasa’s voice immediately drew my attention back to her and I found her scowling at us, her head angled to the side. “Or are you going to come over here?”

I rolled my eyes and fought back the urge to smile as I walked over to their booth, Armin following along at my side. “I wasn’t staring at you.”

“Sure you weren’t,” Mikasa shot back, scooting over into Farlan to give us some room. “You just happened to be staring in my general direction.”

“For your information, I was staring at Farlan.” I corrected with a teasing smile, dropping into the seat beside her.

“Well, I am good to look at,” Farlan mused, a small grin tugging at the corner of his mouth.

Mikasa raised a brow and fixed him with a look. But it was hard not to miss the amusement in her eyes. “You’re full of yourself, you know that?”

Farlan angled his head to the side, still grinning. “I thought that’s what you liked about me.”

“On good days.” Mikasa shrugged, folding her arms and leaning back into him.

“And is today a good day?”

A small smile crossed Mikasa’s lips and she angled her head to rest it on his shoulder, shrugging again. “It might be.”

I was almost positive that they were speaking in code, and I knew I had no hope of figuring it out. Although I wasn’t sure I wanted to. Not when it was a secret between them. Not when it was enough to make her smile.

“Corsets suck!”

Isabel leaned into the booth and let out an annoyed sound as she poked at her stomach, which was currently covered in a tight black steel bone corset. The rest of her outfit was mostly missing, but I was sure Hanji intended to have it that way. Although she had at least been nice enough to give Isabel a ruffled red skirt, rather than a simple pair of panties. And, as usual, she paired it with
matching fishnet stockings and a set of black heeled boots that must have been dragged out of Levi’s stash somewhere.

“You eventually get used to them,” Mikasa shrugged, glancing up at Isabel. She was currently wearing one of her favorites, although I had a feeling it was more for Farlan than for the dress code.

But I didn’t want to linger on that thought.

“I don’t think I could ever get used to this,” Isabel muttered, walking in a slow circle and looking more than a little frustrated with herself. “How do you move? Better yet, how do you breathe?”

“Up.” Farlan pointed, watching her with an amused look.

“How do you even know that?” Isabel frowned at him, folding her arms. “Are you some kind of corset expert or something? Do you wear these when I’m not looking?”

Mikasa bit back a laugh and sat up. “I would pay to see that.”

“I’m sure a few people would,” Farlan agreed, rolling his eyes. “But that doesn’t mean I’m going to stuff myself in one now. I don’t come cheap.”

“I’m sure the Corporal could buy you off!” Hanji grinned as she walked into the room, clapping her hands together. “And I’ve got some nice corsets for boys in the back. We could strap you up right now.”

“We should probably do that after the cake,” Petra noted, pushing the cart in front of her. “Otherwise he wouldn’t be able to eat much.”

“When are we talking like this is a thing?” Farlan asked, raising a brow.

“Because it probably will be,” Mikasa shrugged, pausing to eye the cake. “Why am I not surprised…”

As expected, my birthday cake was a large pink penis complete with two balls that were completely covered in the chocolate shavings Hanji loved a little too much. Although this time there was a new addition to the top of the cake, where the white frosting was dripping out of the tip. Big, long sparklers stuck out in every direction, still unlit but obviously ready to go at any moment.

“Happy birthday!” Hanji grinned widely, pointing at the cake. “Here’s your cock!”

“Is it always a penis?” Isabel eyed the cake and angled her head to the side. “For everyone’s birthday?”

“Almost always,” Hanji shrugged and set the pack of matches at the base of the cake. I had to assume she was waiting for Levi to arrive before she lit it. “It’s kind of a tradition.”

“Do you get a penis?”

Hanji frowned, but the amusement in her eyes told me she knew exactly what Isabel was hinting at. “Why wouldn’t I?”

“Because you don’t…” Isabel hesitated and fumbled over the words, “You don’t eat those, right?”

Hanji exchanged a quick look with Petra and grinned. “It’s a mystery.”

“A mystery?”
“Well, unless you come on Tuesdays,” Hanji continued. “Everyone knows the truth on Tuesdays.”

I could feel my own brow furrowing in confusion, just as Isabel’s was now. “Why Tuesdays?”

“Because we love ‘See You Next Tuesdays’ at The Wall. Especially Sabrina and Hope.” Hanji waved her hand dismissively as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, grinning widely.

Armin stifled a laugh behind his hand and had my attention instantly. “What? What is it?”

“It’s a play on words,” Armin dropped his hand to his side and shrugged, still smiling. “Just don’t come here on a Tuesday unless you really want to know.”

I wasn’t sure I did. Although I was willing to bet I already knew.

It was obvious in the way they looked at each other.

“Levi sure is taking his sweet time, isn’t he?” Petra filled the silence as she dug her phone out of her pocket, glancing quickly at the screen. “Eren, would you mind running back over there to check on him? He’s not answering his phone.”

“I wouldn’t mind, but…” I trailed off and looked over at Hanji, waiting for her to bring up the surprise before I did. But she didn’t. “He wanted me to be here before him. That’s why I came early. Wouldn’t going back up there kind of defeat the purpose?”

“Not really,” Hanji shrugged. “He just needs to come in after you, that’s all. Besides, if he’s taken this long then he’s probably naked and stuck in the toilet or something.”

I raised a brow, “Because that seems likely.”

“It could happen,” Hanji continued, waving her hand. “And I don’t want to see his ding dong flapping about. So go ahead and get him. You can tell him we sent you.”

I rolled my eyes and sighed, pushing a hand through my hair. “Alright, I’ll be right back.”

I exchanged a quick look with Armin and tried not to read into the amusement hiding in his eyes. For some reason, I had a sneaking suspicion that he knew something I didn’t. But that was usually the case, so it was easy to dismiss. For the most part, anyway. It was still lingering in the back of my mind as I made my way across the deserted club and towards the exit, reaching out to grab the handle to the door.

But it opened before I could.

“Eren,” Erwin’s voice held no surprise as he stepped to the side to let me through. He eyed me as I passed, his expression bordering on amused. “Are you leaving already?”

“I’m just going to get Levi,” I angled my head once in the direction of Trost and then paused, looking him over. There was a slight sheen of sweat on his skin. “What were you doing?”

“Lifting,” he replied, a small smirk turning the corner of his mouth. “A lot of lifting.”

“Right,” I muttered, trying not to let the suspicion creep its way into my eyes as it always did with him.

“Don’t look at me like that, Jaeger,” Erwin warned. Although there was nothing threatening about it. His attitude was almost bordering on playful even, and I wasn’t sure how to deal with it. “Hurry up and get him. I’m sure everyone’s anxious to start.”
“Armin’s inside,” I nodded once to the door, but I was sure he already knew.

I walked the short distance to Trost and shoved my hands into my pockets, suddenly noticing the absence of my phone. Which meant I had a good reason to go back after all, considering I’d forgotten my camera as well. Not that I needed a reason to begin with. Although I had to admit that I did feel silly walking back into the apartment after agreeing to leave before him.

I could only hope that I wasn’t going to ruin his surprise.

I pushed open the door and made my way through the silent lobby, surprised to see that the receptionist wasn’t there. Then again, it was a slow time of the night. Most of the people here were either out at dinner or already tucked away in their apartments for the night. Which meant that the trip up the elevator would be a little faster than normal.

Not that it was ever fast.

I hit the button and paused long enough to dig Levi’s apartment key out of my pocket. He had told me once that it could be used in the elevator for a one-way trip to his floor without interruption. And it seemed like a good time to use it, considering I was in the mood to get him back to the party as soon as possible. Of course, that changed the second the doors slid open.

And then suddenly all I could see was red.

Roses filled every inch of the small, familiar box. They hung from the ceiling as if they had grown there all along, littering every inch of the floor with their petals and stems. Twisting bouquets lined up the sides of the walls, climbing them and clinging to them as if they had no plan to leave. As if they had always been there. As if this elevator had never been anything other than a luscious garden filled to the brim with their vibrant red color.

And they should have had my attention. They should have been the only things I could see. But I couldn’t. Not when he was standing in the middle of all of them, more beautiful and perfect than they could ever hope to be. And suddenly I didn’t want to see anything else. Nothing but him. Only him. With that nervous look in his eyes, as if he were actually unsure whether or not this would work out the way he wanted it to.

“ Took you long enough, brat.” Levi whispered the words as he held my stare, the smallest smirk lifting the corner of his mouth.

And my heart started to race.

“I didn’t mean to keep you waiting.”

I wasn’t sure how I managed to speak at all, but I knew he’d heard me.

“I’d wait for you forever, kid.” Levi searched my eyes and then paused, taking a deep breath before pushing a hand through his hair. “But damn it, you’ve got to stop looking at me like that. I’m nervous as shit as it is.”

I felt confusion furrow my brow and frowned, “How am I looking at you?”

He eyed my expression and his hand dropped to his side, slipping into his pocket and lingering there. “Like you already know what I’m going to ask.”

And in that moment, I knew. Beyond a doubt, I knew.
And it was the only thing I wanted to hear.

So I covered my face to hide whatever it was he was seeing, because I was willing to bet that it was there now. “Is this better?”

The soft sound of his laugh had my heart ready to skip out of my chest. “I want to see your eyes when I ask this, Eren.”

I split my fingers apart and stared at him through the cracks, speaking muffled words against my hands. “I don’t know how else to look at you right now. I can’t help it. I—”

“Shit,” Levi spoke the word through another laugh and grabbed my hands, pulling them away from my face. “I love you, kid.”

The soft sound of the elevator chimed behind me, as if it felt the need to respond. And suddenly Levi’s hand dipped into my pocket, snatching the key and pressing it into the lock and twisting it. Giving us only one place to go.

And as the elevator moved up, Levi slid down.

Onto one knee.

“Oh my god…” The words shook in my throat, and I wasn’t even sure why. Because I knew exactly what he was going to ask the second those doors opened. But now it was real. Now it was happening.

And I could barely breathe.

“Eren,” Levi whispered my name as if it were the only thing he would ever want to say, and my body began to relax at the sound. His hands found mine once more, and this time he didn’t let go. Our fingers moved together, closing around each other and tightening into an embrace that was somehow more familiar than the beat of my own heart.

Which was all I could hear right now, in the silence that was dragging around us.

“Levi?”

“I want you, Eren.” His words were soft, but they were all I could hear. The only sound that mattered. “I’ve wanted you since the moment I saw you. Since the moment you walked through the doors and breathed the life back into me. You showed me what it was like to live again. Even more than that, you made me want to. Because I wasn’t alive before you, kid. Not in a way that mattered. I didn’t give a shit about anything back then, but when I saw you…”

His eyes searched mine and he squeezed my hands, as if he knew I needed him to.

“I cared.” Levi continued, holding my stare. “I cared about you, and I wasn’t even sure why at the time. Because you were just some kid, right? It shouldn’t have made a difference to me whether or not you were there. But every time I saw you, I could feel my heart beating. In a way I never thought it would again. And the more you did that to me, the more I wanted it. The more I wanted to feel alive.”

And it was exactly how I felt with him. I wasn’t able to stay away from him, and it didn’t take long for me to realize that I didn’t want to.

“I’ve found my home in you, Eren.” Levi whispered softly, his thumb moving slowly against mine.
“And I never want to lose that again. You’ve given me something worth fighting for, and I don’t just mean you. Because damn it, kid, I love you. But I love our life together, too. From the moment I wake up to your eyes, to the second I fall asleep in your arms. I love it all.”

“Levi—”

“And I want it all, Eren.” Levi’s voice went over mine, and the determination there made my heart race. “For richer or for poorer. In sickness and in health. And whatever else they fucking say. I want it all with you, kid. Every goddamn piece of it. I want a home, a family, and a life. Because I know it’ll be with you. And that’s all that matters to me.”

I didn’t think my voice could work anymore, but somehow I managed to whisper the words. “I want that, too…”

A small smirk tugged on the corner of Levi’s mouth and amusement entered his eyes. “I haven’t asked yet.”

“Then ask.”

“I have to say something first.” Levi paused and looked down at our hands, lingering for a moment before turning his eyes back to mine. “Just like I told you on that first night at The Wall… you don’t have to do this, Eren. If it’s not what you want, for whatever reason, all you have to do is tell me. And nothing will change. You won’t lose me, you won’t lose any of this. So don’t feel like you have to say yes to me unless it’s what you truly want. Because you won’t lose anything by saying no.”

I searched his eyes as if I would find the joke hiding in them, but there was none. Nothing but worry and apprehension. As if he actually thought I might say no. That I would even want to.

When there was nothing I wanted more than him.

“Do you actually think I would say no to you?” I asked, not even bothering to hide the amused smile as I angled my head to the side.

“I want you to have the choice to do so if you want to.”

I stared at him as if he’d lost his mind. “But I don’t have a choice, Levi.”

He frowned and raised a brow, because he still didn’t understand. “Of course you do, Eren.”

“No, I don’t.” I shook my head and shrugged, my smile growing now. “I never have. Not with you. Not with this. Because my answer’s yes. It’s always going to be yes.”

“Eren—”

“So ask me,” I cut him off, squeezing his hands encouragingly as if I could convince him that way. And I wanted to. Because right now I was desperate to hear the words. I needed them. “Say it. Please.”

He let the air rush out of his lungs, and I heard it tremble on the way. And then his hand left mine, lingering in his pocket for only a moment before he drew out a small black velvet box. He snapped it open, and I stared down at the platinum band waiting inside, engraved with words I couldn’t hope to pronounce. And more beautiful than I would have ever dreamed.

“Eren Jaeger,” Levi whispered my name and drew my eyes back to him. And the whole world stopped turning. “Will you marry me?”
The word was a breath on my lips. “Yes.”

And then I was in his arms. His mouth claiming mine as if we hadn’t tasted each other in years. My fingers twisted into his hair and gripped the strands between them, with no plans to ever let go. Not that he would want me to. I could feel it in the way he gripped my shirt, nails digging into the soft fabric as if there was no way he would ever be able pull me close enough.

I barely heard the soft chime of the elevator when we arrived, but I could feel myself stumbling back with him as we moved out of the parted doors. But the red didn’t fade away when we did. In fact, there was more of it. Surrounding us at every angle, just as it had in the small room before it.

“You put them up here, too?” I asked breathlessly, staring at the room. “How did you… Levi, I wasn’t gone that long. How could you…”

“Erwin helped,” Levi filled the silence after my words, laughing softly at the confusion in my eyes. “A lot.”

And suddenly Erwin’s words made sense.

“Lifting,” I murmured softly to myself. “So this is what he meant.”

“Well, it’s not like he didn’t bring help with him,” Levi added, “But he did do a lot more than I expected him to.”

“What is it with him and roses?” I shook my head slowly, still marveling at the sight of it all. “Does he own a floral shop or something?”

A smirk twitched on the corner of Levi’s mouth. “I wouldn’t be that surprised if he did. He seems to own a little bit of everything in this city.”

“Except for you.”

“Well, I’m taken,” Levi replied simply, holding my hand in his and running his thumb over the lettering. “I have been since I saw you.”

“What does it mean?” I asked, staring down at the intricate design surrounding my finger.

“Vous et nul autre.” The words rolled off his tongue and sent a shiver down my spine. And then he leaned into me and my knees went weak as he whispered the translation at my ear. “You and no other, Eren.”

“Levi, I—”

“I mean it, Eren.” His finger touched the bottom of my chin and his eyes met mine, holding my stare. “You and no other.”

I tried to ignore the fact that I could feel the tears welling in my eyes, but it was impossible the second I looked down at my hand. At the words that meant more to me than any of the others that came before them.

I was his.

He wanted me.

And that was all I could ask for.
“The others are probably waiting for us.” Levi broke the silence as he reached into his pocket. “But I promised myself I would dance with you first.”

“Dance?” I raised a brow. “You want to dance with me?”

“You’re the only one I want to dance with, Eren.” Levi smirked and hit the button on the small remote in his hand. “And trust me, that’s saying something. Because I don’t dance with anyone. Not outside of The Wall. And not like this.”

“Like what?”

His arm slipped around my waist as his free hand caught mine, his lips brushing against my ear as he murmured the words. “Like this.”

I wasn’t sure I had any hope of dancing in a way that wouldn’t mangle his toes, but I was willing to try. Especially if this was his first time. And if it meant I could be in his arms, then I would take it. Because I had no intention of letting him go anytime soon, and I was more than content to sway in place like this.

Lately, I’ve been… I’ve been losing sleep. Dreaming about the things that we could be.

“This song is familiar,” I whispered softly, following his movements. “You sang it to me once, didn’t you?”

“I sang it to you more than once.” Levi corrected, “But you were always asleep, so I wouldn’t expect you to remember it.”

I felt amusement cross my face, “You sing to me when I’m asleep?”

“It’s a habit of mine,” he shrugged, a smirk toying on his lips. “And you look so damn peaceful when I do it, so I have no reason to stop.”

“Then don’t.”

“I won’t.” Levi’s expression lightened as the music started to pick up, and he leaned close with his lips a breath from mine. “I’m never gonna stop with you, kid.”

And after that, the words faded away into the music and we lost ourselves into a dance. One that only we knew the moves to. One that we created as we went. And it didn’t matter whether he was in control of it or if I was. Because in the end, it all balanced out into exactly what we wanted it to be. What we needed it to be. And that was all that mattered.

Armin had told me once that the internship would be the opportunity of a lifetime. Something I would never forget. Something I shouldn’t pass up. Something that could, and would, change my life. And in the end, he was right.

Because it did.

In all the ways I would have never expected, and in all the ways I needed it to.

It had saved me.

It made me want to fight again. It made me want to live. It gave me this beautiful man in my arms, and a place I was happy to call home.
Things I was sure I would never have.

Treasures I wouldn’t trade for anything now.

A life I would never want to give up.

And the man who made it all worth it.

Chapter End Notes

...and that's it. That's The Intern. T__T Excuse me while I try not to cry. It has been such a long and incredible journey, one year to be exact, and you have all made it worth it. Honestly, the comments, cosplay, art, videos... they're all so amazing and made me so incredibly happy. But that wasn't the best part... it was the friendships I've made, and the friendships that others have made through this. I love our little community so very much, and I really hope to continue to talk to all of you now that this has come to a close.

For those of you who do not frequent our tiny chats, we will still have those every Friday at 10 PM EST. But they'll be different now... they're writer chats. ^_^ We will have prompts, but you are not restricted to those. And no, you don't need to be a regular to join. We want everyone to share what they're working on, and we'll be having live readings as well! So I really hope that you will all join us some time! ^__^

Oh! And in addition to that, I really want to promote the other incredible writers on here. So if you follow me on tumblr and want me to reblog / promote something you're working on, then please message me! Because honestly, all of you are amazing and creativity is incredible. Because your works would not exist without you, and I truly find that to be a beautiful thing.

I think I rambled a bit here... and I'll probably add to it later. XD But I'll get to the point...

I love you all. Every single reader. All of you.

Because you've given me memories that will never fade.

And for that, and so much more...

Thank you.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!